

A Framework for Resolution

Towards a Just and Durable Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

A Vision Statement and Five Companion Papers

The Palestinians require dignity.

The Israelis require security.

Both are possible.

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A Note on the Creation of This Document

A Framework for Resolution: Towards a Just and Durable Settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict was developed over several working sessions in March 2026 using Claude, an AI assistant developed by Anthropic, as a research and drafting partner.

The intellectual architecture of the framework is mine. The proposals are mine. The central organising insight — that the Palestinians require dignity and the Israelis require security, and that every element of a just settlement must deliver both simultaneously — emerged from my own analysis of why previous frameworks have failed. All five papers come from priorities identified by me and given voice by Claude. The three doctrines developed in Paper One, including the concept of Temporal Connection, originated in our conversations as my ideas, subsequently developed and given legal context through the collaboration. The comparative refugee analysis in Paper Two, the need for regional normalisation, Jerusalem and finally the security compact argument in Paper Five, and the overall structure of the project reflect my direction throughout.

Claude's contribution was substantial and should be acknowledged honestly. It conducted the research, identified and verified the legal and historical sources cited in the endnotes, provided the legal framework and precedent analysis that grounds the more original arguments, and wrote the prose across all five papers and the Vision Statement. It also contributed structural suggestions and on occasion challenged analytical positions.

The result is a genuinely collaborative document in a sense that has no precise precedent. It is not a document I could have produced alone, nor is it one that Claude could have produced without my direction, ideas and intellectual investment. The appropriate description is human-directed AI collaboration: the vision, the concepts and the judgements are mine; the research, the legal scaffolding and the writing are shared.

Working with AI in this way is, at least for me, new territory. I am aware that this kind of collaboration has limitations, and I have overseen the work throughout, but I cannot guarantee it is error-free. Where errors exist, they will be corrected as they are identified. What I can guarantee is that the document is written in good faith.

Since its initial publication, the document has been shared with a number of readers whose responses have informed subsequent revisions.

I have chosen to be entirely transparent about the creation of this document rather than present it solely as my own work. That transparency is itself consistent with the framework's insistence on honesty as a precondition for resolution. A document arguing for the courage to acknowledge difficult truths ought to model that courage in its own presentation.

March 2026

Vision Statement

The Irish statesman John Hume, speaking of his own country's conflict, described what he called 'the politics of the last atrocity' — the cycle in which each act of violence becomes the only reference point for the next, and in which justice for the future is perpetually defeated by grievance from the past. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been trapped in the same cycle for decades. No framework built on that cycle can resolve it.

That cycle has been allowed to continue because this conflict has been made to appear more intractable than it is by the interests of those who benefit from its continuation. This document begins elsewhere.

It sets out a different vision for the resolution of the conflict. It makes no claim to political feasibility in the current moment. It makes a claim to justice — to what a fair settlement would look like if the will to achieve it existed. It is the overarching statement of a framework developed across five companion papers, each addressing a distinct dimension of the conflict in greater depth.

Ordinary Palestinians and Israelis have been failed not by the impossibility of resolution but by the consistent prioritisation of political, ideological and institutional interests over human ones. This document is written in the belief that an honest account of what justice requires stated plainly, without diplomatic evasion — is itself a political act.

It does not ask what each party might accept, or what the international community might broker, or what is achievable in the current political climate. It asks, simply, what fairness requires — and then describes that, as plainly as possible. The distinction matters. A framework built around what is acceptable to the parties will always be shaped by the most powerful, the most intransigent, and those with the most to lose from resolution. A framework built around what fairness independently requires has a different kind of authority — one that cannot be negotiated away, only accepted or rejected.

The Five Elements

One — The Refugee Question

The Palestinian refugee crisis is the most cynically mismanaged humanitarian issue of the modern era. For seventy-five years, Palestinian refugees and their descendants have been kept in camps and denied citizenship by Arab host states, sustained by an international agency whose institutional purpose is the perpetuation rather than the resolution of their displacement.¹ This was not an accident. It was a deliberate political choice by Arab governments who found refugees more useful as a symbol than as citizens.

