

STEPS TO A TWO STATE SOLUTION

LFI POLICY BRIEFING

LABOUR FRIENDS OF ISRAEL

WORKING TOWARDS A TWO STATE SOLUTION

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**FOREWORD BY
STEVE MCCABE MP**

**INTRODUCTION BY
MERAV MICHAELI MK**

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FOREWORD

STEVE MCCABE MP, CHAIR OF LABOUR FRIENDS OF ISRAEL

Thirty years ago this summer, Yitzhak Rabin and the Israeli Labor party swept to power in a landslide victory.

Three short years later – after a rare period of hope and confidence that the tragic conflict between Israel and the Palestinians was at last being addressed – Rabin was brutally murdered in Tel Aviv after addressing a huge rally for peace.

While his successor, Shimon Peres, and later Labor prime minister Ehud Barak attempted to maintain and build upon Rabin's legacy, the last three decades have been difficult and disappointing for all of us who want to see an end to the conflict and the realisation of a two-state solution. The conflict between Israel and Palestinian Islamic Jihad in July, following the upsurge in violence in May 2021, is a stark reminder that, for Israelis and Palestinians, the failure to institute a credible and creative political process to bring about peace has continuing tragic consequences.

This publication from Labour Friends of Israel is, however, not focused on the past, but on the future. It is firmly rooted in LFI and the Labour party's staunch support for a negotiated two-state solution with Israel safe, secure and recognised within its borders; living alongside a viable, democratic and independent Palestinian state.

A two-state solution remains the only means by which the Palestinian people's inalienable right to self-determination and national sovereignty can be realised.

It is also, as Merav Michaeli, the leader of the Israeli Labor party, suggests in her introduction, the only way to guarantee Israel's security and preserve its identity as a Jewish and democratic state. As leader of our sister party, Merav's contribution reminds us of our duty to stand with fellow progressives to promote the cause of peace, reconciliation and coexistence. It is a duty which Labour must seek to fulfil.

This publication recognises that a lack of political leadership on both sides – and a failure by the international community to support peace-makers in both Israel and Palestine – has led to a prolonged hiatus in the peace process.

Our response should be to both redouble our efforts to restart the search for peace and seek new and positive ways to achieve it. This publication shows how this might be achieved.

It proposes 30 concrete, realistic steps – focused on the political, economic and civic society dimensions of the conflict – which would maintain the viability and, crucially, advance the prospects of a two-state solution. When taken together, the steps seek to rebuild shattered confidence and trust on both sides and provide tangible evidence to the Israeli and Palestinian public of the benefits of a different and better future. They seek to ease the plight, and expand the rights and freedoms, of the Palestinian people while preserving the security of the Israeli people.

This is not a “pick and mix” proposal. It doesn't seek to attribute blame nor direct anger and hatred at one side. Instead, it makes demands of Israelis, Palestinians and the international community.

This publication doesn't seek to downplay or avoid the difficult choices and decisions which lie ahead. Nor does it ignore the issues which many regard as at the heart of the conflict and which are legitimately

seen as barriers to the realisation of a two-state solution: the threat of terrorism and those states which promote and sponsor it; the division between Gaza and the West Bank and the appalling humanitarian crisis in the coastal enclave; the pursuit of settlement building; the status of Jerusalem; and the policy of incitement to hate, violence and terrorism.

But we should not allow these difficulties to deter us. As Shimon Peres once suggested: “Making peace is not a simple endeavour. It is a constant struggle. But its complexity should not overshadow its purpose.”

Moreover, I believe that while pessimism defines conservatism, the hallmark of progressive politics is its spirit of optimism and faith in the future. The remarkable “warm peace” we have seen developing between Israel and its partners in the Abraham Accords over the past two years should remind us that old enemies can – with support and encouragement – turn a corner and become firm friends.

The Abraham Accords also underlines the powerful, but too often forgotten, role that civic society has to play in peacemaking. That is why I am proud that Labour has consistently backed one of the key steps contained in this publication, the establishment of an International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace. As Keir Starmer argued in his speech to LFI last November: “We believe that – even in the current absence of a political process – there is much more that the international community can do to lay the groundwork for an eventual settlement.”

Modelled on the International Fund for Ireland, it would invest in civic society projects – such as Middle East Entrepreneurs of Tomorrow, with whom I have met during my visits to the region – which bring Israelis and Palestinian together and create new constituencies for peace. As the International Fund for Ireland did so successfully in the decade prior to the Good Friday Agreement, it would open up new political space to fashion an agreement and provide the popular support necessary to sustain it.

Sadly, this work has been woefully underfunded in Israel and Palestine. While the International Fund for Ireland invested \$44 per person per year in peacebuilding work in Ireland, the equivalent figure is around \$2 in Israel and Palestine.

Having been the beneficiary of so much international support and goodwill in Northern Ireland, Britain has a special responsibility to back this effort. While the United States has made great progress towards creating the fund – with the US Congress passing a five-year, \$250m investment in peace-building work – the UK government is once again nowhere to be seen. It has remained totally detached from international discussions and engagement and has also shown no inclination to offer any form of financial support. In fact, quite the opposite: among its many unconscionable international aid cuts, the government has axed a small-scale UK coexistence programme which ran from 2017-20 and eliminated all UK funding for cross-border people-to-people projects.

Labour will take a different approach. As Keir has pledged: “A Labour government will back the peacebuilders to the hilt and work with our European, American and Middle Eastern allies to make this Fund a reality.”

As we mark Rabin’s death in November, let’s honour his memory by renewing our faith in the possibility of progress; recommitting ourselves to a two-state solution; and starting the steps to peace outlined in this publication.

INTRODUCTION

MERAV MICHAELI MK, LEADER OF THE ISRAELI LABOR PARTY

Shortly after I was elected leader of the Israeli Labor party early last year, I reaffirmed my long-standing support for a two-state solution.

Every day that passes without a border between Israel and a Palestinian state, I argued, is a day that deepens the threat to Israel's future. The question we face is whether Israel can survive as the Jewish state, as the home for the Jewish people, where the Jewish majority determines its fate, with full equality for all Israel's citizens.

I believe that – as well as worsening inequality, weakening our public services, and threatening our democracy – Benjamin Netanyahu's decade in power has made the tragic conflict between Israel and the Palestinians more difficult to resolve.

For all these reasons – and more – I ensured that Labor played its part in the formation of a government last June which could replace Netanyahu. It is also why, in November, Labor will again work to ensure that the former prime minister doesn't return to office.

But this is about more than one man. The government of change that we are proud to be part of is about a new mode of operation – free of corruption and short-term political manoeuvring, where public debate lifts us up rather than pushes us down, where respect for the rule of law and democratic norms are inherent.

Israel is moving on from the tragic mix of complacency and fear exemplified by the previous government's approach to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. They sought to play for time and to avoid hard choices, driven by a misplaced belief that the conflict can be “managed”, rather than confronted and addressed. In doing so, the most extreme elements of Israeli society, the far-right – who have been indulged, feted and bolstered for too long – held the rest of the country to ransom.

Because the majority of Israelis still support this policy. Yes, support for two states has fallen since the mid-1990s, but these are understandable doubts about its viability, not its desirability.

Our government inherited an Israel that faces significant threats. Iran is closer than ever to becoming a nuclear state and the Islamic Republic is closer than ever to our borders. Terror groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas are stronger than ever.

Over the past year, a priority for Labor in government has been to ensure that, on the ground, we maintain the prospect for a future two-state solution. We have opposed measures which make that prospect more difficult and supported those which advance it. We have also played our part in rebuilding trust and cooperation with our friends on the European and American centre-left.

