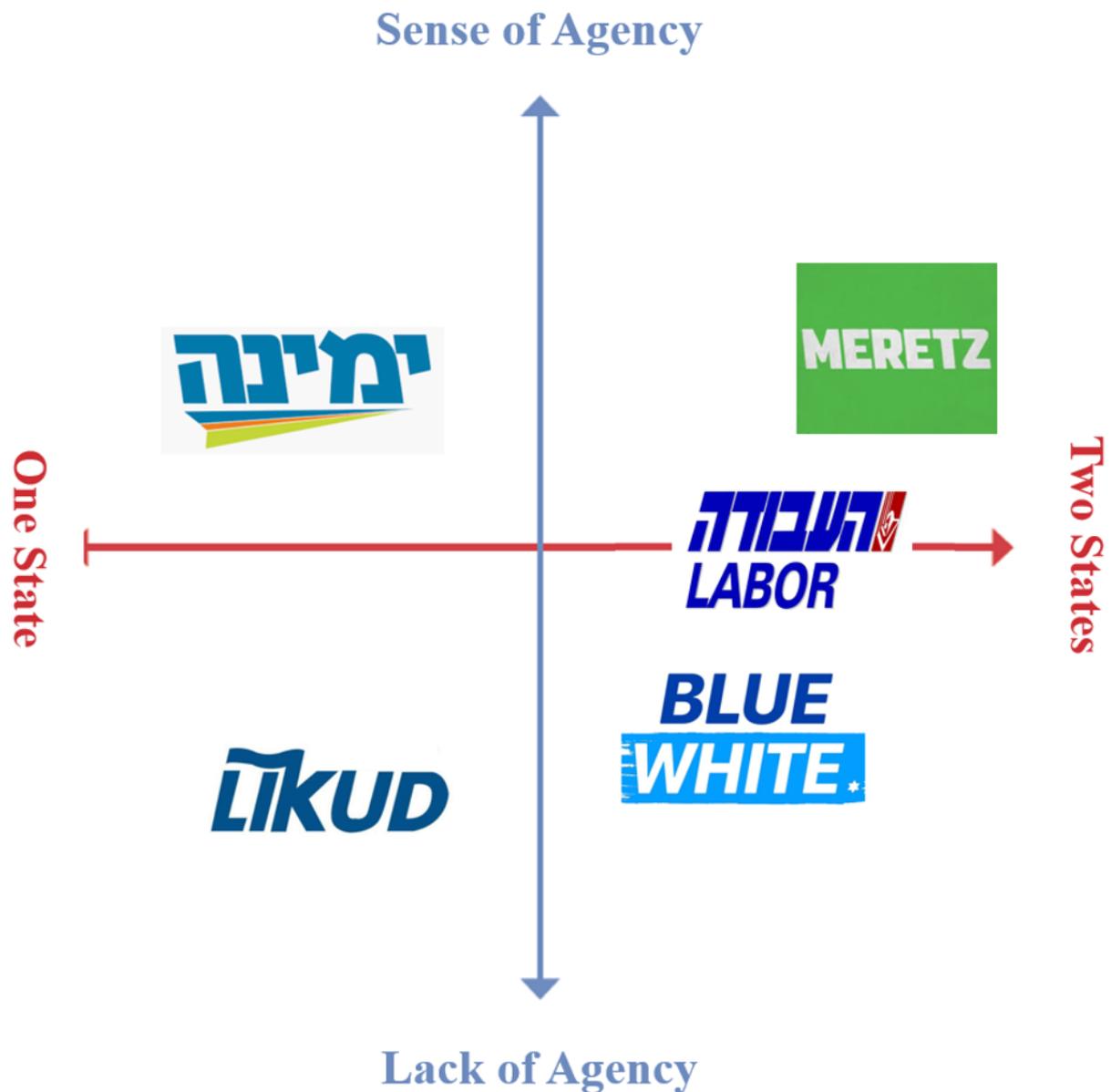# Skeptic Doves

By Avishay Ben Sasson Gordis

Most Israelis, if asked to outline the positions of the various parties regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, would likely draw a two dimensional axis on the one end of which are solutions based on separation into two states, and on the other are one-state solutions. Unfortunately, this analysis of the political debate will not help us understand some of the most fundamental phenomena in Israeli politics today. In particular, this paradigm does not offer a good explanation for the differences between left and center parties regarding the conflict, nor – albeit to a lesser extent – the differences between the various right-wing parties. All the parties from Blue and White and leftwards supposedly support a two-state solution. On the right of the Likud, and among most of the Likud MKs, there is resistance to the idea of a Palestinian state and support for annexation and applying sovereignty at least to all of Area C, which makes up about 60% of the West Bank.