The Right of Return — as currently framed — is not a humanitarian instrument. It is a political one, designed not to give Palestinian refugees a future but to use their dispossession as a

¹ UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees* (unrwa.org, 2024); Congressional Research Service, *UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East*, Report IF12863 (Library of Congress, 2024).

permanent claim against the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.² A just settlement rejects this framing entirely.

Justice for Palestinian refugees requires resettlement and normalisation — full citizenship or permanent residency with equal civil and economic rights in the countries where they and their descendants have lived for generations. It requires the dissolution of UNRWA, whose mandate has served institutional and political interests at the expense of the people it purports to help, and its replacement with standard international refugee resettlement frameworks. It requires a substantial international compensation fund — to which Israel, Arab states and Western donor governments all contribute — acknowledging the original dispossession of 1948 and providing material restitution to those affected.

This is not a denial of Palestinian suffering. It is the only proposal that takes that suffering seriously enough to actually resolve it.

Two — Regional Recognition of Israel

No settlement is durable without it. The insecurity that has shaped Israeli politics and military posture for seventy-five years is not irrational — it is the product of a sustained existential threat from every direction. A just settlement requires that every state in the region that has not already done so extends full diplomatic recognition to the State of Israel — not the cold peace of the Egypt and Jordan treaties, but genuine normalisation: embassies, open borders, trade, cultural exchange, and the unambiguous public acknowledgment that Israel is a permanent and legitimate presence in the Middle East.

The Abraham Accords demonstrated that this is achievable.³ They also demonstrated its limitation — normalisation achieved by bypassing the Palestinian question rather than resolving it is incomplete. The framework proposed here makes regional normalisation a structural element of a comprehensive settlement, not a separate track.

Full recognition transforms the Israeli political landscape. The argument for territorial maximalism and permanent military dominance depends on the premise of existential threat. Remove that premise genuinely and the Israeli electorate's appetite for the policies that have made settlement impossible changes with it.

Three — Palestinian Statehood

A fully independent Palestinian state — genuinely sovereign, not a managed dependency — is the non-negotiable foundation of any just resolution. Previous proposals for Palestinian statehood have failed because they offered sovereignty in name while retaining Israeli control of borders, airspace, water and economic life. That is not a state. It is a more comfortable version of occupation.

The State of Palestine shall be viable — territorially contiguous, economically self-sufficient, and in full control of the instruments of sovereignty. Its borders shall be broadly those of the

² UN General Assembly Resolution 194 (III), 11 December 1948, Paragraph 11, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Third Session* (United Nations, 1948). On non-binding status: Ian Brownlie, *Principles of Public International Law*, 7th ed. (OUP, 2008); Malcolm Shaw, *International Law*, 8th ed. (CUP, 2017).

³ *The Abraham Accords Peace Agreement* (US Department of State, 2020); Middle East Institute, *The Abraham Accords* (mei.edu, updated 2026).

pre-1967 lines, with agreed land swaps of equivalent value where necessary to reflect realities on the ground.⁴ Its capital shall be in East Jerusalem.

The question of the settlers already present on Palestinian territory — and the legal framework for those who choose to remain — is addressed in the following section.

Four — The Settlements

The settlement enterprise has been the single most corrosive element of Israeli policy since 1967. It is a deliberate process of creating facts on the ground that has progressively made a viable Palestinian state harder to achieve. A just settlement requires its reversal.

This does not necessarily mean the physical removal of every settler. The majority of settlers are there for economic rather than ideological reasons.⁵ A just settlement offers those settlers a choice: remain as Palestinians nationals or permanent residents, with full equality before Palestinian law and the constitutional minority rights protections that any genuinely liberal democracy owes its minorities or accept a managed relocation to Israel.

For settlers who elect to remain, the framework offers something more substantial than tolerance — full equality before Palestinian law, constitutional minority rights protections, guaranteed access to sites of religious significance, and the acknowledged legitimacy of their historical connection to this land. These are not special provisions. They are the same protections the framework demands for every minority in every state it envisions.

For the small number of genuinely place-rooted Jewish communities with deep historical and religious attachment to Palestinian territory, a legal framework of Communal Land Connections (developed in Paper One) provides a principled basis for acknowledging that attachment within Palestinian sovereignty rather than in opposition to it. This framework draws on established traditions in International law and represents the most original contribution of the wider project.