But we must do more than play simply defence, however important that is.

Ever since I had the honour of being elected Labor leader, I have been keenly aware that I stand in the tradition of Labor peacemaking exemplified by Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and, more recently, by President Herzog.

As you might expect from Rabin's record, there is nothing soft or weak about this tradition. It is about showing leadership, acting with courage, and making the tough calls. It is about honouring and preserving the most precious feature of Israel's character: that it is a Jewish and a democratic state. And it is about government's most important task: to ensure the security of the Israeli people. I want a country where mothers and fathers don't have to rush their children to bomb shelters. And I want that for Palestinian mothers and fathers, too.

The task ahead is not an easy one, but it is a necessary one. It is not a single event or moment, but a process to which we must urgently return. In his lecture on receiving the Nobel Prize in 1994 Rabin rightly compared peacemaking to building a house: "The architects and engineers of this enterprise are engaged in their work even as we gather here tonight, building the peace layer by layer, brick by brick, beam by beam. The job is difficult, complex, trying. Mistakes could topple the whole structure and bring disaster down upon us."

But he also knew that – whatever the difficulties and obstacles – the goal must be achieved: "We will pursue the course of peace with determination and fortitude. We will not let up. We will not give in. Peace will triumph over all our enemies, because the alternative is grim for us all. And we will prevail."

It is with this approach, and in this spirit, that we should proceed. I welcome LFI's publication as a contribution to this debate. Its eyes remain firmly set on the ultimate prize of peace, while focusing on concrete steps that seek to build trust, narrow the areas of disagreement, and provide real improvements in the lives of both the Israeli and Palestinian people.

I am proud that the government in which I have served over the past year has already begun to take action on a number of these proposals. My own ministry has led on some of these, such as working with Jordan and Morocco to ensure that the Allenby Bridge, the main border for Palestinians wishing to travel abroad from the West Bank, is open for longer hours. We have also embraced and helped facilitate the new opportunities for meaningful relations between Israel and the Gulf states heralded by the Abraham Accords.

Of course, some of these measures will be difficult or uncomfortable for Israelis and Palestinians. They will also require a change of attitude from those parts of the international community who see their role in the conflict as no more than occasionally sniping at the Jewish state from the sidelines and offering warm words – though precious little else – to the Palestinians. This will require them to step up to the plate, to adopt a policy of positive engagement and action, and to support measures – particularly in the economic and civic society spheres – that can help build the foundations for a future agreement.

Over the past two years, we have seen through the Abraham Accords that, once progress commences, it can be rapid. Already, we have seen tens of thousands of Israelis visit the Gulf states, trade is booming and cooperation in fields from food security to healthcare and agro-security is taking root. Most importantly, attitudes and perceptions are changing as ties of friendship and understanding are being strengthened.

I voted for the normalisation agreements and Labor will continue to back their expansion. But we are also clear that they should also be used as a way to help solve – not as an excuse to ignore – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As we did last year, Labor will work after November's elections to heal the divides in Israeli society, to bring together people of goodwill, and to build the next chapter in Israel's bright future. I hope that we will then be able to begin addressing the great unfinished business of bringing to an end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

STEP 1: TACKLE THE HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN GAZA

After more than a decade of war, Israeli and Egyptian restrictions, and Hamas misrule, the humanitarian situation in the coastal enclave is dire: the electricity supply is often severely reduced, 96 percent of the water in the taps is estimated to be undrinkable, and over half of Gazans live in poverty. Crumbling infrastructure causes sewage to flow untreated into the sea off of Gaza, acting as a breeding ground for life-threatening diseases with serious public health implications. Hamas meanwhile spends precious resources importing and manufacturing rockets and constructing tunnels to carry out terror attacks.

The problem has been exacerbated by Palestinian Authority sanctions aimed at ousting their rivals, Hamas, from power and the failure of international donors, principally in the Arab world, to make good on pledges made to aid reconstruction efforts after the 2014 conflict.

In the wake of May 2021's outbreak of violence between Hamas and Israel, Joe Biden was right to pledge to "marshal international support for the people in Gaza and ... the Gaza reconstruction efforts". The president was also right to insist that reconstruction efforts must be conducted in "a manner that does not permit Hamas to simply restock its military arsenal". This requires a robust, round-the-clock and credible monitoring system to ensure that reconstruction materials are not diverted by Hamas into illicit military purposes. As David Makovsky of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy has suggested, if such checks can be put in place, the Abraham Accords provides an opportunity for the US to work with Israel to assemble a consortium of Arab states willing to provide funding for infrastructure and development projects in Gaza.

At the heart of initial reconstruction efforts should be an emergency infrastructure plan – such as that presented by Israel in 2018 – that would see major investment by international donors in desalination plants, electricity lines and a gas pipeline. This would enable the construction and operation of local power plants that would, in turn, be able to supply nearly all of Gaza's electricity needs.

STEP 2: FREEZE SETTLEMENT BUILDING

Continued Israeli settlement-building – especially that which occurs beyond the security barrier – represents an obstacle to a two-seat solution. Both in public and in private meetings with senior Israeli government representatives, LFI has consistently called both for an end to the construction of new settlements and the expansion of existing ones. Continued settlement expansion undermines trust, weakens the viability of a future Palestinian state and does nothing to enhance Israel's security. Instead, over the past decade, it was used as a sop by the Netanyahu governments to appease the most right-wing elements of its electoral coalition, despite their being utterly unrepresentative of the views of most Israelis. E1, a settler project located outside of Jerusalem in an unbuilt area of Ma'aleh Adumim, which has been repeatedly delayed since it was first proposed three decades ago, represents a particular threat to the contiguity of a future Palestinian state and should be strongly opposed.

At the same time, it is important to recognise that most major Israeli settlements are built close to the 1967 lines within the security barrier that was constructed to stop suicide bombers and terrorists entering Israel during the Second Intifada. Including Israeli Jews residing in East Jerusalem, some 85 percent of Israelis who have "settled" beyond the 1967 lines live within the security barrier. Moreover, 90 percent of Palestinians live outside the security barrier. With "land swaps" – in 2008, Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak suggested an agreement involving five percent of the territory of the West Bank

joining Israel with compensating territory from within the 1967 lines going to Palestine – these “settlement blocs” are likely to remain part of Israel after any agreement. Detailed proposals have been drawn up by the Geneva Initiative, a joint Israeli-Palestinian project, to address the issue of settlements as part of ending the conflict.

STEP 3: END THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY’S PAYMENT OF SALARIES TO CONVICTED TERRORISTS AND THE PAYMENT OF REWARDS TO THE FAMILIES OF “MARTYRS”

The Palestinian Authority’s policy of paying “salaries” to those convicted of terrorist offences and to the families of deceased terrorist “martyrs” incentives terror, breaches the terms of the Oslo Accords and sows distrust, violence and fear which weakens support in Israel for a two-state solution. The policy also deprives desperately stretched Palestinian public services of vital investment, and compromises international donors who, while not directly funding the payments, effectively subsidise them by freeing up cash for the PA to spend on them. The amounts of money involved are significant: in 2017, it was revealed that the bill for such payments had exceeded \$1bn since 2013. They are also estimated to take up roughly eight percent of the PA’s budget. Moreover, the policy is also clearly intended to encourage the worst acts of violence by making greater payments for longer sentences. The allowances range from \$364 a month for a term of up to three years in prison to \$3,120 for a term of 30 years. Terrorists from Jerusalem receive a monthly \$78 supplement, while Arab-Israeli terrorists receive a \$130 supplement. Former prisoners are also guaranteed civil service employment upon their release and additional benefits, including assistance with health insurance payments and university tuition fees.