> Nowadays, much of the controversy and debate over the conflict in Israeli society no longer relates to the desired solution but to its feasibility

One possible answer is that there is actually no difference between the various parties in each bloc, and that party structure merely reflects petty political disagreements and ego issues. Another possible answer is that the various parties agree regarding the conflict and their disagreement is more to do with other issues such as economics or religion and state. There is some truth to both answers. In this article, I propose a third answer. I argue that nowadays, much of the disagreement over the conflict no longer relates to the desired solution, but to the solution's feasibility. This is especially relevant to the two-state solution, which is still favored by most Israelis and has far-reaching political implications.

The first part of the article analyzes how beliefs regarding the feasibility of a solution became the main factor that explains current political disputes over the conflict, and why the relative silence of the left's leaders and the ambivalent messages of the center on this issue play into the hands of the right. As part of the analysis, I identify three misconceptions that have cemented the belief that a two-state solution is impossible: there is no Palestinian partner to promote the move; evacuation of settlements – which must be part of a two-state solution – will lead to terrorism; and the settlement project is irreversible. The second part of the article explains why each of these beliefs is wrong.

Sense of Agency

One State — Two States

Lack of Agency

Chart logos: ימינה, MERETZ, העבודה LABOR, BLUE WHITE, LIKUD

The Other Axis

To understand political discourse about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past decade, we must add to our chart with its horizontal axis running between one and two states, a second, vertical axis that maps various views regarding Israel's ability to shape its destiny. At the top end are those who believe our future lies in our hands; at the bottom those who think our fate is predetermined. This feature – belief in our ability to influence our reality – is called agency. Israelis who think it is possible to work towards a resolution of the conflict believe that as a state, Israel has agency regarding the major political question on its national agenda. Those who hold that the circumstances render any solution other than managing the conflict untenable, deny the state's agency.

Supporters of immediate annexation and a bi-national state are on the top left of the chart: they believe that we can act to promote the reality of one state between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. They are in fact already taking action in government and on the ground to establish this reality. Closer to the center point of the graph are supporters of annexing Area C, such as most of the members of Likud. They oppose a two-state solution, but fear of attempts to establish one state, drive them to support problematic ideas such as

annexing Area C – which, it is worth remembering, has no territorial contiguity for either Israel or the Palestinians – without providing real answers as to what will happen with the rest of the territory. Near the bottom of the graph, on the left, is Benjamin Netanyahu. It is not entirely clear where he stands on the desired solution, at times supporting annexation and at others resisting it, but his vertical location is unquestionable: far down the chart, believing that we are doomed to live forever "by our swords" and therefore warning against any initiative and trying to "kill it" softly (if it comes from Trump's Washington) or with a five-pound hammer (if it comes from Europe). His recent move to a more vocal support of annexation following the release of the Trump plan indicates a northwest move on the graph on his part.
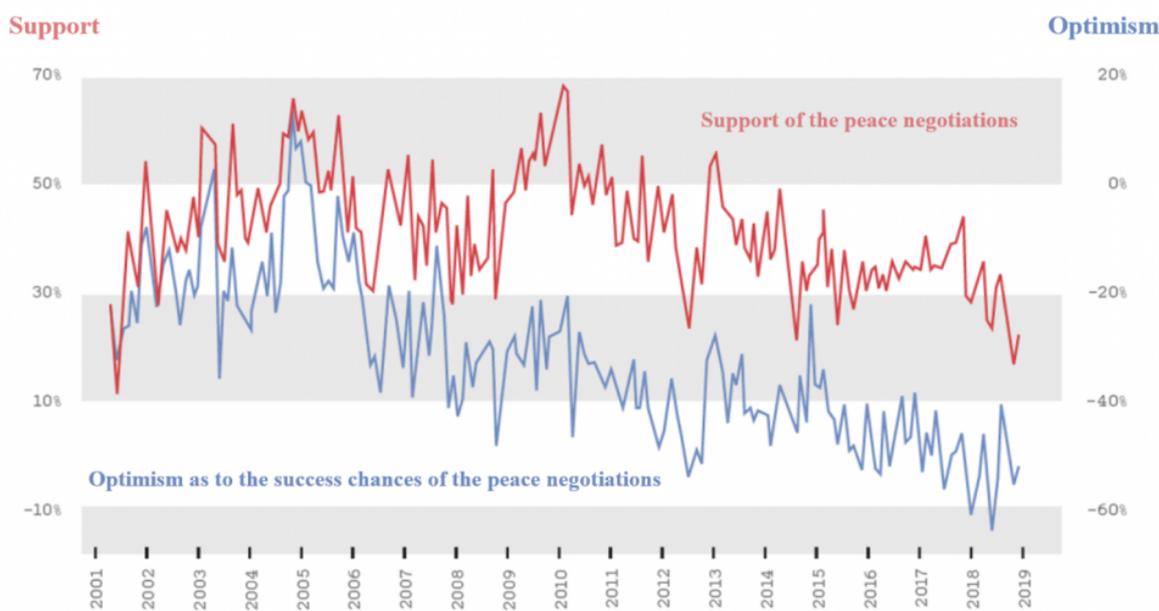
> To understand Israeli political discourse about the conflict, we must add a vertical axis that maps views regarding Israel's ability to shape its destiny

