
In Theory

Grand Bargain: Negotiating Toward a Better Middle East

James K. Sebenius

How can sophisticated negotiation bring about a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East? While a “grand bargain” to accomplish this lofty goal may seem implausible, the potential value of such an agreement would be vast for most Israelis, Palestinians, and key regional players—as well as for many global states. Yet the failure to successfully negotiate it would entail correspondingly huge potential costs for these parties. When the benefits of a deal are high and the costs of no deal are extreme, the underlying basis for a successful negotiation exists—that is, we can envision a collectively beneficial “zone of possible agreement” (ZOPA). The first task of this article is relatively easy: to describe the elements of such a grand bargain—an “Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace Initiative (AIPPI),” which should be announced by Saudi Arabia and/or the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The AIPPI would contain a vision of a permanent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the form of a non-militarized Palestinian state with Israel enjoying normalized relations with moderate Sunni Arab regimes. As a point of departure for negotiating, it would detail the benefits to and obligations of Israelis, Palestinians, and Arab states required to realize this vision, encourage the creation of performance-based milestones toward this end, to be followed by an international conference. The analysis of this article then shows that a ZOPA likely exists among critical stakeholders despite formidable would-be blockers. Yet bringing

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about the AIPPI requires answering two much harder questions: What are the barriers to realizing it and what is a plausible path to overcome these barriers? Sketching credible answers to these two knotty questions is the main intended contribution of this article.

Keywords: negotiation, conflict resolution, Gaza, Israel, Palestine, Hamas, West Bank, Palestinian Authority

Introduction

As of mid-2024, discussion of the Gaza war heavily focuses on its humanitarian costs, ceasefire possibilities, hostage prospects, and “day after” options. Yet what longer-term strategy guides actions on these vital issues while offering a more positive vision for Israelis, Palestinians, and key regional players? This article sketches such a vision, a “grand bargain,” but far more importantly, highlights the formidable barriers to its realization—and the elements of a realistic path to overcoming those barriers. With old political assumptions jolted by recent events, an opening exists for a new and better regional reality to take shape. This analysis builds on and substantially advances a concept articulated in the author’s January 2024 paper ([Sebenius 2024](#)).

The past Israeli approach to the Palestinians and the region has failed. On October 7, 2023, Hamas seized the strategic initiative by committing murderous atrocities and taking hundreds of hostages. To date, Israel largely remains in reactive mode. The current war in Gaza has a primarily short- to medium-term focus that entails substantial risks, especially if fighting remains Israel’s dominant effort without a longer-term political and diplomatic approach to the Palestinians and the region. These risks include an increasingly isolated Israel even less integrated into the region, most Palestinians further distanced from their national aspirations, a more fragmented moderate Sunni block that seeks to oppose aggressive actions of Iran and its proxies, and Israel’s main backers bearing substantial diplomatic costs. Under this “primarily military” scenario, Palestinian radicalization will increase as will regional and global sympathy for their plight. Simmering violence in the West Bank¹ and Gaza with episodic outbursts will continue indefinitely. And Israel will indefinitely act to suppress them.

With fast-moving events in the Gaza war and the region and the inherent uncertainty about how they will play out, any published diagnosis and prescription in mid-2024—the present piece included—risks

having a short shelf life. Given that caveat, this article's approach should be understood as mainly applying to the period following the "hot" phases of the Gaza conflict, as Israel and the many other affected parties grapple with next steps in the medium and longer terms.

As such, this article argues for an alternative path toward a grand bargain that would explicitly *complement* Israel's war effort with a longer-term, positive vision and strategy. Sketched here as an "Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace Initiative (AIPPI)," it is an approach that includes Israeli, regional, US, and global components. This alternative "military plus diplomatic and political" scenario promises to lead—on a carefully phased basis, over time—to a unified West Bank and Gaza under a revitalized Palestinian Authority, meaningful steps toward two states living in peace and security (or a negotiated confederal arrangement), and normalized political, economic, and security relationships between Israel and its regional neighbors. Relative to the risks of a primarily military strategy, the AIPPI would offer considerable advantages to Israelis, Palestinians, and regional Sunni powers, as well as the United States and the Western backers of Israel.

As detailed later in this article, the often-overlapping phases that could transform the AIPPI from vision to reality would roughly include:

- 1) With input from the United States, Saudi Arabia and/or the UAE should publish the AIPPI, outline the Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab obligations under it that would lead to the realization of its vision offering benefits to all three parties, and build active support for the AIPPI concept from regional and international parties, and serve as an invitation to negotiation.
- 2) As Israel increasingly achieves its objectives of substantially degrading Hamas as a military and governing force in Gaza, it places much greater overt emphasis on avoiding and ameliorating civilian suffering in Gaza in collaboration with the international community, provides security and basic services to Gazans, and paves the way for progressively greater Palestinian and other Arab administration of this territory.
- 3) Arab and other parties should undertake initiatives to strengthen the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Palestinian Authority as a governing entity, including a major role in post-conflict Gaza.
- 4) Palestinian support of the AIPPI should be induced by articulating a series of performance-based milestones, largely to be negotiated with and met by Israel, that would sharply increase Palestinian confidence in the reality of a meaningful political horizon for two states or comparable political arrangements.
- 5) Internal and external actors should build support for the AIPPI among Israeli politicians likely to succeed the current government,

who in turn could build support among a wider set of their constituents, by articulating a set of performance-based milestones—largely to be negotiated with and met by the Palestinians and moderate Sunni Arab states—to sharply increase Israeli confidence in its domestic and regional security under the AIPPI.

- 6) The United States, and perhaps other like-minded nations, should host an international conference to formalize commitments to the vision of the AIPPI and negotiate the milestones necessary to realize its potential. This conference would provide an overall framework for negotiating the AIPPI and would launch and/or advance two parallel sets of negotiations: between Israelis and Palestinians and between Israel and Saudi Arabia plus other moderate Sunni Arab states. If possible, the core elements of the AIPPI will be embodied in a revision to U.N. Security Council Resolution 242.

Credibly articulating an AIPPI strategy and taking actions toward implementing it *sooner rather than later* would enhance the otherwise dim prospects of a multilateral response to the security, rebuilding, and governance challenges of post-conflict Gaza—as well as boost the chances of further normalization between Israel and its Sunni regional neighbors. Such an articulation and actions would also enable broader-based efforts to strengthen the Palestinian Authority, which should play increasingly important roles in implementing the AIPPI. By contrast, if there is a failure to commit to a positive vision such as the AIPPI, each of these desirable outcomes would become far less likely.

Of course, simply articulating a positive, longer-term vision like the AIPPI is relatively easy, as many similar proposals attest. That is why a distinctive focus of this article is to highlight and address some of the truly daunting barriers that would prevent this initiative from being advanced by major Israeli figures, let alone realized in practice. While Israel's commitment would ultimately be pivotal to bring this initiative to life, getting Israel on board calls for a sequential approach by the United States and key regional parties as described in the final section of this article. Such efforts are partially underway now and should be intensified. Relative to Israel's current primarily military approach, this AIPPI strategy offers the promise, over time, of overcoming the formidable barriers to the AIPPI en route to a more stable, just, and integrated Middle East.

The AIPPI can only become a reality in stages, over time, as Israelis become more confident that their security concerns on the West Bank can be met and that regional normalization is the credible “reward” for embrace of the AIPPI, as the Palestinians come to believe in a genuine Israeli acceptance of a political horizon for their aspirations and progress toward realizing them, and as regional powers see these Israeli and

Palestinian convictions as real. Yet, as necessary and valuable is this kind of phased approach, it also opens the door to would-be spoilers of all kinds who view the AIPPI as inimical to their interests: Israeli far right-wingers, Palestinian and other Arab rejectionists, as well as Iranian-influenced parties in the region who fear regional integration of Israel with Sunni states and oppose the very existence of the State of Israel. Overcoming these potential spoilers requires acceptance of the end-state of the AIPPI and ongoing efforts to build a sustainable winning coalition in its support.