Despite measures introduced by the US, Israel, Australia and some European countries, such as the Netherlands, the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, has resolutely defended the policy – arguing “even if we have only a penny left, we will give it to the martyrs, the prisoners and their families” – and prioritised the payments, even as the salaries of public service workers were slashed in 2019. Coordinated international action to demand the payments are replaced by a needs-based welfare system is essential.

STEP 4: SUPPORT THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE AND RE-ESTABLISH UK SUPPORT FOR PEACE-BUILDING WORK

Modelled on the highly successful International Fund for Ireland, an International Fund for Israeli-Palestinian Peace would allow the international community to lay the civic society foundations for a negotiated two-state solution. The International Fund would leverage and invest up to \$200m annually in people-to-people projects which bring together Israelis and Palestinians. Academic evaluations have suggested that such projects – which range from sports clubs for children and young people to environmental, cultural, economic and interfaith groups – foster values of peace, reconciliation and coexistence. On a large-scale, this vital work would build constituencies for peace in Israel and Palestine, and, as in Ireland, support any future agreement in the face of the inevitable challenges and attacks it would face. The International Fund has been designed by the Alliance for Middle East Peace, with LFI leading the campaign in the UK.

With the US Congress allocating \$250m in funds for peace-building work, it is crucial that European governments, such as Britain, join the effort to shape and invest in the Fund. Regrettably, however, the UK government has failed to embrace this opportunity. While offering occasional warm words, it has

remained steadfastly detached from international discussions and engagement. It has also shown no inclination to offer any form of financial support. Sadly, this reflects the government's lack of interest in coexistence work more broadly, with a small-scale programme which ran from 2017-20 axed and all UK funding for cross-border people-to-people projects eliminated. Given the experience it gained – and benefits it accrued – from the International Fund for Ireland, the UK should be at the forefront of supporting peace-building efforts in Israel-Palestine.

STEP 5: ENCOURAGE ARAB STATES TO NORMALISE RELATIONS WITH ISRAEL AND DEEPEN THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS

The Abraham Accords – the 2020 agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco to establish diplomatic relations – represent a ground-breaking shift in the relationship between the Jewish state and the once universally hostile Arab world. It is the first major diplomatic breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict since Israel and Jordan formally established relations in 1994. The agreements offer a host of potential strategic, economic, social and environmental benefits. They help to counter Iranian regional expansionism, strengthen moderates against extremists, and, suggests a RAND corporation report, an expansion and deepening of the process over the next decade could bring 4 million new jobs and more than \$1tn in new economic activity. Beyond trade, stronger bilateral ties between Israel and its new Arab partners offer the opportunity to tackle significant social and environmental regional challenges, such as climate change, desertification and food security, with the Jewish state's thriving hi-tech industry and R&D centres playing a major role in reshaping the region.

The Abraham Accords process should neither be held hostage to, nor seen as an alternative to progress in resolving, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Indeed, the agreement between the UAE and Israel brought an end Benjamin Netanyahu's aim to annex parts of the West Bank, preserving the viability of a two-state solution, and thus showing how these processes can complement and buttress each other. As Koby Huberman, co-founder of the Israeli Regional Initiative Group, has suggested, "the new objective" should be a "regional roadmap towards implementing a negotiated regional package deal with the two-state solution at its core". The diplomatic process, he argues, should be "revised, in order to allow for a gradual, reciprocal, partial and parallel progress in both the Israeli-Palestinian track and the Israeli-Arab states track", while the Palestinians should be offered "a fresh political horizon" to provide them with "reasonable clarity that the two-state solution is the endgame of the roadmap". Thus, Saudi Arabia – which has indicated that it remains committed to the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative principle that normalisation should follow a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – could, for instance, secure a commitment from Israel to halt settlement construction and expansion beyond the major blocs which abut the green 1967 lines in return for a significant increase in Saudi ties with the Jewish state.

The international community should encourage, facilitate and support steps towards expanding and deepening the Abraham Accords process. With its close diplomatic, economic and security ties to both Israel and the Arab world, Britain could play a major positive role, although the failure of the UK government's 2021 strategic review to make any mention of the accords suggests this government is unlikely to seize the opportunity.

STEP 6: INCREASE WORK PERMITS FOR PALESTINIANS IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA

Around 120,000 Palestinians travel to Israel each day to work, with some 87,000 holding work permits and an estimated further 30,000 to 40,000 regularly crossing illegally to seek employment. In August 2021, Israel announced it had approved the issuing of an additional 15,000 work permits to Palestinians.

Wages are higher in Israel: workers in the Jewish state earn double the amount for the same job. Increasing work permits for West Bank Palestinians – particularly for women and older men – could boost the Palestinian economy and raise living standards, while also enhancing Israeli security. It has been estimated that granting work permits to 400,000 Palestinians would directly impact the lives of more than 1 million people in the West Bank. The IDF leadership is known to support a big increase in work permits.

In Gaza, more than half of the workforce is unemployed, with that figure rising to nearly 70 percent among young people. Prior to the Hamas coup in 2007, 120,000 Gazans worked in Israel. Subsequent rocket and terror attacks that led to the establishment of Israeli and Egyptian restrictions saw that number fall precipitously. The number of work permits issued by Israel to Gazans was at 7,000 in 2019, the highest level since Hamas seized power. That figure grew to more than 15,000 under the Bennett-Lapid government, with an eventual target of 20,000 permits approved by the Defence Ministry. Once the situation allows, Israel should resume this policy and issue more permits. With an effort to ramp up vetting, as many additional work permits as possible should be issued. This would assist the economy, help tackle unemployment and ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, as well as assisting the process of Israel and Gaza-based terror groups reaching a permanent ceasefire.

STEP 7: ENSURE TRANSPORTATIONAL CONTIGUITY FOR PALESTINIANS

Some 90 percent of Palestinians live in territory in the West Bank – including all of the main towns and cities – which is under the control of the Palestinian Authority (designated Areas A and B by the Oslo Accords). But this land is not contiguous, with Palestinians often living in areas which are surrounded by territory – Area C – in which Israel retains full authority. It is thus when Palestinians travel – to work or to visit friends and family – that they encounter checkpoints and the Israeli military.

Pending a final status agreement, Israeli plans – called Keep It Flowing – developed in the early 2000s and subsequently updated would help address this understandable source of Palestinian anger and frustration. A network of roads, tunnels and bridges – which would be under the authority of the PA – would ensure that Palestinians are able to travel freely across and throughout Areas A and B without encountering Israeli-occupied territory, settlements and security.

STEP 8: SUPPORT JERUSALEM AS CAPITAL OF ISRAEL AND FUTURE PALESTINIAN STATE

Jerusalem is a holy city for three religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – and that status makes it one of the most spectacular – but also tense and politically contested – places on Earth. Both Israelis and Palestinians have legitimate claims to share Jerusalem as their respective capital cities, and access to the city’s holy sites must remain open to all. While Israel has every right to have west Jerusalem as its capital, Donald Trump’s decision to unilaterally recognise this right was wrong and counterproductive to the cause of peace and a two-state solution.