The real value of the more elaboratechart is in uncovering the differences between the left and the center. The two key components of the late Blue and White party – Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid and Benny Gantz's Hosen LeYisrael – support finding a solution to the conflict in principle, but are skeptical about its practicability. Most members of the party list, and in particular its leaders, support the two-state solution (though not all of them, e.g. Moshe Ya'alon and his now disintegrated list). The party platform included statements about the need for initiative, but emphasized what it will not do over what it will. Publicly, too, for most of the 2019 election campaign, party members talked more about the limits of possible political action to reach an agreement – which they view as separate from the peace they desire – than about its content. They were ambiguous about the possibility of evacuating settlements, said nothing about Israel's future borders, did not to relate to the transfer of responsibility to the Palestinian Authority or even to negotiating with it, and did not describe a roadmap that will lead to peace.

> No other factor that usually explains political behavior provides a better prediction for centrist voting than support for a solution and pessimism about its attainability

On the left, meanwhile, both Meretz and Labor have traditionally presented detailed policy plans for resolving the conflict, which relate to questions that the center evades fully discussing and even include explicit time-frames. These plans are, to varying extents, at the forefront of both parties' political platforms. In other words, the distinction between wishing for a two-state solution and believing it is attainable differentiate the left and the center. On the left are parties that appeal to Israelis who believe in both things; on the center parties that appeal to those who believe that a solution is desirable but unattainable.

This reality characterizes not only the elected officials of the center, but also their voters. Dr. Alon Yakter of Tel Aviv University and Prof. Mark Tessler of the University of Michigan recently published the results of a study conducted on the behavior of voters in the Israeli center. Monthly surveys conducted among the Israeli public detected that a persistent gap has opened up between public support for a two-state solution and belief in its feasibility. At the same time, an analysis of the centrist electorate showed that the only predictor of repeated voting for the center, even if a different party represents it in every election, is holding the set of beliefs regarding the conflict: support for a solution and pessimism about its attainability. No other factor that usually explains political behavior – religion, economic status or other political beliefs – provides a better prediction for centrist voting.

Support **Optimism**

70% 20%

50% 0%

Support of the peace negotiations

30% -20%

10% -40%

Optimism as to the success chances of the peace negotiations

-10% -60%

2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018 2019

(Peace Index Data. Yakter and Tessler \ Washington Post, 2019) .מקור: החישובים מבוססים על אינדקס השלום

The Jewish Agency

The agency-free approach, from right to left, is founded on three paralyzing beliefs: there is no Palestinian partner and therefore there is no point in working towards an agreement; withdrawal from any area will jeopardize Israeli security; and the settlement project is so irreversible that an agreement is not really possible. Since they regained power in 2009, Netanyahu and his right-wing partners have done everything they could to deepen the grip of these paralyzing beliefs among the public. The Likud leaders have been careful to paint the Palestinian leadership as objecting to peace and hostile to Israel, despite the ongoing security cooperation and the fight of the Palestinian security forces against terrorism. These politicians repeatedly stated that any territory evacuated by Israel has become a terrorist base, heightening fear of the damage to security that left-wing concessions would cause. Finally, within the confines of international pressure, the right-wing governments of the past decade have striven to cement the settlement project both on the ground and legally, and allowed the settler lobbies to increase control over decision-making in right-wing parties.