To develop this argument in greater depth, this article proceeds as follows:

1. an overview of the likely huge costs of continuing on the current path absent a grand bargain along the lines of the AIPPI,
2. a more detailed description of the AIPPI,
3. an analysis of the collective benefits of the AIPPI for the main parties and the corresponding existence of a zone of possible agreement (ZOPA) for a grand bargain that includes a version of the AIPPI,
4. a discussion of the main barriers to negotiating the AIPPI,
5. a suggested negotiating path toward overcoming these barriers and realizing the benefits of the AIPPI,
6. advice for dealing with blockers and spoilers, and
7. suggested next steps.

Costs of the Current Path Absent a Grand Bargain

The pre-Gaza war Israeli strategic concept might cynically be described as “regional integration with a Palestinian footnote.” This meant the progressive regional integration of Israel into a de facto block of Sunni Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan, the UAE, other Gulf states, and Saudi Arabia (KSA)) that collectively oppose direct and indirect Iranian influence. This approach would have largely bypassed the Palestinians, episodically “mowing the grass” (in 2012, 2014, and 2021) as Hamas mounted attacks on Israel from Gaza, while seeking to advance normalization with the KSA and others that would have complemented the current Abraham Accords (that has largely normalized relations between Israel and the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco). Indeed, as this article will later detail, Israeli policy tacitly boosted Hamas, hoping that it would moderate, while consistently undermining the Palestinian Authority (PA). Significant elements of the current Israeli government would concurrently proceed with de facto or de jure annexation of the West Bank (as well as post-conflict Gaza).

Then came the most recent Hamas attack on October 7, which vividly demonstrated the bankruptcy of this prewar strategic concept; at a

minimum, these events showed that Israel can't ignore the Palestinians and "manage" Gaza—and likely the West Bank—without dire consequences.

While Israel's prior strategy has been discredited, no new longer-term vision has taken root in that country, despite the urging of the United States and key regional players. Rather, wartime imperatives now dominate Israeli actions and discourse: respond to Hamas terrorism by "destroying Hamas" or at least dramatically degrading its military and governance capabilities in Gaza, freeing the hostages, preventing regional escalation, and searching for some kind of "least bad" post-major conflict management option.

This article takes as a political and military "given" that Israel will continue to act forcefully to achieve these purposes—unless or until the costs of this course of action appear to exceed the benefits. While understandable, this primarily military approach might be characterized as a kind of "strategic myopia" in which Hamas has seized the strategic initiative and Israel has mainly been reacting to it. Given the barbarity of October 7, it is easy to forget the meticulous planning by Hamas that went into its attack and easy to underestimate the group's longer-term strategy, which anticipates, and arguably welcomes, a brutal Israeli reaction.

One [observer](#), in a fairly typical and prescient analysis from November 2023, sees Hamas's strategy as rallying "a besieged population in Gaza around it in anger" . . . and helping to "collapse the Palestinian Authority government by ensuring Palestinians see it even more as a feckless adjunct to Israeli military authority." Meanwhile, "Arab states move strongly away from normalization, the Global South aligns strongly with the Palestinian cause, Europe recoils at the Israeli army's excesses, and an American debate erupts over Israel, destroying the bipartisan support Israel has enjoyed [there] since the early 1970s. Rumbblings of a regional war suit Hamas well, prompting global debates about the cost of an alliance with Israel . . . its goal is to estrange Israel from its international partners and turn it into the pariah that Hamas believes it to be" ([Alterman 2023](#)). More than six months after this analysis was published, its general direction and many of its specific predictions have proved accurate. Moreover, without a broader counter to Hamas's strategy, there could easily be much more serious outbreaks of conflict on multiple fronts (from Hezbollah, the Houthis in Yemen, as well as uprisings on the West Bank and in "mixed" Jewish and Arab Israeli cities).

These dire consequences are by no means inevitable as a result of Israel's primarily military strategy, but the odds of their intensifying are much higher than under the kind of "military plus broader political/diplomatic" strategy proposed in this article.

Without a more effective counterstrategy by Israel, its backers, and regional powers, Hamas's preferred scenario could continue to play

out—especially if Israel has few post-conflict Gaza plans for dealing with Palestinians beyond periodically suppressing violent actions while expanding settlements. With respect to some of the more extreme members of the current Israeli government, Ambassador Dennis Ross [underscored](#) the unreality of their implicit approach: “They are basically saying, ‘We will control Palestinians forever, and they will simply accept it’” ([Ross 2024](#)).

If that is the extent of Israel’s post-war plans, the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank will feel increasingly hopeless, without the prospect of a “political horizon” for their national statehood aspirations. And the stage for a resurgence of Hamas or its equivalent will be set. After all, beyond its military manifestation, Hamas represents an idea as well as a regional political force that will continue to attract adherents, especially if no credible political horizon exists for Palestinians. Barely two months into the war, [polls](#) indicated that the popularity of Hamas both on the West Bank and in Gaza spiked ([Agencies and TOI staff 2023](#)). Five months in, [polls](#) indicated a drop in support for Hamas in the West Bank, but an increase in Gaza. (Much of this support for Hamas derives from its boost to the Palestinian agenda regionally and globally after years of relative neglect ([Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research 2024](#)). In particular, Hamas may well be able to recruit from the many Palestinians who will have lost relatives and friends from the current round of fighting as well as from others who feel embittered and hopeless.

Increasingly serious eruptions of unrest and worse would seem inevitable, met by Israeli countermeasures. Yet as General David Petraeus wryly [concluded](#), with respect to the U.S. experience dealing with insurgents in Iraq, “We cannot kill our way out of this endeavor”—certainly not in the longer term ([Petraeus 2008](#)).

In short, for a secure Israel and an integrated region over time, the Palestinians cannot remain a “footnote.” Israeli warfighting should be part of a broader plan that addresses the Palestinian issue in a longer-term context—and promises collective benefits to Israel, the Palestinians, the region, and beyond. This approach should seek to split most Palestinians off from the militant path of Hamas by credibly offering a positive alternative. It should help Israel regain some of the moral high ground that it has lost and is increasingly losing as the Gaza war grinds on and civilian suffering and deaths mount. Israel’s ultimate commitment to this broader approach is essential but unlikely at present given its political configuration. That is why the advocacy and participation of a larger group of interested countries on behalf of the AIPPI is integral both to gaining Israel’s support and the initiative’s successful implementation.

The Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace Initiative (“AIPPI”)

Such a longer-term vision might be called the **Arab-Israeli-Palestinian Peace Initiative (“AIPPI”)**, to be implemented on a phased basis. Before sketching the familiar elements of how this grand bargain would ultimately look—the easy part—note that the real contribution of this article lies in analyzing the formidable barriers to realizing the AIPPI’s vision and how they might be overcome. But for now, we consider the elements of the AIPPI as a *vision* for the future:

- The first element is a strengthened, potentially reconstituted, and more credible Palestinian Authority contributing to the post-conflict governance of Gaza, likely in combination with various regional Arab states. Over time and as conditions permit, Gaza and the West Bank would unify under the PA, with elections to follow.
- The second element is a longer-term commitment by Israel, regional powers, the US, and others for two states or a confederal arrangement (see [Scheidlin and Waxman 2016](#) or [Husseini and Beilin 2022](#)) to be primarily negotiated between Israelis and a united but demilitarized Palestinian entity that offers it a credible path to secure self-determination while ensuring Israeli security via a performance-based set of milestones.
- The third element is normalized relations—diplomatic, political, commercial, and security—between Israel and the Sunni regional powers, in part to form a strengthened block to counter an aggressive Iran and its proxies. Such normalization could well extend to other parts of the Muslim world.