Instead, it is vital to embrace creative and imaginative proposals which can allow both Israelis and Palestinians to share Jerusalem, such as those proposed by Bill Clinton (the so-called “Clinton Parameters” in 2000) or Ehud Olmert in 2008. In the case of the former, Clinton suggested that, in relation to Jerusalem, “The general principle is that Arab areas are Palestinian and Jewish ones are Israeli. This would apply to the Old City as well.” Clinton recommended Israeli control over and access to Jewish holy sites in Jerusalem, including the Western Wall, with Palestinian sovereignty over Al Haram al-Sharif. Olmert’s proposal to Mahmoud Abbas drew on the Clinton parameters. It said that Israel would withdraw from the Arab neighbourhoods of east Jerusalem and an international consortium, including Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt, would be established to work with Israel and Palestine to determine future arrangements concerning the Old City and its sensitive holy sites.

STEP 9: ENSURE ENFORCEMENT OF UNSCR 1701, INTERNATIONAL ACTION TO PREVENT HEZBOLLAH’S PRECISION-MISSILE PROJECT AND ATTACKS ON ISRAEL

UN Security Council Resolution 1701 brought to an end the bloody 2006 Lebanon war between Israel and terror group Hezbollah. Hezbollah is committed to the destruction of Israel and has publicly stated its utter rejection of any peace process or accommodation with the Jewish state, as well as its belief that “If [Jews] all gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them worldwide.”

Hezbollah continues to amass an ever-larger arsenal of weaponry. It has an estimated 130,000 rockets and missiles – an armoury larger than that of many states – thousands of which are capable of hitting civilian targets across Israel. It is also now engaged in a potentially deadly precision-missile project and seeking to convert “dumb” missiles – those which do not have precision capability – by fitting GPS guidance packs onto medium-range Zelzal-2 missiles. Hezbollah’s leader, Hassan Nasrallah, claimed in December 2020 that the terror group had doubled its number of precision-guided missiles over the course of the previous year. The process is relatively cheap and speedy. Such missiles would enable Hezbollah to more accurately target critical Israeli infrastructure, military and industrial centres. The terror group has previously vowed to attack Israel’s nuclear reactor, power stations, Haifa oil refinery, as well as military targets. The precision-missile project is overseen and run by Iran’s Revolutionary Guard (IRGC), which supplies and transports the components, as well as training Lebanese specialists in how to fit them.

These actions are in direct contravention of UNSCR 1701, which specifically barred the “sale or supply of arms and related material to Lebanon except as authorised by its government”. Hezbollah’s domestic political and military power in Lebanon has further weakened the country’s government and economy and severely compromised the authority of the Lebanese Armed Forces. It is vital that, working through the UN Interim Force in Lebanon, the international community take immediate action against Hezbollah and Iran. The UN should also impose tough sanctions against those involved in the project from Hezbollah and the IRGC.

STEP 10: DEMAND HAMAS RENOUNCE THE USE OF VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM

Terror group Hamas is opposed to Israel’s existence in any form, declaring in its 1988 covenant that “there is no solution for the Palestinian question except through jihad (holy war).” Any effort at coexistence by Palestinians is violently opposed, with the group warning that any Muslim who leaves “the circle of struggle with Zionism” is guilty of “high treason”. Hamas instead calls for the creation of an Islamic republic in Palestine that would replace Israel. Muslims should “raise the banner of Allah over every inch of Palestine,” it says. An updated 2017 statement of Hamas’ principles, designed to soften its regional and international image, “does not include any concession on the liberation of all of Mandatory Palestine, let alone recognition of Israel”, experts suggest.

Alongside its suppression of the Palestinian people, Hamas has waged a violent terrorist campaign against both Israel and any form of peace process. Its response to the Oslo Accords, for instance, was to launch a suicide bombing campaign against Israeli civilians, killing scores between 1993 and 1997. When Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza in 2005, it vowed: “We shall not rest until our entire land is liberated ... To the Zionists we promise that tomorrow all of Palestine will become hell for you.” After its violent coup against the Palestinian Authority, Hamas took control of Gaza and has since used it as a base to launch rocket and mortar attacks against Israel and build terror tunnels, with the aim of infiltrating the Jewish state. It has also continued to encourage and execute terror attacks in the West Bank, on occasion targeting the PA. Hamas’ activities were the cause of the 2009, 2012, 2014 and 2021 Gaza wars and the resultant destruction and tragic loss of life. It is imperative that Hamas adhere to the Quartet principles of recognising Israel, agreeing to abide by past diplomatic agreements and renouncing violence, all of which are enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution 1850. Those regional countries with whom Hamas has good relations – such as Turkey and Qatar – should demand that it does so.

STEP 11: DEMAND HAMAS RELEASES HOSTAGES

Hamas should also be pressured to end its practice of holding hostages as a bargaining chip to attempt to free terrorist prisoners held in Israel. Hamas is currently holding the bodies of two Israeli soldiers – Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul – killed during the 2014 war, as well as Avraham Abera Mengistu, who emigrated to Israel from Ethiopia when he was five, and Arab-Israeli Hisham al-Sayed. Both men, who crossed into Gaza for unknown reasons, are still being detained more than seven years later, despite pleas from their families and groups such as Amnesty International to release them. They are also both said to suffer from serious mental health issues.

“The death of one’s child is the most painful loss, and finding true comfort will never be possible. But our loss has been made even more devastating because Hadar’s body has not been returned,” Goldin’s parents wrote in 2019. “ Hamas’s refusal to confirm its apparent prolonged detention of men with mental health conditions and no connection to the hostilities is cruel and indefensible,” Sarah Leah Watson, Middle East director at Human Rights Watch, said of Mengistu and al-Sayed’s continuing detention in 2017. “No grievance or objective can justify holding people incommunicado and bartering over their fates.”

STEP 12: PRESSURE THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY TO STOP HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES

Alongside Mahmoud Abbas’ failure to hold elections in the Palestinian Territories since 2007, the Palestinian Authority has, in recent years, shown a growing unwillingness to tolerate political and civic society dissent and has thus taken on an increasingly autocratic hue.

Reports from Human Rights Watch published in October 2018 and May 2019 accused both the PA and Hamas of engaging in “systematic” torture and arbitrary arrests in order to stifle social media criticism, independent journalism and peaceful protests. The use of torture is widespread and deliberate enough to constitute “governmental policy”, HRW alleged. “In detention, security forces routinely taunt, threaten, beat, and force detainees into painful stress positions for hours at a time.” The 2019 update found that there had been “no let up” in the arbitrary arrest and torture of peaceful critics and opponents by the PA and Hamas and, it reported, between January 2018 and March 2019, the PA admitted detaining more than 1,600 people based on the peaceful expression of opposition to its rule. “The Palestinian Authority and Hamas remain bitterly divided, but unified in a common approach to crushing dissent,” said Eric Goldstein, deputy Middle East and North Africa director at HRW. “Leaders who have been in power for more than a decade without elections should at the very least listen to criticism, not punish it.”

An updated report in July 2022 reached similar conclusions, accusing the PA of “systematically mistreating and torturing Palestinians in detention, including critics and opponents”. The 2022 report pointed to the death in custody in 2021 of activist Nizar Banat, as well as the violent dispersal of protestors demanding justice for his death, as an example of PA authoritarianism.

The PA’s actions are also harmful to the peace process. “The oppressive policies of the PA have undoubtedly contributed to the alienation of large parts of the Palestinian public, and pushed some further towards extremist groups such as Hamas,” suggests Palestinian human rights activist Bassam Eid. “These abuses by the PA have hardened attitudes against the process of negotiations with Israel, an undertaking with which President Abbas’s government is deeply associated. As the PA becomes increasingly tarnished in the eyes of the Palestinian public, so too will the peace process with which the PA has been engaging come to be seen in an ever worse light.”