The ideological settler minority — those whose presence is an expression of religious nationalism rather than residential choice — present the hardest case. They will not easily accept Palestinian sovereignty. A just settlement doesn't require their acceptance. It requires their compliance with Palestinian law, which is a different demand.

That this compliance may require significant force to achieve is not a possibility the framework dismisses. The ideological settler minority is armed, organised, and has demonstrated willingness to resist the Israeli state itself. Compliance with Palestinian sovereignty may be hard won.

Five — Jerusalem

Jerusalem is the issue most resistant to a clean resolution. Both peoples have claims to the city that are ancient, deep and non-negotiable at the level of identity. Any solution that awards the city entirely to one side does violence to the other in ways that no political settlement can survive.

The framework proposes a division that reflects both the demographic and the symbolic reality. West Jerusalem remains the seat of Israeli government. East Jerusalem becomes the

⁴ UN Security Council Resolution 242 (S/RES/242, 1967), UN Documentation Centre (digitallibrary.un.org).

⁵ Ibid.

capital of the State of Palestine. The Old City — the square kilometre that contains the holiest sites of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and where the competing claims are most intensely concentrated — is placed under joint Israeli-Palestinian administration, with international guarantees and a specific legal framework for the sacred sites it contains.

Joint administration is not a perfect solution. It requires a level of sustained cooperation between two peoples that the history of the conflict does not make easy to imagine. But it is the only arrangement that acknowledges what is true — that both peoples have a relationship with this city that predates and will outlast any particular political arrangement — without requiring either to pretend that relationship does not exist.

The Thread That Connects Them

These five elements are not independent proposals. They form a single framework, each element depending on and enabling the others.

Palestinian statehood without refugee resettlement leaves the Right of Return as a permanent destabilising claim. Refugee resettlement without regional recognition leaves Israel in a security posture that makes genuine concession politically impossible. Regional recognition without Palestinian statehood is the Abraham Accords — a partial normalisation that sidesteps rather than resolves the central question. Palestinian statehood without a settlement framework for the settlers creates a human problem without a legal solution. And all of it without Jerusalem is a framework with a hole at its centre.

The framework stands or falls as a whole.

There is one further dimension that connects these five elements and that deserves to be stated plainly. A just resolution of this conflict is not merely a moral good. It is an economic transformation of the first order — one whose benefits would flow most powerfully not to Israel, which already functions as a sophisticated internationally connected economy, but to the Arab world, which faces an urgent and unresolved developmental challenge as the era of hydrocarbon dependence draws to a close. A Middle East in which Israel is a full economic partner rather than a regional pariah is a Middle East with access to one of the most remarkable concentrations of technological, scientific and entrepreneurial capacity on earth. The economic case for resolution is not a footnote to the moral case. It is a force multiplier for everything the framework proposes.

A Note on Honesty

This framework asks difficult things of everyone. It asks Palestinians and their supporters to abandon the Right of Return as a political instrument and to accept that 1948, however unjust, cannot be physically reversed. It asks Arab states to accept responsibility for their deliberate perpetuation of the refugee crisis and to extend genuine recognition to a state many have spent decades trying to delegitimise. It asks Israel and its supporters to accept that the settlement project must end and that Palestinian sovereignty must be real rather than nominal. It asks the Western left to recognise that its investment in Palestinian suffering as a political cause has served its own ideological needs more than it has served Palestinians.

None of these are comfortable asks. They are honest ones.

The alternative is the continuation of a conflict that has already consumed generations and shows no sign of consuming fewer. That is not a neutral outcome. It is a choice — made again and again by those with the power to choose differently and the interests to choose not to.

This framework exists in the conviction that honest description of what justice requires is the beginning, not the end, of the political work needed to achieve it.

Paper One: Beyond Sovereignty

Beyond Sovereignty: Temporal Connection and Communal Acknowledgment as a Framework for Israeli-Palestinian Final Status Negotiations

Abstract

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been negotiated, almost without exception, in the language of sovereignty — of borders, territory and political control. That language has proven exhausted. Every serious negotiation has foundered on the zero-sum logic sovereignty produces. This paper proposes a different legal register — one already present in international law but never applied to this conflict — in which questions of connection to land are disaggregated from questions of governance over it. It develops three complementary doctrines: Palestinian Nationality with constitutional minority rights protections for Jewish residents who elect to remain; Sacred Access Rights for a defined list of sites of singular religious significance; and Temporal Connection — a declaratory doctrine acknowledging the deep historical and religious relationship of both peoples with the same land, simultaneously and without contradiction. Together these doctrines do not replace a two-state settlement. They make one possible.