This vision for an AIPPI is hardly an original concept; significant variations have been advanced by figures such as President [Joe Biden](#), American Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](#), former Israeli Prime (and Defense) Minister [Ehud Barak](#), and World Jewish Congress President [Ronald Lauder](#), as well as journalists such as [Thomas Friedman](#) ([Biden 2023](#); [Cortelessa 2023](#); [Lauder 2023](#); [Magid 2023](#); [Friedman 2024](#)). Along with other calls for an updated version of the Arab Peace Initiative first proposed in 2002, the vision of the AIPPI builds on the original Arab Peace Initiative, the Abraham Accords, and significant geopolitical changes in the region ([Hamzawy and Brown 2023](#); various other versions have been proposed, see, e.g., [Alghasian 2024](#)).

Yet the above vision for an AIPPI, along with variations that have been proposed, does not specify the form it might take, what entities might sponsor and propose it, its more detailed provisions, and the steps necessary to realize it. To foreshadow the concept, an initial version of the

AIPPI should be proposed by a combination of the KSA and/or the UAE—depending on the state of their sometimes strained relationship—with an invitation to wider adherence. (Until the Palestinians and Israelis sign on, the name of this initiative would likely list only its Arab sponsors, but would become known by its full name as these other parties signed on.)

Its development should be closely coordinated with the United States, which would almost certainly need to affirm a stronger security relationship with Saudi Arabia as well as a civilian nuclear program accompanied by tight safeguards (Spetalnik and Shalal 2024). As more Arab states, a Palestinian entity, and, ultimately, Israel, come to endorse successive iterations of the concept, it would become the basis for negotiation in a broader international conference likely organized by the United States. At all stages, it would include increasingly granular descriptions of the obligations of Arab, Palestinian, and Israeli parties necessary to realize the broader vision outlined above.

When put forward by the KSA and/or the UAE, the AIPPI in essence would call upon the major parties—Israeli, Palestinian, and Arab—to commit to more detailed versions of the following interlocking obligations:

1. Israel would make a strategic decision to negotiate into existence a demilitarized, sovereign Palestinian state or confederal arrangement in the West Bank and Gaza Strip based on 1967 borders with appropriate land swaps to compensate for major existing Israeli settlements, with East Jerusalem as its capital, firmly designed to meet its security concerns. Palestinian refugees would be permitted to return to the new state of Palestine, with a symbolic number of refugees permitted to settle in Israel proper. No further settlements or outposts would be built in Palestinian territories and settler attacks on Palestinians and their property would be strongly discouraged and punished if and when they occurred. Such a permanent Palestinian state would be the irrevocable outcome of a performance-based set of negotiated milestones—largely to be met by Palestinian and Arab countries—that would ensure Israeli security leading to the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
2. Arab adherents would consider the Arab-Israeli conflict legally and politically resolved, and commit to the following: recognize the state of Israel; normalize diplomatic, political, economic, and security relations with Israel as part of this overall peace agreement; and undertake regional initiatives on key subjects of keen mutual interest such as water, food, climate, academic exchanges, tourism, economic development, and technology. In particular, moderate Sunni Arab adherents would work with Israel to form a coordinated and strengthened block to counter an aggressive Iran and its proxies.

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- In addition, Arab adherents would jointly work, in cooperation with Israel, toward the revitalization and reform of the Palestinian Authority to enhance its legitimacy, effectiveness, transparency, and governance. An early focus of this work with the PA would be the creation and progressive deployment of an Arab-Palestinian civilian and military force to govern Gaza as the threat of Hamas is removed.
3. With the active support of the Arab parties to this agreement, the Palestinian Authority would negotiate with Israel to become the initial governing entity of a demilitarized, sovereign state, including the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while retaining the authority and capability to enforce its laws and ensure order in its territory. It would reaffirm its a) recognition of the State of Israel, b) renunciation of violence, and c) commitment to abide by all past agreements with Israel and the end of claims on Israel. It would vigorously oppose all acts of terror, would not provide financial support to terrorist organizations or individual terrorists, and would act to eliminate all acts of incitement within its jurisdiction. It would agree to negotiate a performance-based set of milestones to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—largely to be met by Israel—irrevocably leading to the Palestinian state described above with elections to be held as soon as feasible. As soon as practicable, the PA would closely work with Arab states, international organizations, and others to ensure transparency, efficiency, and good governance on the road to economic development.

IF—and this is a big if—such a vision could be negotiated into existence, it would serve the core interests of most stakeholders except Hamas, Iran and its regional proxies (Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Shiite groups in Iraq and Syria), and some far-right elements of the Israeli government. The advantages would include a militarily weakened Hamas, the majority of Palestinians both in Gaza and the West Bank on a realistic path toward realizing their national aspirations, and a secure Israel integrated into the region, with mutual political, commercial, and security benefits. Moreover, the regional Sunni powers plus Israel would serve as a formidable block against Iran and its proxies. In short, realization of the AIPPI would offer large joint gains relative to the fragmented, conflictual outcome sought by Hamas. (Aspirationally, as a longer-term goal, but not as part of the AIPPI, better relations should be pursued between the semi-adversarial blocks now led by Iran and by Saudi Arabia.)

These gains will be spelled out more fully in the next section followed by a discussion of the main barriers to the AIPPI's adoption and how these barriers could be overcome.

Building Support for the AIPPI: Its Potential Appeal to Key Parties and the Existence of a ZOPA

In the course of its more precise formulation as well as after its announcement, the sponsors of the AIPPI should actively seek regional and global supporters. Given its potential for regional peace and development—especially between the Israelis and Palestinians—much of the world, including many countries in Europe, Africa, North and South America, as well as Asia could be expected to welcome and support the AIPPI. More specifically, here are some ways that the AIPPI would serve the interests of many of the core regional parties *if* the three core elements of the AIPPI could be made credible:

Why would the US say yes to a version of the AIPPI?

- It would align with long-term US national security and other interests in the Middle East that include Israel, the Palestinians, as well as moderate Sunni powers (forming a more united alliance against Iran's regional military activities).
- It would mitigate virulent domestic and global criticism for its seemingly unconditional military support of a “brutal” Israeli approach to Gaza.
- It would position Biden as a regional statesman, offering a political “win” for an idea that would strongly align with his administration's proposal.

Why would Sunni regional powers say yes to a version of the AIPPI?

- In accord with their advocacy for Palestinian rights and statehood, embracing, publicizing, and following through on the AIPPI would tangibly demonstrate—especially to their skeptical domestic populations that are increasingly inflamed against Israel given the war in Gaza—a genuinely meaningful commitment to the Palestinian cause.
- It would meet their interests in the security, technological, and commercial benefits of regional integration with Israel.
- It would help cement a stronger regional alliance to counter aggressive actions of Iran and its proxies.
- At an elite and governmental level, many of these countries, with the exception of Qatar, are united by dislike—and often suppression—of the militant elements of the Muslim Brotherhood and radical Islamists (see [Freer 2023](#)); there are increasing fears of regime instability if and as popular regional sympathy for Hamas and its ideological kin, already high since October 7, continues to grow. Broader acceptance of the AIPPI would blunt or reverse these concerns.

Why would Palestinians say yes to a version of the AIPPI?

- The PA would welcome actions and resources to strengthen its legitimacy and effectiveness.
- The prospect of unifying the West Bank with Gaza would be powerfully appealing.
- The prospect of two states or a confederal outcome negotiated with Israel would fulfill a long-term vision for Palestinian national aspirations.

Why would Israel say yes to a version of the AIPPI?

- The current government (in mid-2024), along with much of the Israeli electorate, absent the approach detailed below, would most certainly **not** now say yes.
- Nevertheless, a majority of the Israeli population deeply dislikes the current government. Sizeable fractions desire a two-state solution but only if Israeli security concerns are credibly assured.
- Enough Israelis might be induced to see three major potential advantages of a properly implemented AIPPI: 1) a longer-term solution to the Palestinian issue with appropriate security safeguards for Israel, 2) stronger prospects of regional normalization, and 3) a stronger regional alliance against Iran and its proxies. These factors, elaborated at some length below, might lead to a change in Israeli policy and/or in the government itself.