International donors to the PA, such as Britain and the European Union, should consistently and publicly call out human rights abuses by the PA, and make Abbas’ Authority live up to its promises to protect such rights.

STEP 13: SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF RAWABI

The first pre-planned Palestinian city, Rawabi is a \$1.4bn development in the West Bank and the brainchild of Palestinian entrepreneur and businessman Bashar Masri. Close to Ramallah, the project has faced opposition from both Israeli settlers and right-wingers and the BDS movement, but Masri is unrepentant, suggesting: “I'm creating jobs for my fellow Palestinians. I am populating the land [and] if I'm not doing it, the settlers are. We're not sugar-coating the occupation. We're not normalising with the occupation. We are defying the occupation.” The development of Rawabi - which aims to eventually provide homes for around 40,000 Palestinians and will include business, educational, shopping and leisure facilities - stalled in 2014 thanks to a now-resolved dispute with Israel about the supply of water and is now motoring again. An innovative mortgage system, unusual in the West Bank, is attracting middle-class Palestinian home-buyers, while Masri envisages a tech hub opened in 2018 forming the nucleus of the future state's very own Silicon Valley. “It's about nation-building,” Masri argues.

Rawabi deserves international political and economic support as a model for the kind of private sector-led growth that will be crucial to underpinning the success of a Palestinian state.

STEP 14: ENSURE PALESTINIANS CAN TRAVEL ABROAD MORE FREELY

The freedom and ability of the Palestinian people to travel abroad for commercial reasons, to visit family and friends, and to study, is severely curtailed. Most Palestinians have to travel to Amman's international airport, leaving the West Bank for Jordan via the Allenby Bridge. Israelis are barred from using the bridge, which is designated only for use by Palestinians and tourists.

Despite planned improvements and recently announced 24/7 opening hours, the Israeli grassroots NGO Shrinking the Conflict has identified tackling long waits and congestion at the Allenby Bridge as a small step which could be taken to improve relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Similarly, the author and academic Micah Goodman has suggested that, in addition to introducing advanced technology at the crossing, Israel could allow Palestinians to fly abroad via Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport using direct, secured shuttles which would connect the airport with the West Bank.

STEP 15: SUPPORT CONSTRUCTION OF A GAZA SEAPORT

In the wake of the 2014 Gaza war, Labor MK and security minister in the Bennett-Lapid government Omer Barlev presented a comprehensive strategy to effectively end Gaza's international isolation without compromising Israel's security. One of its key proposals was for a Gaza seaport – a proposal first included in the Oslo Accords – to ease imports and exports. (Israel will not accept Hamas' proposal for a

port built on the Gaza coast itself because of legitimate fears the terror group will use it to smuggle weapons). Since Barlev's plan was published, a range of other plans – including from Israeli government ministers – have been floated. These include building a seaport on an artificial island off of the Gaza coast and building an autonomous Palestinian port in Sinai close to the Gazan border.

Israeli security experts have also proposed a number of options to significantly reduce the security risk for Israel, including the use of an external port, for example in Cyprus, for unloading large cargo ships for inspection and reloading onto smaller ships capable of docking at Gaza and the operation of a floating checkpoint away from the shore, or connected to the shore via a bridge.

STEP 16: SUPPORT STEPS TOWARDS A PERMANENT GAZA CEASEFIRE

Hamas' refusal to renounce violence and terrorism, accept Israel's right to exist within the framework of a two-state solution, and agree to abide by past diplomatic agreements makes the prospect of a peace deal between the terror group and the Jewish state a remote one. Similarly, the terror group's refusal to disarm has repeatedly hampered Mahmoud Abbas' efforts to bring about Palestinian unity and return Gaza to the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority.

Nonetheless, a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, such as that which the former UN Middle East peace process special envoy Nickolay Mladenov worked to broker with the assistance of Egypt, remains both realistic and an urgent necessity. Indeed, between 2019-2021, a degree of "quiet" was maintained on the Gaza border, largely thanks to economic concessions and the Israeli-facilitated transfer of Qatari financial aid – some \$30m per month – to the enclave. A permanent ceasefire should aim to end rocket and terror attacks on Israel, ensure urgent humanitarian and reconstruction work, and assist the process of the reunification of Gaza and the West Bank.

STEP 17: INTERNATIONAL ACTION TO CURB IRAN'S MALIGN ACTIVITIES

While the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) aimed to rollback Iran's nuclear programme, it did nothing to address Tehran's destabilising activities in the region: its expansionist aims, support for terrorism, and its ballistic missile programme. Moreover, the expiry of the agreement's "sunset clauses" would effectively allow Iran to ultimately become a nuclear threshold state at a time of its choosing. At the same time, Donald Trump's "maximum pressure campaign" succeeded only in allowing Tehran to cease complying with the JCPOA, hampering the work of international inspectors and reducing to three months the "breakout" time needed by Iran to amass enough fissile material for a single nuclear weapon. As of summer 2022, this "breakout" time is now estimated at just a few weeks.

Since taking office, Joe Biden is right to insist on a more comprehensive approach – one that aims for a "stronger, longer" deal. That deal should aim to stop Tehran acquiring nuclear weapons. It should also seek to put an end to its support for terrorism and proxy armies and Shia militias, such as Hezbollah, which underpin the regime's neo-colonial drive to create a contiguous zone of direct influence from

historical Mesopotamia and the Levant towards the Mediterranean. These ambitions have brought violence, bloodshed, and economic, political and social chaos to Iraq, the Yemen, Lebanon and Syria, as well as posing a direct threat to the security of Israel. Finally, a new agreement should seek to address Iran's ballistic missile programme which, experts say, could come to threaten not just its Middle Eastern neighbours but Europe as well.

STEP 18: OPPOSE UNILATERAL ACTIONS BY EITHER SIDE

The sole route to a viable, sustainable two-state solution is through a settlement resulting from direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. While Israel was right to withdraw from Gaza, the unilateral nature of this process in 2005 has contributed to the continuing violence and conflict surrounding the coastal enclave. By contrast, negotiations – like those at Camp David in 1978 which led to peace between Israel and Egypt, or those which brought about peace between Israel and Jordan in the 1990s – have proved much more durable. Unilateralism goes against the spirit of the Oslo Accords, which declare: “Neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip pending the outcome of permanent status negotiations.”

Unilateralism also weakens the peace process by strengthening the position of hard-liners on both sides. This is why – despite Israel's right to have its capital in west Jerusalem – Donald Trump was wrong to unilaterally recognise Jerusalem as the Jewish state's capital in 2017. It is also why – despite the fact that the settlement blocs which abut the 1967 Green Lines will inevitably remain a part of Israel following any negotiated settlement – the Netanyahu government was wrong to consider unilaterally annexing parts of the West Bank in 2019-20.

Similarly, unilateralism on the part of the Palestinian Authority does nothing to advance the chances of a durable and lasting settlement with Israel. This includes actions such as seeking unilateral statehood recognition from international bodies or individual countries and attempting to “internationalise” the conflict through appeals to bodies such as the International Criminal Court. Indeed, such steps have done little or nothing to improve the reality on the ground for ordinary Palestinians and have instead proved simply a distraction from the vital task of returning to the negotiating table, where both sides will have to make painful compromises and concessions.