> The beliefs that drive skepticism regarding the two-state solution dominate public consciousness and feed on the fact that they are rarely challenged and even reinforced by the leaders of the left and center

On the other hand, as noted, the leaders of the center do not offer any explanation as to how they will move toward a solution, thus helping perpetuate the feeling that there is no solution other than Israeli inaction in the direction of two states. Yet the left, too, has not done enough to explain to the general public in Israel how the desired solution will be attained. If you look at Meretz's political platform, you may think that the complexity of implementing the two-state solution has not increased significantly in recent decades. Labor's platform published for the 2019 elections showed the first signs of systematic dealing with the three obstacles, but this is a novelty compared to the party's official line in recent years. Most of the time, the left's engagement with a solution to the conflict, has focused on the need to reach a solution, while the policy plans generally seemed more like outlines for a solution than a practical proposal. But without

offering a full, methodical answer to the three questions that are troubling Israelis, the left will not be able to narrow the gap between agreeing on the nature of the solution and lack of belief in its feasibility.

> The center parties, and sometimes Labor, have helped deepen the crisis of confidence in the attainability of a solution

Even worse, as we all depend on political leaders and opinion-shapers to organize the meaning of our political reality and the events that take place in it, the disappearance of the political center-left from the active conversation has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Individuals and nations, that do not believe in the ability to act lose this ability, and a political camp whose leaders instill – in their silence or through ambiguity – the feeling that we live in a reality we cannot control and navigate, cannot consider an alternative.

Over the years, the representatives in Knesset and in government who support the two-state solution have failed to further this goal. The center parties, and sometimes Labor, have helped deepen the crisis of confidence in the attainability of a solution. This began with Ehud Barak's declaration that there is no Palestinian partner after the failure of the permanent-status talks in 2000, and continued with the parliamentary support that the centrist parties and Labor gave governments headed by Netanyahu – i.e. Kadima, headed by Tzipi Livni and Labor (and Barak's Independence party which split off from it) in 2009, and Yesh Atid in 2013. This backing continued to erode belief that a political solution can be reached. Election after election, the center and left parties have transferred votes for the two-state solution to a camp that is fighting against its implementation and which is undermining the belief in its feasibility.

Thus, the three beliefs that imprison us in skepticism regarding the feasibility of a two-state solution dominate public consciousness and feed on the fact that they are rarely challenged and even reinforced by the leaders of the left and center. Yet we must not settle for this answer. It is our duty to understand why these beliefs are so plausible.

> Predictions that Gaza would prosper were proven wrong. Instead, a regime that is hostile to Israel and has relatively advanced military capabilities took over Gaza

The most important piece of evidence in favor of the three are the results of the 2005 Disengagement from Gaza. Ariel Sharon's government promised Israelis that security would improve after the withdrawal and downplayed the importance of the threats that Gaza could pose to Israel. Predictions that Gaza would prosper under the PA rule were proven wrong. Instead, a regime that is hostile to Israel and has relatively advanced military capabilities took control of Gaza. On the political level, immediately after the disengagement, Hamas won the Palestinian parliamentary elections held in early 2006, thereby gaining control of the Palestinian government. A year later, in June 2007, it physically took over the Gaza Strip and expelled the PA, thus further undermining the position of PA President Mahmoud Abbas.

In the end, the lasting public memory of the withdrawal from Gaza is the tremendous effort that went into evacuating 8,000 settlers, and the ongoing failure to conclude the process of their absorption back into Israel. The lesson for many Israelis from this narrative (and from further evidence) is that transferring territory to Palestinians would be irresponsible, even if it were clear to which of the Palestinians we should pass it, and that evacuating settlers to promote a political solution would be impossible. It is important to clarify one point: the public perception that the withdrawal from Gaza was bad for Israeli security is wrong. Despite the shortcomings mentioned here, the disengagement unequivocally improved Israeli security. It is precisely because of this gap that any solution in the West Bank will need to address all the failures – whether real or imagined – tied to the disengagement.

In the existing situation, it is almost obvious why voters repeatedly prefer Netanyahu and the political camp

that follows him. Many may beg to differ with the observations that there is nothing to do except manage the conflict, that we will forever live by the sword and that the price that Israel pays for continued control of the Palestinians is inevitable, but Netanyahu's narrative seems to fit with what many do actually see happening in reality. His vision, as grim as it might be, at least offers a semblance of welcome stability.

Still, not all is lost. Most Israelis are still convinced of the need for compromise. So the task now, if we go back to the chart we began with, is not to move the conversation along the horizontal axis – from support of a one state to a two state solution – but to change the public's position on the vertical axis: to regroup around an unequivocal, clear position that not only supports compromise but also believes in our ability, as a society and as a country, to promote it. This can be started by countering the three paralyzing beliefs that inform public opinion about Israel's inability to reach a two-state solution. The second part of the article aims to assist in this task.