The Value of “Yes” to the AIPPI versus the Costs of “No”

IF an AIPPI were successfully negotiated and implemented—again, a big IF—the potential gains to key parties in the region and beyond, as detailed immediately above, could be vast. In contrast, as detailed above, failure would virtually imply the opposite of such collective benefits: an increasingly isolated Israel even less integrated into the region, most Palestinians much further from their national aspirations, a more fragmented regional group to counter Iranian influence, and Israel’s main backers bearing substantial diplomatic costs. Palestinian radicalization would increase as would regional and global sympathy for their plight. Simmering violence in the West Bank and Gaza with episodic outbursts would continue indefinitely. And Israel would indefinitely act to suppress them. The risk of active conflict intensifying and spreading through the region would increase.

In short, the huge discrepancy between the value of an AIPPI agreement and the cost of failure suggests that there does exist a zone

of possible agreement, a “ZOPA,” among key supporting parties. The trick, of course, is how to bring such a deal into existence . . . against the range of barriers arrayed against it.

Blockers and Spoilers

This section would not be complete without highlighting groups that would almost certainly oppose the AIPPI unconditionally and could be expected to act as blockers or spoilers. These include 1) many on the Israeli far right and messianic groups committed to “Greater Israel” regardless of whether Israeli security would be assured in a two-state or confederal context, 2) those entities that deny the legitimacy and oppose the existence of the state of Israel including Hamas and other Arab rejectionists, and 3) the current Iranian regime and its proxies. A later section will suggest measures that could stymie the effects of these opponents to act as spoilers.

Daunting Barriers to Realizing the AIPPI

For such a wartime peace initiative to become a reality, it must overcome the major barriers to its realization, hinted at above, but deserving a fuller analysis. It is depressingly simple to enumerate the many such barriers that stand between the current situation and the promise of an AIPPI (see, e.g., [Kurtzer and Miller 2023](#)). Grouping these barriers into three inter-related categories, they include:

Barriers Directly Related to the Gaza War

- A militarily capable Hamas embedded in Gaza, currently holding a substantial number of Israeli hostages.
- An extended Israeli campaign against Hamas with ever-increasing civilian suffering and death that, despite Israeli efforts to avoid such casualties, is profoundly alienating regional powers and other countries as well as imposing increasing diplomatic costs on Israel and its backers (especially the United States and Europeans).
- Widespread public opinion in many regional Sunni Arab states that is incensed against Israel, given its massive military action in Gaza, and that is increasingly unwilling to support any further moves toward regional normalization with Israel.
- A potentially ungovernable, post-conflict Gaza.
- An almost singular focus among Israeli Jews on the military action in Gaza with a generalized suspicion that many if not most Palestinians are aligned with or at least sympathetic to Hamas, underscored by the fact that Mahmoud Abbas has not unequivocally condemned Hamas’s actions on October 7.

Barriers Related to the Feasibility and/or Negotiation of a Two-State or Confederal Solution

- Absence of credible Israeli and Palestinian leadership motivated and able to pursue a longer-term agreement between their peoples and in the region.
- A weak, unpopular, and illegitimate Palestinian Authority in the eyes of many inhabitants of the West Bank that is unable or unwilling to make the hard decisions necessary for a more permanent solution.
- An Israeli government led by a prime minister who appears guided by self-interest and is in thrall to an extreme right-wing coalition that appears fundamentally opposed to any AIPPI-like proposal, many members of which seek expansion of Israel proper to encompass the West Bank and even Gaza.
- Widespread skepticism among Israeli Jews even to the concept of two states or a confederal solution (“no partner for peace” and fear of a militarized West Bank “taken over” or at least controlled by Hamas or its successor entities); outright opposition in right-wing quarters of the population to moves of this kind that would preclude broader territorial annexation.
- Deep lack of confidence among Israeli Jews about whether their security would be assured if there was a Palestinian state.
- Palestinians fundamentally skeptical of whether Israel would genuinely commit to a realistic “political horizon” for statehood or similar arrangements, cease settlement expansion, and stop settler violence.
- Prior negotiations over “core issues” between Israelis and Palestinians—borders, settlements, security, refugees, Jerusalem—that have repeatedly failed in past attempts and have sometimes been followed by violence, breeding deep cynicism about peace processes.

Barriers Related to Potential Actions of Outside Players

- US domestic skepticism/opposition (conservative Jews/AIPAC/Evangelicals); aside from more sober [assessments](#) of the challenges of two states, prominent evangelical pastor John Hagee even [claims](#) that an “Israeli-Palestinian peace deal will be the work of the anti-Christ” ([Reider 2021](#); [Corn 2023](#)). (And white evangelical voters made up more than a third of the Republican electorate ([Igielnik, Keeter, and Hartig 2021](#))).
- Spoiler efforts of Iran and its regional proxies; after all, many analysts suggest that a major factor in the timing of the Hamas attack was the heightened prospect of an Israeli-Saudi normalization (combined

with deep political polarization of Israel deriving from attempts by the right-wing government on “judicial reform”).

IF—again, a big if—reasonable prospects for overcoming these barriers could be produced, the value of adopting the AIPPI as a peace initiative could become compelling. If adopted, the nature of the war effort may well shift to support it as well as to militarily erode Hamas.

A Six-Part Sketch of How Key Barriers to Realizing the AIPPI Might be Surmounted

At present the necessary Israeli and Palestinian leadership who could and would commit their publics to the core ideas of the AIPPI is simply not present. Rather than wait for it to emerge through new elections or other means, actions by “outside” parties should partially substitute for this absent leadership by taking actions that could advance the process and might help induce change in both Israel and Palestine. **Step one** would be the announcement by the KSA and/or UAE of the AIPPI along with actions to build wider support for this initiative. **Step two** would ensure that as Israel increasingly achieves its objectives of substantially degrading Hamas as a military and governing force in Gaza, it places much greater overt emphasis on avoiding and ameliorating civilian suffering in Gaza in collaboration with the international community, provides security and basic services to Gazans, and paves the way for progressively greater Palestinian and other Arab administration of this territory.

Step three would be actions and resources, especially from Arab states, to strengthen the Palestinian Authority. **Step four** would be to induce PA/PLO support for the AIPPI via a set of performance-based milestones—many of which would have to be met by Israel—that would ensure Palestinian confidence in the reality of a meaningful political horizon for two states or comparable political arrangements. **Step five** would build on the previous steps to grow support for the AIPPI concept among Israeli politicians most likely to succeed the current Israeli government, who in turn could build support among a wider set of their constituents, all by way of a set of performance-based milestones—many of which would have to be met by the Palestinians and moderate Sunni Arab states—to ensure Israeli security under the AIPPI. **Step six** would entail holding an international conference hosted by the United States to formalize commitments to the vision of the AIPPI and the milestones necessary to realize its potential. Ideally, a number of the milestones would have already been met by Israelis and Palestinians. Negotiations within the framework of the AIPPI would be launched on two tracks: toward resolving the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict and toward normalization of relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia (plus other supportive Sunni Arab states) and progress on diplomatic, economic, political, and security-intelligence cooperation. If possible, the core of the AIPPI would be embodied in a revision of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242.