STEP 19: PRESSURE EGYPT TO PERMANENTLY OPEN THE RAFAH CROSSING

The Rafah Crossing represents a crucial route to the outside world for the people of Gaza and is the only pedestrian crossing between Gaza and Egypt. (The tightly restricted border between Israel and Gaza has a crossing at Erez, as well as a commercial crossing at Kerem Shalom). After Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, the Agreement on Movement and Access came into force and the number of monthly entries and exits through Rafah reached around 40,000.

However, after Hamas seized power in Gaza in 2007, the border was largely shuttered and only those falling into strictly limited categories – such as patients, pilgrims and foreign residents – were able to make use of its occasional openings. While the crossing began to open more often after 2010 – and restrictions were further loosened in 2011 to the degree that entries and exits reached 2005 levels – jihadi terrorism in the Sinai led Egypt to begin tightening border controls in 2013, with the crossing shut almost permanently from late 2014. Moreover, the discovery of smuggling tunnels crossing the border has led Egypt to take a series of measures – a demolition campaign to construct a one-mile wide buffer zone and the building of two walls (the second, of reinforced concrete, was built in February 2021) – which have thus far met with only limited success.

In 2018, Egypt once again started to allow Rafah to open more regularly, although time-consuming pre-registration controls remained in place and prior to the closing of the border during the pandemic, entries and exits remained way below the levels seen in 2005. This year, journeys through Rafah have risen to levels not seen since 2013. As public health allows, Egypt should permanently reopen the Rafah Crossing, while enforcing appropriate controls both to protect its own security and to prevent the smuggling of weapons into Gaza.

STEP 20: SUPPORT FREE ELECTIONS IN THE WEST BANK AND GAZA

In 2005, Mahmoud Abbas was elected president of the Palestinian National Authority with a four-year term. The election, which Abbas won by a landslide, was observed by a number of international observers, and the European Union praised the process as “a very important step towards the creation of a viable and democratic Palestinian state”. However, 17 years later – and without seeking a renewed mandate from the Palestinian people – Abbas remains in office.

This stems, in part, from the outcome of the 2006 Palestinian legislative election, in which Islamist terror group Hamas eked out a narrow popular vote victory over Abbas’ Fatah party. While Fatah faced deep internal splits and allegations of corruption, Hamas – which ran under the banner of “Change and Reform” – was widely seen as a clean pair of hands. (Hamas had boycotted the 1996 election because of its objection to the establishment of the PA and the Oslo peace process). Voters in both Gaza and the West Bank participated in the elections. While international observers deemed the elections to have been free and fair, the message from the Palestinian electorate was hardly a ringing endorsement of Hamas’ hardline policies: exit polls suggested that nearly 80 percent of voters wanted a peace agreement with Israel and three-quarters wanted to see the terror group changes its policies towards Israel.

Abbas subsequently invited Hamas to form a government, although Fatah initially refused to enter a coalition with it. A Hamas-Fatah unity government, formed in early 2007, collapsed when the terror group staged a coup in Gaza in June 2007, leading to the effective separation of the coastal enclave from the West Bank. Abbas appointed a new prime minister in the West Bank, where the PA remained in control, suspending those provisions in the Palestinian Basic Law which required the legislative council to approve a government.

In Gaza, Hamas snuffed out any form of opposition to its rule. Freedom House’s 2022 report designates 2022 Gaza as “not free” and states that the “Hamas-controlled government has no effective or independent mechanisms for ensuring transparency in its funding, procurements, or operations”. The

media, opposition parties and independent NGOs have all been suppressed, with Hamas establishing “a de facto one-party state”. It adds: “The de facto head of government, Yahya Sinwar, was chosen in a closed election by Hamas members in 2017.”

Freedom House also ranks the West Bank as “not free”, noting that: “The PA lacks an elected executive and legislature. Because the legislature has not functioned since 2007, new laws are introduced via presidential decree.” There have, however, been four sets of local and municipal elections since the PA’s formation: in 2004-5, 2012, 2017 and 2021-22 (the 2012, 2017 and 2021-22 elections were in the West Bank only).

While Abbas has proposed new elections on a number of occasions, these pledges have not come to fruition. Indeed, in January 2021, he set dates for new legislative and presidential elections – following an agreement with Hamas, to be held in both the West Bank and Gaza – in May and July 2021. However, in April 2021, Abbas postponed these elections. Although he blamed Israel’s refusal to agree to East Jerusalem’s participation in them, analysts have noted Fatah’s unpopularity, and rifts within the party, as the principal driver of this decision.

Abbas should now schedule new elections to allow the Palestinian people a vote on their future. This should be accompanied by measures to ensure these elections are free and fair and, particularly in Gaza, not hampered by intimidation by terrorist groups.

STEP 21: PRESERVE THE TEMPLE MOUNT STATUS QUO

The Temple Mount is a frequent flashpoint in Jerusalem – a city which is holy to Jews, Muslims and Christians. The site of the former Temple, it is the most holy site in Judaism. The Temple Mount, known to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary, is home to the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa mosque, and is the third holiest place in Islam.

From 1948 to 1967, as part of the Old City, the Temple Mount and the Western Wall beneath it fell within the eastern half of Jerusalem which was occupied by Jordan. Jordan subsequently reneged on its commitment to allow Jews access to those holy sites. Following the 1967 war, Israel gained control of the Old City and the Temple Mount. However, shortly afterwards, Israel’s then defence minister, Moshe Dayan, met with the Waqf religious authorities, who, under Jordan’s remit, governed the religious sites, and formally returned the Temple Mount to their control. Since 1967, therefore, while Israel is responsible for security around the site, it is the Waqf which retains control over access, determining who can pray and when. In effect, this has meant that Jews can visit the Temple Mount for short periods each day but not pray there. (Many Jews believe it is forbidden to ascend to the Temple Mount for religious purity reasons). It is also forbidden to bring or wear any Christian or Jewish religious jewellery, articles or artefacts onto the site.

“In ceding the right of Jews to pray on the Mount,” the Israeli writer Yossi Klein Halevi has suggested, “Dayan’s intention was to minimise bloodshed and prevent the Palestinian-Israeli conflict from becoming a holy war.” Since 1967, despite domestic pressure from some religious Jews who would like to be able to pray at the Temple Mount, Israeli governments of all political stripes have recognised the importance of retaining the status quo Dayan initiated.

STEP 22: EXPAND PALESTINIAN AUTONOMOUS ZONES AND ISSUE BUILDING PERMITS FOR AREA C

The Oslo Accords established three zones – Areas A, B and C – in the West Bank. In Area A, the Palestinian Authority exercises both political and military authority. Although comprising only 18 percent of the landmass of the West Bank, it includes all of its major towns – including Ramallah, Jenin and Bethlehem – and the land in their immediate vicinity (with the partial exception of Hebron, 80 percent of which is classed as Area A). In Area B, which covers roughly 22 percent of the West Bank, Israel and the PA share jurisdiction, with Israel retaining, in coordination with the PA, security control and the PA in charge of Palestinian public order and civil affairs. In Area C, which covers the remaining territory, Israel has full control over civil affairs, security and public order, although the PA is responsible for civil affairs relating to Palestinian residents. Although sparsely populated, Area C includes all Israeli settlers in the West Bank, as well as IDF military installations, and only a minimal number of Palestinians. In all, approximately three million Palestinians live in the West Bank, with more than 90 percent living in Areas A and B.

However, while the Palestinian population has inevitably grown since the 1990s, Areas A and B have not. As Micah Goodman has argued: “The Palestinian autonomous zones are too small for the population, and cannot accommodate its current rate of growth.” The most obvious and tragic consequence can be seen in the building of Palestinian homes in Area C, which, deemed illegal by the Israeli authorities, are then subject to demolition orders.