The Failure of the Sovereignty Binary

Every serious attempt to negotiate a final status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians has eventually collapsed on the same structural problem. The framework within which negotiations take place treats sovereignty as the only relevant legal category. Land is either Israeli or Palestinian. Communities are either inside or outside the border. Populations are either protected or abandoned. Every concession by one side is experienced as an existential loss rather than a pragmatic compromise.

This zero-sum logic is not an accident of negotiating psychology. It is produced by the conceptual framework itself. When sovereignty is the only tool available, every question becomes a sovereignty question — and sovereignty, by its nature, cannot be shared, divided or qualified without appearing to be surrendered.

The result is a negotiating history of remarkable persistence and remarkable futility. Camp David, Taba, the Geneva Initiative, the Olmert proposals — each represented a genuine attempt at resolution and each ultimately failed to bridge gaps that narrower technical negotiation could not close. The gaps are not primarily technical. They are conceptual. The framework itself is the problem.

This paper argues that international law already possesses the conceptual resources to break this impasse — that the relationship between people and land has been disaggregated from questions of political sovereignty in several significant legal traditions, and that applying those traditions to the Israeli-Palestinian context opens possibilities that the sovereignty framework permanently forecloses.

Precedents: Connection and Sovereignty as Separable Questions

The proposition that rights of connection to land exist independently of sovereign determination is not novel. Several distinct legal traditions demonstrate it clearly.

In *Mabo v Queensland* [1992] HCA 23¹ the High Court of Australia held that the common law recognised native title — rights derived from the traditional laws and customs of indigenous peoples — which survived the assertion of Crown sovereignty over the continent. The Court's conceptual move was decisive: sovereignty and the extinguishment of prior connection rights are not synonymous. Sovereignty was asserted. Connection persisted unless specifically extinguished. The relevance to the present framework is not the specific content of native title but the underlying legal move — the recognition that belonging to a place and being governed by a state are separable questions that international law is competent to address independently.²

Following the First World War the German-speaking population of South Tyrol found themselves transferred from Austria to Italy. Italian sovereignty was never in question. What was negotiated, over decades and eventually embodied in a comprehensive autonomy statute, was a layered architecture of communal rights operating beneath and subject to that sovereignty — linguistic protections, cultural autonomy, communal self-governance in defined spheres, constitutionally entrenched and internationally monitored.³ The South Tyrol arrangement demonstrates that a minority community's deep attachment to place can be given robust legal expression without compromising sovereign authority — and that international treaty guarantees can provide enforcement without constituting foreign interference in domestic governance.

When Finland achieved independence the Swedish-speaking Åland Islands sought unification with Sweden. The League of Nations awarded sovereignty to Finland but coupled that determination with guaranteed cultural autonomy and explicit demilitarisation, entrenched in international treaty.⁴ The Åland precedent contributes a critical element — the explicit decoupling of communal rights from military protection. The Swedish-speaking community's rights are guaranteed by Finnish constitutional law and international treaty, not by Swedish arms.

International law has a long tradition of protecting religious access rights independently of sovereignty determinations. From the post-Ottoman treaty arrangements of the early twentieth century to the 1994 Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty,⁵ the principle that sacred sites transcend the political authority of the state in which they sit has been repeatedly recognised in binding international instruments.

Across these traditions a common thread is visible. International law has repeatedly demonstrated the capacity to disaggregate who governs a territory from what rights

¹ *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* [1992] HCA 23; (1992) 175 CLR 1. High Court of Australia eLibrary (eresources.hcourt.gov.au).

² Patrick Macklem, *Indigenous Difference and the Constitution of Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 2001).

³ European Centre for Minority Issues, '50 Years of South Tyrolean Autonomy' (ecmi.de, 2022); Autonomous Province of South Tyrol, *Autonomy Report South Tyrol 2025* (works.eurac.edu).