Step One: Announce the AIPPI and build support for this initiative. As a partial, interim substitute for the necessary but currently absent Israeli and Palestinian leadership, the US and key regional players—especially Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt—should quietly align on the concept of the AIPPI. Both before and after its public announcement by the KSA and/or the UAE, its sponsors should begin to sell it through coordinated diplomatic initiatives in the region, to Israel, to Palestinians, and to a wider set of states globally. Under President Biden, the US has already urged adoption of key elements of the AIPPI; in a coordinated fashion with other AIPPI supporters it should undertake the sophisticated sequential diplomacy required to forge a broader supportive coalition since each of the relevant Arab states has [distinct interests](#), including its relationship with Israel and views toward Hamas ([Khatib 2023](#)). With a solid core of Arab (and, ideally, Palestinian) support, the United States should publicly announce its support for the AIPPI as a framework and point of departure for negotiation rather than as a *diktat* (or take-it-or-leave-it offer as the initial Arab Peace Initiative was widely perceived in Israel²). Individually and collectively the supporting states should urge Israelis to commit to a more sustainable relationship with the Palestinians with the prospect of regional normalization as a lure. And more privately, key members of this de facto coalition should quietly emphasize their willingness to consistently pressure militant elements of Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and other jihadis (as explained later). If and as Israel starts to make commitments in line with the AIPPI, the Saudis may be among the first states in the region willing to overtly resume negotiations toward normalization, provided that the US has taken the lead and offers some of the security guarantees and nuclear programs sought by the KSA. Others can be expected to follow depending on the pace and perceived sincerity of Israeli actions.

At present, however, with Israelis preoccupied with the fighting and emotions running high against “Palestinians” in general, outsiders including the US and regional players will need to take the initiative to quietly build support for the AIPPI concept in key quarters of Israel (as detailed below). Over time, if/as the current or next Israeli government begins to get behind it, Israel will and should be seen to be playing a pivotal role. As detailed below, work on strengthening and enhancing the legitimacy of the Palestinian Authority is vital in order for it to play its essential role in the AIPPI process.

Step Two: As Israel increasingly achieves its objectives of substantially degrading Hamas as a military and governing force in Gaza, it should place much greater overt emphasis on avoiding and ameliorating civilian suffering in Gaza in collaboration with the international community, provide security and basic services to Gazans, and pave the way for progressively greater Palestinian and other Arab administration of this territory. Israel should take these steps visibly and publicly, prompted by its own concerns as well as by intensified pressure from the United States and the international community. This approach should permit sharply delimited humanitarian pauses (as have been announced and contemplated), ceasefires for hostage release or other purposes, the establishment of aid corridors, the provision of massive amounts of necessary aid, the restoration of vital civilian services, and other actions to make it clearer to Gazans as well as to broader regional and global audiences that Israel's battle is with the militant wing of Hamas, not the civilians of Gaza or Palestinians in general. Israel should welcome and facilitate the broadest possible international support of these humanitarian actions. The prosecution of the war must seek as much as possible to comply with international law and respect human rights. It should become more specifically targeted toward Hamas in a counterinsurgency mode and far less "heavy" in its actions than was the case, especially in the early months of the war.

Prior to a permanent ceasefire, Israeli actions in Gaza should be redesigned to help show its residents that life will be better post-Hamas—a very difficult but important goal. As but one example, when Israeli troops initially "cleared" Hamas fighters from the Al Shifa hospital, these troops should have very visibly followed that initial action by opening up a safe corridor to the hospital for the wounded and sick to use, repaired the key parts of the facility to make it operational, and immediately ensured that it had adequate medicines and health professionals available to resume their urgent work. Important lessons from US failures and successes in "nation-building" should inform Israeli actions going forward. "Clearing" an area of Hamas militants with troops then mainly moving on to other battles opens the door to criminals, insurgents, and reconstituted Hamas fighters—as has already happened in areas of Gaza. Instead, to generate security and the conditions for recovery and economic development, the twin mantras of "clear and hold" as well as "clear and revive" can set the basis for gradual Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and replacement by Palestinian and Arab civil administration.³

This is a delicate balancing act: from an Israeli perspective, its actions in Gaza must be militarily strong enough to substantially degrade the military and governance abilities of Hamas and to enhance deterrence, especially of Hezbollah in the north of the country. Such actions

must be significant and visible enough to respond to the absolute Israeli domestic imperative of powerful retaliation in the face of the horror of October 7. It cannot ignore the hostages. Yet it cannot be so apparently ruthless and seemingly unmindful of civilian suffering and casualties as to completely alienate global players and, in particular, regional parties that could play key roles in eroding the power of Hamas (see Step Five below) and fostering regional integration.

A much stronger and more visible Israeli commitment to civilian well-being in Gaza will enhance the likelihood and effectiveness of the other steps in the AIPPI project.

Step Three: Strengthen and revitalize the Palestinian Authority. While unlikely under the current Israeli government, a combination of the Arab League, the EU, the US, and, eventually, Israel, should rapidly begin to work with Palestinians toward strengthening and potentially restructuring the PA for greater legitimacy, transparency, and effectiveness. Initially, until elections are feasible, this entity should be understood as a heavily technocratic Transitional Palestinian Authority (TPA). If/as the current Israeli government changes policy, it could greatly enhance such efforts (as detailed below). This would enable the TPA, over time, to play important roles in the eventual integration of Gaza and the West Bank, in major developmental investment in the West Bank and Gaza, in the acceleration of the US efforts to develop TPA security forces, and in effectively engaging with Israelis and regional parties in negotiating longer-term arrangements that are at the heart of the AIPPI.

These roles would require enhanced TPA legitimacy and capabilities, in part via new elections when appropriate, at which point the entity would lose its “transitional” name. Such a “new PA” need not require a wholesale dismantling of the current PA; older figures such as Mahmoud Abbas could be “elevated” to more symbolic, honorific roles. Issues such as corruption, poor administration, and authoritarian tendencies will require Palestinian actions, firmly urged and enabled by supportive regional powers. Thoughtful Palestinian perspectives on the requirements for a strengthened and revitalized PA have been laid out by Khalil Shikaki (Shikaki 2023).⁴ Many other such proposals have been put forth by informed observers and directly involved parties (see, e.g., among many other analyses and proposals, Fayyad 2023; Ezra Klein Show 2024; Tzoreff 2024).

Yet Israel, at least in a successor government to its current (mid-2024) one, has a crucial role in this task, especially given its history of implicitly boosting Hamas while undermining the PA—as explained below—via withholding tax revenues and imposing onerous administrative burdens and lengthy delays for simple actions such as granting

building permits, installing solar panels, and so on. In tandem with Palestinian actions, reversing these tacit and explicit Israeli policies would considerably enhance the PA.

Of course, this latter set of steps implies at least some level of collective acceptance of the AIPPI's commitment to revive multilateral and bilateral diplomatic efforts toward resolving core Israeli-Palestinian issues with a "political horizon" for Palestinian statehood, a tough sell in Israel after October 7, and one that would likely require new elections in Israel or at least a major shift in policy as discussed below.

As detailed below, Steps Four and Five require the articulation of performance-based measures to induce Palestinian and Israeli support for the AIPPI; these steps would be closely linked and should be pursued largely in parallel rather than sequentially. Positive actions on each side should progressively enable corresponding actions on the other side. Ideally, each side will independently undertake to meet at least some of these milestones, yet many of them will form the basis for the negotiations envisioned in the international conference as part of Step Six.

Step Four: Induce Palestinian support of the AIPPI by articulating a series of performance-based milestones, largely to be negotiated with and met by Israel. A revitalized Palestinian Authority able to meet its obligations under the AIPPI—largely the recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence and support of terror, elimination of incitement, embrace of security cooperation with Israel, and acceptance of a non-militarized status—would require the fulfilment of a series of performance-based milestones by Israel, likely requiring a change of government in that country. The fundamental milestone would entail a strategic decision by Israel to make an irrevocable and binding commitment to support a negotiated non-militarized sovereign Palestinian state or confederal entity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This arrangement should be based on 1967 borders with appropriate land swaps to compensate for major existing Israeli settlements, and with East Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital. Some of these milestones might be met independently and others would be negotiated. In no particular order, these milestones could include actions such as the following:

- full and prompt receipt by the PA of its tax revenues, now collected by Israel, eventually leading to collection of such revenues itself;
- reactivating permits for Palestinian workers to work in Israel;
- strengthening of security cooperation and expanding PA powers in Area B of the West Bank (currently under joint Israeli-Palestinian control);

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- curtailment of Israeli military operations in Area A (currently under exclusive Palestinian control);
 - rapid approval of Palestinian strategic projects in Area C (currently under Israeli control), as well as granting other Palestinian building permits;
 - ending home demolitions, stopping settlement expansion, and evacuating illegal settlement outposts;
 - crackdown on settler violence; and
 - gradually changing the status of parts of Area C to B, and of Area B to A.