First belief: There's no partner – and nothing to do about it

The claim that there is no Palestinian partner can be understood in two ways. Yet before I elaborate on them, let me stress that even if this argument is completely correct, and there is in fact no partner, it would be a grave error to conclude that Israel cannot make immediate moves towards a two-state solution.

The first way to understand this argument is that there is no Palestinian leader willing to enter into a political arrangement with Israel. According to this view, there is no real difference between the PA leadership and the Hamas leadership, both of which strive to destroy Israel. Even the Palestinian public would never accept Israel's existence, from this perspective, so there is no point in trying to negotiate with its leaders. The second way to understand the statement that there is no Palestinian partner is that there the Palestinian leadership, and even some of the Palestinian population may be willing to reach a peace agreement, but they have insufficient power to carry it out, and therefore to make them a relevant negotiations counterpart.

> Abbas' refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state is also considered a sign that there is no Palestinian partner

The first explanation is supported by two main arguments – the conduct of Abbas and the PA under him, and the unwillingness of the Palestinians to accept previous proposals. Both arguments are factually incorrect. Abbas, who has been leading the PA since 2005, has consistently opposed physical violence against Israel, guided his people to fight terrorism, and adhered to political, nonviolent action against Israel even at times of deep frustration on his part. It should also be mentioned that over the past decade, while promoting a right-wing policy, Netanyahu has negotiated both openly and secretly with Abbas through political and personal liaisons.

Abbas' refusal to recognize Israel as a Jewish state is also considered by some as a sign that there is no Palestinian partner. That Egypt and Jordan were never required to recognize the Jewish character of Israel, as well as Palestinian statements that Israel is welcome to determine its own character, and official Palestinian recognition of Israel in 1993 – have all been forgotten in the face of what many Israelis view as refusal to acknowledge the obvious.

The Palestinians may or may not be able to agree with any Israeli government on the outline for an arrangement in Jerusalem and regarding the refugee issue, but it is clear that posing the demand for recognition of Israel as a Jewish state as a starting point for negotiations does not promote any substantive discussion of the permanent issues. And what about the Israeli partner? Imagine what would happen if the prime minister was a leader from the center or the left – would there be no one to talk to in Ramallah then, too? How quickly would overt negotiations resume? Netanyahu's governments have made a tremendous effort to alienate the Palestinian leadership, and without a doubt they have succeeded. The obvious question, then, is whether one should expect a Palestinian partner ready for peace talks when it is evident that the

Israeli government is not a partner for such talks.

From left, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Omert, President George W. Bush, and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas shake hands following the President's address to more than 50 counties and international organizations at the Annapolis Conference in the Naval Academy's Memorial Hall in Annapolis, Md., Nov. 27,2007. | [Wikimedia Commons](#)

A common argument added to the previous two is that it is highly doubtful the Palestinians will ever agree to any proposal. This is usually based on the way Abbas and Olmert ended their negotiations. The latter placed a proposal on the table after announcing an end to his term as prime minister due to criminal proceedings against him, and Abbas did not respond. Barrels of ink have been spilt over why Abbas did not respond and whether he would have if Olmert had continued in office, or Tzipi Livni would have replaced him in the prime minister's office instead of Netanyahu. For the purposes of this article, it is worth noting two points that are not hardly affected by the debate surrounding the Olmert-Abbas talks. The first is that the loss of Israeli's confidence in the ability to reach a peace agreement is not significantly related to the Palestinians not answering Olmert's offer. This lack of faith began before Olmert made his offer and has not changed significantly since. The other is that even if there is doubt as to the possibility of Israel and the Palestinians reaching agreements, that is not a good enough reason not to engage in political contacts with the Palestinians or to initiate moves to ensure that once the Palestinian are ready (assuming they are not now) arrangements will be as simple as possible to implement.

This leads to the second way to understand the "no partner" argument, which raises the question whether, given an Israeli government that is willing to seriously discuss a permanent settlement with the Palestinians, there will be someone who can implement such an agreement. The PA does not control the entire Palestinian territory. Since 2007 the Gaza Strip has been under Hamas' control, and therefore even if an agreement is reached with the PLO (with the PA acting on its behalf), it will not practically include Gaza. In this sense there is indeed no single partner who can easily ensure an agreement with the Palestinians. Moreover, Abbas is currently 84 and not particularly healthy. It is unclear who will take his place when he can no longer serve as president of the PA. In countries where elections are held regularly, leadership changes do not raise particular difficulties, but the last election in the PA took place over a decade ago. It would be better for

Abbas' successor to inherit an agreement that is a fait accompli, much like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt found itself in 2012 committed to the peace treaty with Israel. But since it is unlikely that such an agreement will be signed before a significant change in the Palestinian arena will have taken place, issues of who will replace Abbas and how the PA will look the day after remain open, as does the ability to treat such an agreement as a feasible option in the near future.