⁴ Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, *The Special Status of the Åland Islands* (um.fi); Act on the Autonomy of Åland (FFS 124/1920, revised 1991); UN Office of Legal Affairs, *The Åland Islands Solution* (legal.un.org, 2012).

⁵ *Treaty of Peace between the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the State of Israel*, Article 9(2), 26 October 1994 (Avalon Project, Yale Law School, avalon.law.yale.edu).

communities within it hold by virtue of their connection to it. It is upon this established but underdeployed legal tradition that the present framework is constructed.⁶

The Three Doctrines

Palestinian Nationality with Constitutional Minority Rights Protections

Jewish residents of Palestinian territory who elect to remain following the establishment of the State of Palestine shall do so as Palestinian nationals or permanent residents, subject to Palestinian civil and criminal jurisdiction in all matters, with full equality before Palestinian law. No separate legal architecture is required or proposed for these residents beyond the constitutional minority rights protections that any genuinely liberal democratic state owes its minorities — freedom of religious observance, cultural and educational autonomy, property protections, and equal treatment before the law. These are not special privileges. They are the standard obligations of democratic constitutionalism, applied without discrimination. The constitutional framework outlined here assumes a Palestinian judiciary whose independence and impartiality do not yet exist. That is a condition of success, not a condition of proposal.

The symmetry with the position of Arab citizens of Israel is explicit and intentional.⁷ Israel asks its Arab citizens to accept Israeli sovereignty while retaining their cultural and religious identity. Palestine is asked to extend the same offer to Jewish residents who choose to remain. The principle is identical. The application is reciprocal.

The Jewish Minority as Asset

The settlements represent decades of substantial built investment — roads, water systems, electricity infrastructure, housing stock, schools, medical facilities and commercial development. A Palestinian state that inherits this infrastructure rather than having to build from scratch can redirect its developmental energy toward institutions, education, governance and economic growth.

Israel has produced, per capita, one of the most remarkable concentrations of technical, scientific, agricultural and entrepreneurial talent in the world. Jewish residents who elect to remain in Palestinian territory bring with them educational attainment, professional networks, technical skills, language capacity and in many cases capital. A Palestinian state with access to even a fraction of this human capital has a developmental advantage that no aid programme can replicate.

The parallel with post-apartheid South Africa is instructive, if imperfect.⁸ The retention of white professional and business communities contributed materially to South Africa's economic functioning through the transition period. A Palestinian state that welcomes a Jewish minority, protects their rights under constitutional law, and demonstrates that Jewish residents can live peacefully and productively under Palestinian sovereignty makes an argument in the most concrete possible way — that Palestinian nationalism is civic rather than ethnic, grounded in self-determination rather than exclusion.

⁶ European Centre for Minority Issues, op. cit.; Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, op. cit.

⁷ Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, *Population of Israel* (cbs.gov.il, 2024).

⁸ Allister Sparks, *Beyond the Miracle: Inside the New South Africa* (Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2003).

Sacred Access Rights

There exists a category of place where constitutional minority rights alone are insufficient — where the relationship between a people and a specific location is so ancient, so religiously significant, and so central to collective identity that acknowledgment must be accompanied by guaranteed physical access. Sacred Access Rights constitute a legally guaranteed right of access, worship and religious practice at a defined and exhaustively enumerated list of such sites — fixed at the time of treaty conclusion and amendable only by mutual consent. The doctrine applies universally across the faiths of both peoples and of all those with a sacred relationship to this land. It encompasses Jewish, Muslim and Christian sacred sites in equal measure. The principle is identical in each case: that the sanctity of these places transcends the political authority of the state in which they sit, and that access to them is a right grounded in history and conscience, not in the tolerance of any sovereign.

The full catalogue of enumerated sites shall be established during the transitional period through a joint survey conducted under international auspices, with representatives of all three faiths participating on equal terms.