As these milestones are accepted and met, the PA would be strengthened and given added legitimacy—including to meet its obligations under the AIPPI. Numerous Palestinians have attested to the immediate boost in the PA's status that would result from its ability to secure “visible results on the ground”—in contrast to widespread views that it has been worse than ineffective. Over time, a rehabilitated PA could become the basis for building the institutions of interim governance and ultimate statehood for Palestinians.

Step Five: Build support for the AIPPI among Israeli politicians likely to succeed the current government, who in turn could build support among a wider set of their constituents, by articulating a set of performance-based milestones—largely to be negotiated with and met by the Palestinians and moderate Sunni Arab states—to ensure Israeli security under the AIPPI. This is a quite lengthy section for the simple reason that, without a sufficient number of Israelis confident that the AIPPI will ensure their security, Israel will simply not agree to accept a sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. And without a credible commitment to a Palestinian state, it is most unlikely that full regional normalization will take place, especially in a post-Gaza war context. Prior to the most recent war in Gaza, both the Abraham Accords and increased moves by Saudi Arabia toward normalization with Israel took place with apparently less concern for the Palestinian situation, especially among Arab elites, than had traditionally been the case. (Indeed the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, endorsed by the Arab League in 2007 and again in 2017 made Israeli recognition of a Palestinian state the absolute requirement for normalization.) As will be elaborated below, however, popular sympathy in the Arab world for the Palestinian cause has dramatically escalated during the Gaza war. As such, the necessary condition and realistic political “price” for a resumption of normalization with Israel by various Sunni governments is real progress on longer-term Palestinian issues by Israel with a commitment to Palestinian statehood. This outcome, linked to normalization of relations between Israel and Arab states in the region, hinges on Israeli confidence

in its security when existing side-by-side with a Palestinian state. Hence the lengthy consideration of this issue that follows.

Much as the PA needs to be revitalized in order to be a credible partner within the AIPPI framework, the current (mid-2024) Israeli government will almost certainly have to be replaced to have any chance at Israeli acceptance of the AIPPI. Even with new leadership, such acceptance will be a very tough nut to crack given the recency of the Gaza terror attacks, the widespread Israeli determination to defeat Hamas militarily, the generalized suspicion of Palestinians (not only of Hamas), the failed history of Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking attempts, and fear of control of the West Bank by Hamas or its successor entities. Persuading a skeptical Israeli public that a phased version of the AIPPI is both feasible and desirable will take great political skill if and when important Israeli players become convinced of its value—in part by the focused efforts of the US and regional players as described above. And here is where articulating a performance-based set of security-enhancing milestones that must be met by the Palestinians and regional Arab states is essential in order for enough Israelis to embrace the AIPPI.

To set the stage for articulating such milestones, political change in Israel is vital and can be influenced by several factors:

- The current Israeli government is deeply unpopular; public pressure to change its approach could be productively directed toward an AIPPI in parallel with the Gaza war effort.
- AIPPI advocates, especially the United States, should focus persuasive efforts on senior political figures, seen as most likely to replace (or powerfully influence) the current government, who may realize the value of complementing the war effort with a peace initiative like the AIPPI. These politicians will have keen domestic insight into when and how best to publicly advocate for this concept and build support for it, in part drawing on the deep dissatisfaction with the current government's policies.
- These efforts could lead to new elections if enough members of the Knesset defect (at least five as of mid-2024), or if there is a “constructive no-confidence vote” (a [longshot possibility](#)) in which Prime Minister Netanyahu, after losing sufficient support in the Knesset, turns the management of war over to a new prime minister (likely Benny Gantz) without new elections ([Green 2023](#)).
- There is significant diplomatic pressure on Israel, especially from the United States—which has shown itself as a steadfast backer of Israel in the current crisis and an essential weapons supplier—to see a strategic “way out,” pointing to a better future than periodic wars and attacks like that of October 7.

What factors and arguments might be utilized by skilled politicians that could lead enough Israelis to accept key elements of the AIPPI that it would have a good chance of acceptance? There are several overlapping possibilities:

- There is a deep realization among many Israelis that Israel's past strategy toward the Palestinians is in a shambles and that warfighting is not enough, along with a growing Israeli conviction that failure to meaningfully take Palestinians' interests into account or to credibly provide them with real hope of statehood will lead to more of the same. The AIPPI, implemented in stages, represents a positive vision for the future that could provide this hope. It offers the prospect of a more stable and positive relationship with Palestinians rather than a continuation of the past decades of periodic eruptions and Israeli military actions to repress them.
- A consistent reminder that any feasible two-state outcome (or options such as a confederal approach; see, e.g., [A Land for All](#), n.d.; [Scheidlin 2023](#)) could potentially include a number of important "hard" elements ensuring Israeli security that have apparently proved negotiable in the past (e.g., a long-horizon withdrawal of Israeli troops as conditions permitted; a nonmilitarized Palestine without heavy weapons or an air force; a long-term cooperative security program among the IDF and Israel's security services (e.g., the Shin Bet and the Mossad) and the Palestinian security services; massively enhanced Jordan Valley border protection with rapid deployment options and potentially even the staging of some US troops; for more details of various options from prior negotiations, see [Kerry 2018: 462–466](#). For details of a security-based, staged approach toward a two-state outcome carefully formulated by over three hundred former Israeli generals and their equivalents in Israel's security services, see their "Initiative 2025" ([Commanders for Israel's Security 2021](#)).
- Highlight the security, diplomatic, commercial, and political benefits of regional integration that could come about by an Israel that credibly commits to improving its relations with most Palestinians on a long-term basis, ultimately accepting a demilitarized Palestine. The value of a regional coalition, augmented by U.S. actions, to check Iran and its proxies greatly adds to overall Israeli security. For example, when Iran launched almost 300 ballistic missiles, drones, and cruise missiles at Israel on April 13, 2024, coalition actions in tandem with the Israeli response downed almost all of these attackers. While Israelis focus on security threats emanating from Gaza and the West Bank, their deeper and more existential concern is with Iran and its proxies, most immediately Hezbollah to the north. Beyond the

deterrence provided by Israel's individual intelligence and military capabilities and enhanced security cooperation with the Palestinians, a unified regional coalition arrayed against the activities of Iran and its proxies offers a quite significant enhancement of Israeli security.

- Israel's security will be a function of both "hard" and "soft" elements. Beyond the "hard" military dimensions detailed above with respect to a future Palestinian state as well as the value of a regional coalition, several "soft" factors could enhance Israeli security. Suppose that, in negotiations over statehood with Israel, a strengthened and more legitimate PA recommits to the recognition of Israel, renounces violence, commits to prevent terror, eliminates incitement, embraces security cooperation with Israel, and accepts a permanent non-militarized status. In tandem with hard factors, these softer ones should go some distance toward assuaging Israeli fears.
- In this connection, many Israelis see Hezbollah as the result of Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 and Hamas as the result of its withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. Hence the idea of a Palestinian state—potentially taken over by Hamas or its militant equivalent—appears to many Israelis to be a frightening continuation of that "trend" writ large, extending throughout the West Bank. Such fears are understandable, but there are at least four mitigating factors. First, much current anti-Israeli sentiment among Palestinians derives from over half a century of military occupation, sharply restricted rights, increased settlement expansion, settler violence, and the absence of any meaningful "political horizon," or prospects for their own state and self-governance. Under the AIPPI, these factors would no longer apply. Second, even with such discouraging political prospects, the pre-October 7 support for Hamas among Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza was less than one in five people, according to The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR). As noted above, while support for Hamas shot up during the war, this is likely to be temporary since, "as shown in all previous PSR polls [extending back many years], Hamas' increased popularity during wars begins to erode soon after the wars end, eventually returning to where it was before the war" ([Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research 2023: 1–2](#)). Third, if and when a credible nonviolent pathway toward a negotiated two-state solution or confederation opens up and genuine progress is being made, the lure of Hamas should decline. And fourth, the commitment of a strengthened PA to the conditions described above should help assuage these Israeli fears.
- There is the real promise of key Sunni governments intensifying their crackdown on militant factions of Hamas, elements of the Muslim Brotherhood, and radical Islamists in the region. To understand this