Israel should take two steps to address this situation. First, Israel should exercise its power to issue building permits to Palestinian residents of Area C. Second, as the Israeli group Commanders for Israel’s Security has suggested, there should be a phased transfer of some 617 sq km of Area C – just over 10 percent of the West Bank’s territory – to Area B. This territory, adjacent to Areas A and B, would improve Palestinian territorial contiguity and make it far easier for new Palestinian homes to be built, subject to the jurisdiction and planning regulations of the PA.

STEP 23: SUPPORT A REFORMED UNRWA

The plight of Palestinian refugees is both tragic and a recurring obstacle in the search for a two-state solution. Established in 1949, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has an important role to play in providing much-needed education, health care and social services for the Palestinian people. Its original mandate – to provide “humanitarian and development” goals “pending a just and lasting solution” – clearly remains unfulfilled.

In order to meet its goals, and support two states for two peoples, UNRWA must receive the funds it needs. That is why LFI strongly opposed the swingeing and arbitrary cuts imposed by the Trump administration and welcomes Joe Biden’s decision to restore over \$500m in assistance to the Palestinians, the majority of which has gone to UNRWA.

We also support the president’s determination to secure reform of UNRWA. The principal focus of reform should focus on two main areas of concern.

First, there have been consistent and legitimate questions about UNRWA's complicity in incitement to violence and terrorism. In 2009, for instance, a former legal adviser to the agency, James Lindsay, wrote that UNRWA has "taken very few steps to detect and eliminate terrorists from the ranks of its staff or its beneficiaries, and no steps at all to prevent members of organisations such as Hamas from joining its staff."

Over a decade later, serious concerns about the content of textbooks provided for Palestinian schools by UNRWA – which deny Jewish rights and refute Jewish connections to holy sites in Israel – continue to be voiced.

Second, after the 1948 war, there were approximately 750,000 Palestinian refugees (from 1948-1951, as many as 800,000 Jews were expelled from their native Arab and Muslim nations or forced to flee as a result of state-sponsored anti-Zionist violence). However, UNRWA's definition of a Palestinian refugee – one that is not automatically used for other refugee groups, including those assisted by the UNHRC – includes the patrilineal descendants of those 750,000 refugees. This means that the number of Palestinian refugees, according to UNRWA, has risen from 750,000 to over 5.5 million over the past 75 years.

UNRWA's expansive definition of a refugee, and its support for a total "right of return" to Israel which includes the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those who were displaced following the 1948 war, is harmful to the cause of peace. Palestinian refugees should primarily settle in a future Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, as has been accepted in past peace negotiations.

An unequivocal "right of return" to present-day Israel would destroy the prospects of two-state solution by severely undermining the viability of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. It would also end Israel's vital role as a safe haven for Jews worldwide. Promoting maximalist positions, such as the "right of return", also does nothing to prepare the Palestinian public for the difficult compromises they – and, in other areas, the Israeli people – must accept if future negotiations are to come to a successful conclusion.

Instead, individual cases of family reunion should be supplemented by an international compensation fund. Referring to his own birthplace of Safed in northern Israel, the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, has captured well the principle which should guide future progress: "It's my right to see it, but not to live there."

UNRWA should also press the plight of Palestinians who live in neighbouring Arab states and who are – for political and historical reasons – frequently denied the basic rights of citizenship. In Lebanon, for instance, Palestinians are forbidden to work in more than 70 qualified professions or to own property, and are subject to certain travel restrictions.

STEP 24: SUPPORT THE REUNIFICATION OF THE WEST BANK AND GAZA UNDER PA AUTHORITY

The reunification of the West Bank and Gaza is a crucial step in the establishment of a viable Palestinian state. It is also a key demand of the Palestinian people and intimately connected to the holding of legislative and presidential elections in the Palestinian territories, which have been repeatedly delayed and postponed.

Gaza – from which Israel unilaterally withdrew its forces, and uprooted settlers, in 2005 – was under the control of the Palestinian Authority from the time of the authority’s establishment after the 1993 Oslo Accords until terror group Hamas seized power in a bloody coup in 2007. Since that date, the Palestinian territories have effectively been separated with Hamas imposing strict Islamist authoritarian rule in Gaza, while the PA governs the West Bank.

Over the past 15 years, there have been repeated efforts – often supported by regional and international actors – to encourage the process of reunification. Notably, in June 2014, a unity government was established following an agreement between Fatah and Hamas. However, the government, led by prime minister Rami Hamdallah, resigned a year later due to its inability to operate effectively in Gaza. Subsequent efforts to promote reunification – including agreements between Hamas and Fatah in 2017 and 2020 – have also ultimately proven unsuccessful. So, too, have efforts by Abbas to exert economic pressure on Hamas – such as cutting the salaries of Gaza-based civil servants and stopping payments to Israeli utility companies which supply water and electricity to the Strip – to come to an agreement.

Key disagreements between the two sides hinge around Abbas’ legitimate and oft-repeated demand that, across the Palestinians Territories, “there must be one authority, one law and one gun – like every other country in the world.” But Hamas, which will not recognise the State of Israel and promotes violence and terrorism, has refused to cede security control of Gaza to the PA. The PA, meanwhile, continues to implement Oslo-era security cooperation agreements with Israel.

Reunification thus rests on an interlinked, multi-step approach involving an end to terrorism and the disarmament of Hamas; the reconstruction and economic regeneration of Gaza; and the holding of free and fair elections in both Gaza and the West Bank.

STEP 25: SUPPORT PALESTINIAN ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

As previous international initiatives have recognised, efforts to strengthen and grow the Palestinian economy are closely tied to both the peace process and the future viability, prosperity and stability of a Palestinian state.

Currently, economic relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority are governed by the Paris Protocol, an annex to the Oslo Accords. In reality, the protocol – which was only intended to remain in place for five years – has made the Palestinians economically dependent upon Israel in a manner never intended by those responsible for drafting and agreeing a supposedly stop-gap measure. It has thus acted as a drag on the Palestinian economy and is understandably deeply unpopular.

While recognising that, as neighbours, Israel and Palestine are likely to remain closely tied economically, it is now time to amend the protocol and set a future Palestinian state on the path to economic independence.

A number of the measures in the economic plan developed by the Institute for National Security Studies include (INSS) proposals – such as increasing Palestinian work permits and allocating parts of Area C for Palestinian economic development and industrial estates – which are examined in Steps 6 and 22. Working with the PA, there should also be a drive to increase Israeli and international investment in job-

creating projects. This drive would fall under the remit of a new International Development Bank of Palestine. Potentially modelled on the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, which was founded in 1991 to aid the economies of central and Eastern Europe during the post-Cold War era, it would work to provide the Palestinian economy with expertise and assistance, as well as helping to raise investment and oversee a spectrum of ventures. As the INSS suggests, these would range from investing in small, hi-tech enterprises and establishing industrial parks to projects – such as the construction of a port in Gaza, education reforms and building an independent tax collection system – with a longer-term horizon and impact.

STEP 26: END INCITEMENT IN THE PALESTINIAN SCHOOL CURRICULUM

In 2017, the Palestinian Authority introduced a new school curriculum which teaches the virtues of martyrdom, describes terrorists as “heroes” and repeats antisemitic tropes.

The Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (IMPACT-se) has published a series of reports which argue that the curriculum “exerts pressure over young Palestinians to acts of violence in a more extensive and sophisticated manner”; has expanded its focus from the “demonisation of Israel to providing a rationale for war”; and is “more radical than ever, purposefully and strategically encouraging Palestinian children to sacrifice themselves to martyrdom”. A long-delayed report from the Georg Eckert Institute, commissioned by the European Union and backed by the British government, confirmed in June 2021 that the curriculum promotes antisemitism and incitement to violence, celebrates terrorism and jihad, and rejects peacemaking and reconciliation with Israel.

Through the payment of the salaries of PA Ministry of Education civil servants and teachers involved in implementing it, British aid has directly helped to support the delivery of the curriculum. Despite ministers’ claims, moreover, the latest analysis of the 2020-21 curriculum by IMPACT-se found there have been no substantive changes to the most problematic content and, in fact, the curriculum has become progressively worse with each revision since its initial introduction. “No changes relating to existing problematic content which supports hate speech, antisemitism, incitement, violence, and encouragement of martyrdom and jihad have been made in the Palestinian Authority’s 2020–21 school textbooks,” it suggests. “Most adjustments keep such material intact or make it worse.”

International aid to support the education of Palestinian children and young people is vital. That aid should work to enhance the prospects of peace. The UK government should follow the example of Norway and refuse aid to the PA that directly or indirectly finances the implementation of the curriculum pending a commitment to substantive and meaningful changes to the curriculum. Palestinian children and young people should not pay the price for their government’s failings, so, during any suspension, UK aid should instead be redirected to a Palestinian Peace Fund which would invest in education, children’s and youth projects run by NGOs with a proven track record of promoting the values of peace and coexistence. LFI also supports the passage of legislation – such as that introduced in 2019 by our former chair, Dame Louise Ellman – which would mandate that any UK assistance to the PA education system must comply with international values of peace and tolerance.

STEP 27: INCREASE EXIT PERMITS TO ALLOW GAZA RESIDENTS TO STUDY ABROAD

After Hamas' 2007 coup in Gaza, and its use of the coastal enclave as a base from which to launch terror attacks into Israel, restrictions imposed by Israel and Egypt made the movement of goods and people much more difficult. Exemptions for those with work permits or requiring medical treatment – part of a wider “exceptional humanitarian cases” dispensation – are available, and students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate studies, as well as those enrolled in engineering and other technical certification programmes, are eligible for permits allowing them to transit through Israel for studies abroad. (Prior to the imposition of restrictions, more than 1,000 Palestinian students left Gaza each year to take up educational studies).

However, Palestinian young people often struggle to attain exit visas (or to attain them in a timely fashion) in order to take up opportunities to study abroad. Indeed, students are often subjected to a bureaucratic maze by which they have to attain visas to enter the country they're studying in; exit visas from Gaza (obtained from Israel via an application made by the Palestinian Civil Affairs Committee); and potentially Jordanian transit visas (students are required to travel from Gaza to Jordan and then pick up international flight connections in Amman). For potential female students, the situation is further complicated by Hamas laws which allow male relatives to block unmarried women from travelling abroad.

Israel has legitimate security concerns but, subject to individual security screening, the number of exit permits to allow Gaza residents to study abroad should be dramatically increased and more efficient systems put in place to process them.

Greater educational opportunities for young Palestinians – together with the resulting economic gains – benefit both Palestinians and Israelis, easing the environment of poverty and hopelessness in which extremism and violence can flourish.

STEP 28: ACTION BY INTERNATIONAL DONORS TO IMPROVE PALESTINIAN GOVERNANCE

A viable, democratic Palestinian state rests on the strength, transparency and accountability of the institutions of Palestinian governance. This is vital for the Palestinian people. And it is vital if Israel is to be convinced that a partner for peace exists that can both speak for the Palestinian people and, by negotiating on their behalf, come to an agreement which will be upheld and honoured.

Recent polling indicates the Palestinian people's widespread lack of confidence in the Palestinian Authority. Perceptions of corruption in PA institutions stand at 84 percent; 60 percent of people in the West Bank believe they cannot criticise the PA without fear; and less than 40 percent view the PA as an asset. Asked about the two main problems confronting the Palestinians today, the largest group - 30 percent - in the West Bank cited corruption in the PA, with unemployment and poverty in second place. Confidence in the ability of prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh's government to deliver economic improvement and new presidential and legislative elections is low. Confidence in the judicial system also

remains weak – a critical factor both for tackling crime but also for improving security and the prospects of economic investment and reform.

While many of these problems are long-standing, the six-year premiership of former prime minister Salam Fayyad – as well as his prior stint as finance minister – saw the introduction of extensive plans for state building through institutional reform and the modernisation of the public and security services. Moreover, although progress in tackling corruption and economic reform stalled after Fayyad left office in 2013, a series of reform plans published by his government aimed at building public confidence in transparent, competent and corruption-free governance institutions remain relevant. In particular, steps to introduce and safeguard the political neutrality of the judiciary and anti-corruption bodies are a key foundation upon which further future reforms can be built.

STEP 29: SUPPORT A PALESTINIAN SEAPORT AT HAIFA

A crucial component of economic independence (see Step 25) is the ability of Palestinian businesses to trade more freely with the rest of the world. Unlike Gaza, the West Bank is landlocked, adding a further barrier to the realisation of this goal. Plans for a seaport in Gaza (see Step 15) should thus be complemented by the construction of a Palestinian seaport in the Israeli coastal city of Haifa. This seaport would be connected to Jenin by a new rail line.

To assuage legitimate Israeli security concerns, the IDF's experimental "door-to-door" plan – which speeds up Palestinian goods entering Israel at border crossings by allowing security officials to remotely inspect the loading of goods into lorries in West Bank factories – could be expanded by the use of marked and locked containers. This would allow goods to be transported securely from the West Bank to the Haifa seaport by rail.

Four years ago, the Israeli government launched a "Tracks for Regional Peace" proposal which would see Haifa's rail network connected to that of Jordan and then those of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. The Israeli plan also proposed that the Haifa-Jordan line would stop in Jenin, thus connecting the Palestinian economy to that of Israel and Europe to the west, and the Arab world to the east. While the Palestinian Authority refused to support the idea at the time, saying it would not "normalise relations with Israel", there has been a recent surge in interest in the upgrading and construction of rail lines (some of them hi-speed lines) throughout the region.

STEP 30: ALLOCATE TERRITORY IN AREA C FOR PALESTINIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In Step 22, we proposed to expand the Palestinian autonomous zones of the West Bank (Areas A and B, in which more than 90 percent of the Palestinian population lives) by the phased transfer of some 617 sq km of Israeli-controlled Area C. We also advocated the issuing of more building permits to Palestinian residents of Area C and there has been positive movement on this front with Israel approving six Palestinian housing projects in July.

But wider action should be taken to improve the economic prospects of West Bank Palestinians. While the Palestinian economy is beginning to recover from the impact of the pandemic, there also needs to be

a major drive to boost jobs and growth in the West Bank, where the unemployment rate is just below 14 percent.

In line with plans drawn up by Israel's Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), up to one-quarter of Area C should be designated for Palestinian infrastructure and economic projects. Utilising capital provided by the proposed new International Development Bank of Palestine (which, as set out in Step 25, would be potentially modelled on the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development), there should be a focus on investment in establishing industrial and green energy enterprises, tourism and hi-tech ventures, residential construction, and other projects. The INSS plan envisages that, at the initial stage, Israel would not transfer security and planning powers to the Palestinian Authority in these Area C development regions. But these powers would be "ready and waiting" and gradually shifted to the PA if it cooperates with the development.

FURTHER READING

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