In spite of all this, I stress yet again that the question of a partner is not an obstacle to moving towards a two-state solution, for two reasons. First, there are moves that Israel can make on its own; second, the way we operate affects the question of whether there will be a partner in the future. As Commanders for Israeli Security claim in their "security first" plan, and as others also argue, Israel is free to take various kinds of action in furtherance of separation from the Palestinians. Moreover, many of the things Israel can do without need for Palestinian input would be in its own interest, and not just that of the Palestinians. The most important step is the evacuation of settlements deep within the territory clearly designated for a Palestinian state, if this state is to enjoy territorial contiguity. Other less important examples are allowing more Palestinian construction in Area C in order to respond to the needs of the growing Palestinian population, and willingness to cooperate with existing programs for development of the Palestinian economy.

> The main answer regarding the lack of a partner is that Israel's actions have the power to build up or undermine a partner

The main answer regarding the lack of a partner is that Israel's actions have the power to build up or undermine a partner. The more Israel signals in its actions that it is not interested in the accumulation of power by Palestinian institutions, and the more it moves away from a two-state solution, mainly in its settlement policy, the more it reduces Palestinian interest in generating leadership that is focusing on internal governance. Israel cannot replace the Palestinians in building effective institutions, but it certainly can refrain from interfering, or intervene less. In some ways, it has done so in recent years – for instance, by reducing the number of checkpoints between Palestinian towns and by permitting the construction of the city of Rawabi. Yet more can be done: removing barriers to Palestinian political, civilian and economic activity in the West Bank and collaborating with international agencies in forming effective plans for building up institutional abilities on the Palestinian side.

The Gaza Strip is also less influential than it seems to be on whether we can act now to create the right conditions for a two-state solution. Ending the civilian presence in the West Bank and formulating the outline of a security strategy there, can progress almost completely separately from the question of how and against whom Israel operates in the Gaza Strip. Ultimately, the formation of an effective Palestinian government in the West Bank and Israeli political initiative is in Israel's independent interest. This will also increase the likelihood of a Palestinian political union under a government committed to agreements with Israel, more than any other action Israel can take.

Second belief: Withdrawals jeopardize security

The second erroneous belief that entrenches skepticism about the implementation of a political solution is the fear of the security implications of a move towards a two-state reality. For many Israelis, the withdrawal from Gaza showed that territory handed over to Palestinian control will become a base for terrorist activity and reduce Israeli security on the home front. Indeed, if Israel tried to withdraw from the West Bank today as it withdrew from the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2005 – in several weeks and with both a military and civilian retreat – the political framework that would arise in the West Bank would likely be a failed state.

The PA does not currently have the institutional capacity to take control of the territory that Israel will vacate. This is undoubtedly the result of Palestinian failure to build up these capabilities in the 25 years since

the Oslo Accords were signed, but Israel and its conduct as an occupying force in the last 53 years have played a critical role in creating this situation. However, and it is important to emphasize this, no one is proposing such a withdrawal. The measures being considered at this stage relate to redeploying civilians, not a rapid reduction of Israeli military presence in the West Bank. Evacuating settlements will make it easier to provide security for Israeli citizens and at the same time help prepare the conditions for a two-state solution.

> Most professionals dealing with the issue of Israeli security in the West Bank agree that continuing the current situation is detrimental to Israeli security

Most professionals dealing with the issue of Israeli security in the West Bank in recent years agree that continuing the current situation is detrimental to Israeli security, both in the West Bank and in general. That is even without addressing the broad political and security implications of preserving Israel's control of the territories and the construction of settlements. A study by the Molad Center the I was one of the authors of, found that defending settlements extends the line of contact that the IDF needs to secure in the West Bank, and that most Israeli forces in the West Bank are engaged in protecting the settlements rather than preventing terrorism. We also found that interests relating to the settlement enterprise have led to the Separation Barrier being incomplete more than a decade and a half after its construction began.

No wonder, then, that we hear more and more voices calling for unilateral Israeli action, but significantly different from that taken in Gaza. The practical translation of this approach is moves aimed at ending the civilian presence in the West Bank, namely – dismantling the settlements that lie mostly east of the barrier, while maintaining security control on the ground until a stable agreement is reached. Dismantling the settlements is a security interest, therefore, as well as a political one, as the settlements are the reason for the vast majority of international criticism of Israel. International law recognizes an occupation that seeks to protect the security interests of the occupier, but not when it is aimed at settling the occupied territory.