likelihood, it is important to realize that there exists an important divide between the relevant Sunni governments—especially, Egypt, Jordan, some Gulf states, the KSA, and others—and the views of much of the population in these countries. The stunning “success” of Hamas has re-energized much of the Arab world, the famous “street,” by striking a stunning blow to Israel that is seen to be on behalf of the Palestinians writ large. In this emotionally potent view, Hamas is a legitimate political actor and Israeli actions—whether vis-à-vis settlers in the West Bank or in its prosecution of the war—are comparable to Hamas’s actions on October 7. The resurgent popularity of Hamas’s “triumph” has terrified regional (Sunni) governments—and not only the Saudis, Egyptians, and Jordanians—about the implications of revived militant elements of the Muslim Brotherhood, jihadists, and radical Islamists, of which the militant wing of Hamas is an exemplar. Such a revival could very well threaten their stability. Courtney Freer has sketched their view toward these entities: “A powerful bloc of anti-Islamist Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, have labeled these movements as terrorist organizations and have repeatedly denigrated them: for example, the Emirati foreign minister famously [dubbed](#) the Muslim Brotherhood “the gateway drug” to jihadism. Such disparagement has severely diminished both the governance capacity and coherence of Islamists and their image among Arab publics” ([Freer 2020](#); see also [Kirkpatrick 2014](#); [Steinberg 2014](#); [Obaid 2020](#); [Solomon and Tausch 2020](#); [Başkan 2021](#); [Economist 2023](#); [Freer 2023](#); [Bianco and Lons 2024](#)). A number of Sunni Arab states have effectively banned the Muslim Brotherhood including Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE; others such as Tunisia have attempted to do so. Saudi, Israeli, and American diplomacy should build on and harness this deep and justified concern.

Putting these factors together essentially constitutes a list of many performance-based milestones, largely to be fulfilled by a strengthened PA and the relevant Arab states, that should enable Israel to accept and fulfil its commitments under the AIPPI. These include

- Palestinian recognition of Israel based on 1967 borders with appropriate land swaps to compensate for major existing Israeli settlements, with East Jerusalem as its capital,
- Palestinian acceptance of a right of return of refugees that is limited to the new state of Palestine with a symbolic number permitted, mainly for family reasons, to settle in Israel proper,
- Palestinian renunciation of violence and support of terror, along with a commitment to fight terror in partnership with Israeli forces,

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- Palestinian commitment to eliminate incitements to violence, including payments to Palestinians who kill Israelis and educational materials that promote attacks on Israelis,
 - Enhanced Palestinian security cooperation with Israel,
 - Palestinian acceptance of a permanent non-militarized status,
 - Normalization of Israel's diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia and other moderate Sunni Arab states with corresponding political, economic, and intelligence/military cooperation, especially vis a vis Iran and its proxies,
 - As elaborated below, the commitment of key Arab states to work with Palestinians to play an increasing role in the civil affairs and governance of Gaza along with a commitment to work with the international community to rebuild and develop Gaza, and
 - Recommitment by the United States to maintain Israel's qualitative military edge.

Even as the conflict in Gaza rages, a range of parties—including Israelis, Palestinians, the Arab League, the EU, and the US—should commit to developing a detailed administrative structure to govern Gaza to which Israel can safely hand control if/as it is successful in removing Hamas from operational control in that territory. While there is no politically or pragmatically realistic alternative to Israeli provision of security for a period of time after the hot conflict subsides, a number of other [options](#) should be considered and developed that could involve a range of local, regional, and/or global players ([Solomon 2023](#), or see [Harb and Grewal 2024](#)). In almost any case, a strengthened PA should play an increasing role in this task over time. Yet without Israeli acceptance of a longer-term, positive vision, most other candidate entities for a post-conflict Gaza role have stressed their extreme reluctance to meaningfully participate.

Along with developing such an administrative structure to supplant Israeli control, the parties should also envision a kind of Marshall Plan for Gaza, heavily supported by regional powers. As with options to provide post-conflict security and Gazan governance, Israeli acceptance of a longer-term, positive vision such as the AIPPI will greatly enhance the chances that massive reconstruction aid will be forthcoming.

Many if not most of these performance-based milestones, both for Israelis and Palestinians, will have to be negotiated. Yet especially in Israel, skepticism about the potential for negotiations runs deep. Skilled politicians will need to convince key constituencies that negotiating the AIPPI, especially the performance-based milestones, is well worth undertaking. To do so, they will face considerable skepticism based on a number of factors.

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- It is common to hear that “there is no partner for peace” among the Palestinians. In significant part, this has resulted from past Israeli policy, spearheaded by Prime Minister Netanyahu, that was consciously designed to prevent two states by boosting Hamas while delegitimizing and weakening the PA; see [Raz 2023](#); [Schneider 2023](#); and [Shumsky 2023](#) for elaborations of this point. Beyond routinely withholding tax revenues from the PA ([European Parliament 2020](#)) and expanding settlements, this policy goes back to the manner in which a single captured Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, was traded for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners, in a matter that allowed Hamas to take full credit for the exchange and left the PA appearing feckless and unable to effectuate the release of any prisoners ([Sherwood 2011](#)). This is not to exonerate the PA from its evident shortcomings (corruption, improper administration, etc.) ([al-Omari 2023](#)) but to underscore that the past “divide and conquer” strategy championed by Netanyahu offered Israelis a “peace” choice that represented no real choice at all: a deal with a militant Hamas (out of the question) or with an illegitimate and weak PA (pointless).
 - Adopted in stages, over time, the AIPPI gives hope for a credible partner in a strengthened PA minus Hamas. Israeli public opinion often forgets that, in stark contrast with Hamas, the PA has recognized Israel, has often renounced violence, and has continued (highly unpopular) security cooperation with the IDF in the West Bank—which would be far more popular if it was credibly in service of advancing a genuine “political horizon.” By shifting policy toward supporting and strengthening Palestinian moderates, the odds over time of a mutually successful negotiation with Israel increase substantially.
 - Along with the “no partner for peace” argument is a widespread sentiment among Israelis, sometimes called “negotiation fatigue,” that leads to the conviction that negotiations are pointless. In this view, relatively generous Palestinian statehood offers by Israeli Prime Ministers Ehud Barak in 2000 and Ehud Olmert in 2008 were not taken up. Why bother to negotiate again, the argument goes, if the Palestinians have already rejected such offers? Independent of the competing arguments that swirl around the reasons for failure of past such negotiations,⁵ past Palestinian refusals to accept an offer need not imply future refusals, especially under changed conditions. To illustrate this point in another context, consider one party’s offer to buy the business started by an entrepreneur. The purchase offer may be indignantly refused even if made a few years later: “my business is still not for sale!” Yet if the entrepreneur is nearing retirement or another intriguing business opportunity has presented itself, that identical offer to buy, if made a third time, may be accepted, even without improved terms (though better terms may

make the proposal even more attractive). In short, when circumstances change, new incarnations of formerly “unacceptable” proposals may become far more appealing and newly negotiable. And whether it is the Abraham Accords, October 7, new leadership, or many other recent changes in the region, reasoning from the past that negotiations would be pointless is mistaken as a practical matter and can lead to a self-fulfilling failure by not making the attempt. As a vivid example, looking back to 1967, the leaders of the Arab League unanimously endorsed the so-called “three nos” embodied in the Khartoum Resolution: “no peace with Israel, no negotiations with Israel, no recognition of Israel.” And yet, since that unequivocal hard-line statement, both Egypt and Jordan have established diplomatic relations with Israel; four other Arab states—the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco—have gone a long way toward full recognition; and Saudi Arabia has been pressing for normalization. Even though prior peace negotiations have failed, the world has changed fundamentally, making future negotiation prospects more hopeful.