Temporal Connection

Temporal Connection is the most conceptually original element of this framework. It is a declaration — embedded in the constitutional preamble of the State of Palestine and in the multilateral treaty framework establishing that state — that the Jewish people maintain an ancient, continuous and religiously and culturally significant connection to the land of historic Palestine, which connection predates and survives any determination of political sovereignty, and which the international community and the State of Palestine formally acknowledge as a permanent feature of the historical landscape.⁹

Temporal Connection confers nothing actionable beyond what the other two doctrines provide. It does not qualify Palestinian sovereignty. It is purely declaratory. But embedding it in Palestinian Basic Law forecloses the position that Jewish historical connection to this land is fabricated or illegitimate. It changes the character of the argument — from a dispute about whether each people belongs here at all, to a conversation about how two peoples who both belong here can share it.

The doctrine is explicitly reciprocal. The same framework simultaneously acknowledges Palestinian Temporal Connection to the entirety of historic Palestine. Israel accepts a reciprocal constitutional obligation — incorporating into its own Basic Laws an equivalent acknowledgment. The settlement is symmetrical or it is not serious.

The Relationship Between the Three Doctrines

Palestinian Nationality addresses the present — the people living there now and their practical rights within a functioning sovereign state. Sacred Access Rights address the practice — the living religious relationship that requires physical expression at specific sacred places. Temporal Connection addresses the permanent — the historical and theological relationship that transcends current politics and will outlast any particular political arrangement.

No previous negotiating framework has attempted to address all three dimensions simultaneously. It is the third — the question of whether each people's deepest relationship

⁹ Malcolm Shaw, *International Law*, 8th ed. (CUP, 2017), Chapter 3.

with this land is acknowledged as real and legitimate — that has made every practical arrangement feel, to both sides, like a betrayal of something essential. Temporal Connection does not resolve that feeling. It addresses it directly, in law, for the first time.

Constitutional and Treaty Architecture

The framework requires embedding at three levels — Palestinian constitutional law, multilateral international treaty, and reciprocal Israeli constitutional obligation — each reinforcing the others. Palestinian Basic Law shall incorporate the three doctrines at its highest level of constitutional entrenchment. The multilateral treaty framework shall establish the international monitoring body, provide for the dissolution of UNRWA and the resettlement of Palestinian refugees, and record the full normalisation of relations between Israel and all Arab League member states. Israel's reciprocal constitutional obligations shall be subject to the same international monitoring framework.

The framework's legal architecture is, as its authors acknowledge, deliberately constructed — a set of agreed fictions designed to allow two peoples with incompatible claims to inhabit the same legal universe without destroying each other.¹⁰ The Good Friday Agreement did something similar: it simultaneously affirmed the constitutional legitimacy of both Irish unity and the maintenance of the union with Great Britain, allowing both communities to hold irreconcilable constitutional aspirations within a single legal framework. International law has always worked this way. The question is never whether legal architecture is artificial but whether it serves justice and whether it works.

Enforcement

A framework without enforcement is a wish. The history of Israeli-Palestinian agreements is substantially a history of obligations undertaken and not met, mechanisms established and not resourced, violations documented and not addressed. The monitoring body established by treaty must have binding authority — not merely observational status — and be empowered to make enforceable determinations on alleged violations by either party without requiring political consensus from bodies whose composition makes consistent action impossible.¹¹

A Commission perceived as captured by any party loses the authority that is its only value. Its composition, funding and mandate must be structured to guarantee impartiality as a constitutional matter, not as an aspiration.

The Political Case and Conclusion

The spoilers are real. Hamas's entire political identity is constructed on the rejection of Jewish legitimacy in any form — Temporal Connection is existentially threatening to that identity precisely because it is not a military or territorial concession but an acknowledgment of historical reality. The Israeli religious nationalist right is equally threatened by unqualified Palestinian sovereignty over the heartland of biblical Israel. But spoilers are not majorities. The framework is designed for the larger populations on both sides for whom a just and durable resolution is preferable to permanent war.

¹⁰ *The Belfast Agreement*, 10 April 1998 (gov.uk); Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland*, 3 vols. (OUP, 2019).

¹¹ Ian Brownlie, *Principles of Public International Law*, 7th ed. (OUP, 2008), Chapter 30.

The sovereignty binary has been tried exhaustively and has exhausted itself. The choice is not between this framework and a better one. It is between this framework and the continuation of a conflict whose human costs are borne overwhelmingly by ordinary Palestinians and Israelis who had no voice in creating it and have been given no serious path out of it.