Simply put, the citizens of Israel are defended by their security forces – not by the settlements. Steps that bring us closer to separating from the Palestinians and reaching two states, while maintaining security control over the West Bank in the short and medium run will only increase Israeli security.

Third belief: The settlements cannot be evacuated

The conclusion that stems from the previous two parts is that the most feasible and necessary progress towards the two-state solution at the present time is to reduce Israeli civilian presence in the West Bank, and especially east of the Separation Barrier. Assuming that Israel has an interest in evacuating settlements, our lack of faith in our ability to do so is based on two separate arguments. The first is that settlers cannot be evacuated from their homes; the second is that even if they are evacuated, it will be impossible to absorb them fairly within sovereign Israel. Here, too, the disengagement is the supposed proof: If the evacuation of some 8,000 settlers demanded huge human resources and massive logistical preparation, how can 100,000 people be relocated? Furthermore, if the absorption of those 8,000 people was not completed more than a decade after they were evacuated from their homes, how will the state successfully absorb 12 times as many citizens? These are perfectly reasonable questions and supporters of the two-state solution must be prepared to answer them.

> To promote the establishment of a Palestinian state with reasonable territorial contiguity alongside Israel, it will be necessary to evacuate approximately 125,000 people

There are currently approximately 630,000 Israelis living beyond the 1967 borders (of whom some 220,000

live in the Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem). To promote the establishment of a Palestinian state with reasonable territorial contiguity alongside Israel, it will be necessary to evacuate approximately 125,000 people – about 31,000 households. This estimate assumes that Israel will be able to annex settlements adjacent to the barrier, some of which are the largest settlements, as well as Gush Etzion, the Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem and the main settlements surrounding the city (especially Ma'ale Adumim and Givat Ze'ev). Naturally, if Israel continues to build settlements in the West Bank, this number is expected to rise and the economic and social cost of the evacuation along with it.

Previous surveys indicate that about a quarter of the settlers will agree to voluntary evacuation if they are compensated. In addition, about 45% of the settlers are under the age of 17, so the youngest can be expected to evacuate with their families. Moreover, the ability to live established lives in the West Bank today depends to a considerable extent on active government support, including tax benefits, balancing grants to weak local authorities and payments for education, and especially transportation and employment. Gradually reducing the scope of support provided to settlements will incentivize voluntary evacuation.

> A significant proportion of the settlers who must be evacuated will do so without objection, if they are given an appropriate alternative and suitable compensation

All this indicates that a significant proportion of the settlers who must be evacuated will do so without objection, if they or their parents are given an appropriate alternative and suitable compensation. In the end, there will be only a few thousand settlers who will refuse to evacuate, including use of minimal and non-violent force, much like the evacuation of the Gaza Strip in 2005. Some of those who refuse will be those who regard the settlements as important for Israel's messianic role, for whom the establishment of the settlements is intended in the first place to prevent the concession of territory and the establishment of a Palestinian state. However, they will be exceptions, and it will not be necessary to carry out the evacuation on a tight schedule as in Gaza. The project can be carried out gradually, over a long period of time, with more limited forces assigned to the task.

The success of voluntary evacuation depends on the existence of a suitable alternative and compensation for the evacuees. A residential alternative is not just four walls and a floor to sleep on, but also includes appropriate community response and educational and employment institutions, or at least access to them. The existing job trends in the settlements greatly simplify the employment portion of the equation, as the need for the services of those 20% of settlers employed in education – as well as those of settlers employed in Israel – is likely to remain the same even after they move to Israel, especially if existing communities maintain their structure and schools.

A study carried out by the planning company Urbanix for the Blue-White Future movement in 2011 examined whether the State of Israel has planning reserves that will allow it to absorb approximately 100,000 settlers from 25,000 households in appropriate areas within its territory. Although the study was conducted based on a higher number of evacuees than required in reality – and, accordingly, assuming higher required financial input by the absorbing authorities – the conclusion was resoundingly positive. Even though only approved building plans were examined, the plans for urban localities of 2011 were enough to accommodate all the new families, along with meeting the ongoing demand for housing in Israel in the following years.

The data have changed since the study was conducted in 2011, but the basic finding remains the same. Israel is able to provide proper housing solutions for approximately 30,000 families. These solutions are likely to initially include temporary sites. Evacuees who do not need a community-based solution will be able to use the amount of compensation they receive to purchase an apartment in the existing market. For the rest, permanent solutions will be built within a few years. In conversations I have held with experts on this question, comparisons have often been made to the absorption of former Soviet Jews in the 1990s. On the one hand, Israel absorbed about one million immigrants over a decade with relative success; on the other hand, the process of moving from temporary housing to permanent residence took longer than expected; the

construction and planning processes did not proceed in an orderly manner, and in some cases led to low-quality construction, including in ill-chosen sites (next to quarries, wastewater treatment facilities and so on).