Step Six: The United States, and perhaps other like-minded nations, should host an international conference designed to bring the AIPPI to fruition. With the announcement of the AIPPI, the benefits to and obligations of Israelis, Palestinians, and Arab states would have been laid out. Ideally, with a revitalized Palestinian Authority and a new Israeli government, the provisions of the AIPPI would be accepted as the basis for more detailed negotiation. With as much progress as possible toward the above milestones having been achieved through independent actions by Israelis, Palestinians, Arab states, and key members of the international community, this conference would be designed to formalize commitments to the vision of the AIPPI and negotiate the specific performance-based milestones necessary to realize its potential. Hosted by the United States and perhaps other like-minded countries, this conference would provide an overall framework for negotiating the AIPPI and would launch two parallel sets of negotiations: between Israelis and Palestinians, and between Israel and Saudi Arabia plus other moderate Sunni Arab states. If possible, the United States and like-minded nations would seek to embody the core elements of the AIPPI in a revision to U.N. Security Council Resolution 242.

The Promise and Peril of a Phased Approach to the AIPPI

While this article has offered the AIPPI as a longer-term strategy and vision—without detailed consideration of ongoing fighting and the

civilian catastrophe in Gaza, the hostages, a ceasefire, a “day after” blueprint and so on—many steps should be taken now to enhance the odds of the AIPPI becoming a reality; a number of analysts (e.g., [Kurtzer 2023](#)) have spelled out potential phases in an effort like this.

In any positive vision for the regional future such as the AIPPI, timing is essential. Quietly but urgently, AIPPI advocates must intensify the necessary diplomatic groundwork among the United States, regional parties, the EU, sympathetic Israelis, and others. They need to develop support for this concept in the region, in part by beginning to work discretely with key Israeli parties to persuade them of its value and necessity. If the Quartet (the US, the EU, Russia, and the UN), or a new version minus Russia but including the Arab League, can be productively revived on behalf of this initiative, involve it. Other activities, such as increasing humanitarian aid, a “lighter” Israeli military approach, plans for post-conflict governance in Gaza, and strengthening the PA, should be undertaken as soon as practicable.

As observed at the outset of this article, the AIPPI can only work if it is implemented in phases—or stages—over time, in line with the performance-based milestones laid out above: as Israelis, working with the United States and the Palestinians, become more confident that their security concerns on the West Bank can be met and that regional normalization is the credible “reward” for embrace of the AIPPI, as the Palestinians come to believe in a genuine Israeli acceptance of a political horizon for their aspirations and progress toward realizing them, and as regional powers see these Israeli and Palestinian convictions as real.

A Note on “Spoilers”

Past efforts at permanent solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have failed for one reason or another (many of these factors echoed in the lengthy section above on barriers to the AIPPI).⁶ Yet, apart from such factors as inadequate leadership, prominent political figures who sought to undermine potential agreements such as the Oslo Accords, fundamental disagreement on difficult issues such as refugees or Jerusalem, or outbreaks of violence such as the Second Intifada that pushed Israeli society sharply rightward, the AIPPI is vulnerable to would-be spoilers from many potential quarters. Such opponents can be counted on to try to prevent agreement at all as well as to undermine it if and as it is adopted and before it has taken deep root.

There are many groups who would view the AIPPI as inimical to their interests: Israeli far right-wingers, Israeli messianists who yearn for an Israeli state “from the (Jordan) river to the (Mediterranean) sea,” Palestinian and Sunni Arab rejectionists, especially Hamas remnants and recruits, as well as Iranian-influenced parties in the region who fear regional integration of Israel with Sunni states, and repudiate the very

existence of the State of Israel. The years before the promise of a vision like the AIPPI can be realized give plenty of time for internal and external opponents to coalesce, recruit other skeptics and naysayers, and undermine the process before it has sufficiently advanced.

Inevitably, major steps toward peace, such as the signing of the Oslo Accords (and, e.g., the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland) generate furious and violent actions by spoilers intent on preventing peace deals. This was the case with a series of Hamas terrorist attacks after the Oslo Accords, which generated an Israeli backlash and led to further escalation. As Wendy Kristiansen writes, “At the time of the signing of the Oslo accords, Hamas set itself up as the champion of resistance to Arafat’s ‘sell-out of Palestine’ through *jihad* . . .” (Kristiansen 1999: 22). Soon an Israeli settler, Baruch Goldstein, gunned down more than thirty-five Palestinian worshippers and wounded some 200 others in the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron. With ups and downs, including the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist, the progress promised by Oslo eventually collapsed with the major terrorist violence of the Second Intifada from 2000 through 2005 and the harsh Israeli response.

AIPPI supporters must, at a minimum, set public expectations in advance that real progress will inevitably be followed by terrorist actions seeking to prevent peace. Beyond inoculating public opinion, supporters need to align on a clear plan to counter such expected spoiler actions, call them out, and be prepared to take vigorous countermeasures that range from deterrence and military countermeasures, to making good arguments, to persuading those opponents open to reason, to dividing and conquering opposing groups, and so on.

Significant bulwarks against spoilers include institutional barriers against backsliding. For example, a revised U.N. resolution 242 that enshrines the essence of the AIPPI would be quite helpful as would solemn treaty commitments by the relevant states, especially Israel and Palestine. But most importantly, overcoming these potential spoilers requires the broadest and deepest possible acceptance of the end-state vision of the AIPPI and ongoing efforts to build and buttress a sustainable winning coalition to support it.

Conclusion

If the many difficult blanks in this rough outline of the AIPPI can be credibly filled in, the outcome of this tragic drama will be significant improvements for many regional parties, including Israelis, Palestinians, and moderate Sunni Arab states—as well as their global backers. This wide range of parties would enjoy substantial benefits. The main “losers” would be the militant wing of Hamas and its ideological cousins

and other Iranian proxies, as well as the extreme right and messianists in Israel. Realizing the AIPPI vision would mean the opposite of the enfeebled Israel envisioned by Iran and Hamas in a conflict-torn region with the Palestinians even further from realizing their national aspirations. Relative to a primarily military approach by Israel without a forward-looking political vision, embrace of the AIPPI could result over time in a stronger, more regionally integrated Israel via a normalization process, collective economic and military benefits, a defanged Hamas and its allies, and a much more sustainable relationship between Israel and its Palestinian neighbors—who will enjoy far more positive prospects. When the benefits of a deal are vast and the costs of failure are huge—as in this case—a zone of possible agreement exists. The challenge lies in overcoming the formidable barriers to the deal. The opportunity lies in forging a negotiating path that offers real promise of overcoming those barriers to realize the great positive potential of agreement.

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Notes

1. This article will use the term "West Bank" in an attempt to neutrally refer to the region variously called the Territories, the Palestinian Territories, the Occupied Territories, Palestine, Judea and Samaria, etc.
2. Consider this fairly typical Israeli expression of this view: "Israel should also reject the 'all or nothing' approach of the Saudis and the Arab League. Peacemaking is the process of negotiation, not *diktat*" (Teitelbaum 2009: 3).
3. For a much more extensive discussion of this approach, see Petraeus, O'Sullivan, and Fontaine 2024.

4. But note the cautions advanced by [al-Omari 2024](#).
5. For a recent panel discussion of such arguments, see [Bazon 2023](#).
6. For a summary of the virtually endless literature on the causes of failure of past efforts at Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, see [Bazon 2023](#).

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