Fortunately, there are significant differences between the absorption of the "one million immigration" and the absorption scenario of future evacuees from the settlements. In 1990 alone, more immigrants from the Soviet Union came to Israel than all the settlers whose gradual evacuation is expected. While the arrival of former Soviet Jews was somewhat unpredictable and was driven by an emergency, the evacuation of settlers can be proactively prepared by state action such as increasing the housing supply. We can also learn from the past. The process of absorbing former Soviet immigrants has already taken place, as has the failure to fully absorb the Gaza evacuees. There is no reason why the appropriate authorities and ministries cannot study both cases and properly prepare for a future evacuation process.

Political Mission

This analysis leads to the conclusion that the current challenge facing supporters of the two-state solution is to convince Israeli citizens that the solution can be advanced, even if it is unclear when it will be fully achieved. Avoiding the question of how to reach a solution will only strengthen opponents and those who believe in Israel's lack of choice. Yet to address this question, we must face real concerns among the Israeli public that an Israeli initiative would jeopardize security, that there is no partner on the other side, and that the settlements have succeeded in the task laid out by the founding fathers of the enterprise: to change reality on the ground so that no political solution can ever be reached. Those who believe in these claims can no longer seriously support the two-state solution and must accept the status quo or lay the foundations for a bi-national state.

The truth is that there is no reason to believe these claims. They can be firmly rejected by those who believe that our possibilities to promote a two-state solution depend first and foremost on us, and that a solution is not only worthwhile and necessary, but also feasible: dismantling the civilian presence in the West Bank while maintaining a military presence until the implementation of a permanent settlement will improve Israeli security and create conditions for implementing a full two-state solution in the future. The question of a partner on the Palestinian side is controversial but less important than it may seem, as Israel has a great deal of leeway that does not require Palestinian consent, and as any progress towards a solution increases the likelihood of finding a partner in due course. Ending the settlement project will be more difficult today than it was in the 1990s or even a decade ago, in terms of public consciousness, but in practical terms is entirely possible.

Nonetheless, implementing the solution will be complex and will require a great deal of work. We must assume that the political sensitivity of the government and the military engaging in the evacuation settlements and ending civilian presence in the West Bank will prevent background preparation from taking place before a government is formed that openly seeks to advance the two-state solution. However, as we have seen, completing the details of an action plan can significantly increase the political viability of any eventual plan, as this will convince Israelis that the idea is feasible. So it would seem like we have a paradox on our hands. We need background work to prepare for announcing the move, but such work will be difficult to carry out until after the move is announced. The obvious solution is to lean on the mass of non-governmental knowledge that currently exists in left-wing circles. As mentioned above, several studies have been done in the past on the various questions at hand, emphasizing the issues of security and evacuation. However, most of these studies are not very detailed and in some cases need updating.

> Those who first voted in the last elections were at most 10 years old when
> Netanyahu was elected in 2009

On the security issue, the next step is to propose a detailed action plan including the forces and tasks required to ensure security when the IDF will no longer be required to defend tens of thousands of Israeli civilians in hostile Palestinian territory. The orders will probably change when the time to actually implement them comes, but the background work will lay the foundations. The necessary foundations for evacuation should include the reconstruction of relevant databases regarding the needs of the population that will be evacuated, development of a legal infrastructure for both evacuation and re-absorption in the State of Israel, and the beginning of urban and national planning for absorption.

On the political level, neglecting the question of implementation has a very real price. Without a political leadership to focus its messages on the feasibility of the two-state solution and on challenging actors and arguments that push it away, Israelis will not be exposed to these ideas. As a result, alongside the despairing generation of adults, there is now a generation in Israel that cannot imagine a different political reality than the one into which it was born. Those who first voted in the last few rounds of elections were at most 10 years old when Netanyahu was elected in 2009. They went through youth and early adulthood in an era when no one is explaining why the proposed solution is also practical. This leads, at best, to supporting center parties, or to adopting right-wing ideas because over time, there is a real mental cost to believing in a solution that one is convinced can never be achieved. Over time, there is no point in saying that we must support the two-state solution if we do not do what it takes to instill belief in our power to advance it. Happily, the seeds of change in this approach are beginning to appear. What remains is to ensure that they continue to grow and take root.