This paper's framework is, its authors acknowledge, legal artifice — a constructed set of doctrines designed to give legal expression to a moral and historical reality that existing frameworks have failed to accommodate. It should wear that description without apology. Almost all of international law is artifice. Native title was invented by a court that recognised a moral reality existing law had no language for. The Good Friday Agreement resolved a century of conflict through deliberate constitutional ambiguity. Legal artifice is not cynicism. It is creativity in service of human need.

What the framework does is change the argument's character — from a zero-sum contest over who belongs here to an acknowledged shared habitation of contested ground, governed by law, monitored by the international community, and grounded in the honest recognition that both peoples are here, both peoples have always been here, and neither is going anywhere. That is not a small thing. In this conflict, it may be everything.

Paper Two: The Refugee Question

The Refugee Question: Resettlement, Normalisation and the End of Deliberate Displacement

Abstract

The Palestinian refugee crisis is the most cynically sustained humanitarian failure of the modern era. This paper argues that the Right of Return — as currently framed in international discourse and Palestinian political culture — is not a humanitarian instrument but a political one, and that its continuation is an active impediment to any just or durable resolution. Drawing on the historical context of population exchanges that followed the Second World War and the partition of India and Pakistan, it argues that the displacement of 1948 was neither unique nor irreversible in the way its political exploitation implies. Justice for Palestinian refugees requires what justice has required of every other displaced population in modern history — resettlement, normalisation, and material compensation. It requires the dissolution of UNRWA, whose institutional architecture has perpetuated displacement rather than resolved it. And it requires an honest accounting of the Arab state responsibility that the standard discourse has consistently refused to provide.

1948 in Historical Context

The displacement of Palestinian Arabs in 1947 and 1948 was a human tragedy. Approximately 700,000 people lost their homes, their communities and the lives they had built.¹ That suffering was real and its acknowledgment is not in question here.

What is in question is the claim that 1948 was a uniquely irreversible historical injustice demanding a remedy unavailable to any other displaced population in modern history. That claim does not survive contact with the historical record.²

The year 1947 — the year before — witnessed the largest and most violent forced population movement of the twentieth century. The partition of British India produced the displacement of between 10 and 20 million people across the new borders of India and Pakistan. Somewhere between 200,000 and two million people died in the violence that accompanied it.³ Entire cities changed their demographic character overnight. Communities that had coexisted for centuries were torn apart in weeks.

Nobody seriously proposes that the descendants of those displaced in 1947 hold a right of return to their ancestral villages across the India-Pakistan border. The reason is not that their suffering was less real. It is that the international community — and the affected populations themselves — understood, however painfully, that the displacement was a

¹ UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine, *General Progress Report (A/1367/Rev.1, United Nations, 1950)*; Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 2nd ed. (CUP, 2004).

² Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years' War on Palestine* (Metropolitan Books, 2020).

³ Yasmin Khan, *The Great Partition: The Making of India and Pakistan* (Yale UP, 2007); Prabhu Bhardwaj, Asim Ijaz Khwaja and Atif Mian, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 43:35 (2008), pp. 39–49.

consequence of a political settlement that could not be undone without producing greater violence than it resolved. Resettlement and integration were the only humane path forward.

The post-war settlement in Europe produced comparable movements. Twelve to fourteen million ethnic Germans were expelled from Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and other Eastern European states following the Second World War — a forced displacement explicitly sanctioned by the Potsdam Agreement of 1945.⁴ They were not given a right of return. They were resettled in West Germany and integrated, imperfectly and painfully, into a new reality.

The point is not to diminish Palestinian suffering by comparison. It is to establish that the international community has a consistent and well-developed framework for addressing mass displacement — one that involves resettlement, integration and where appropriate compensation, not the indefinite preservation of refugee status across generations as a political instrument. 1948 has been treated as the singular exception to this framework. That exception requires justification. None has ever been satisfactorily provided.

The Jewish Refugees: The Silence That Reveals

Any honest account of 1948 and its aftermath must include the population movement that ran in the opposite direction and has been almost entirely erased from the dominant discourse.

Between 1948 and the early 1970s, approximately 850,000 Jews were expelled from or forced to flee Arab countries across North Africa and the Middle East.⁵ These were ancient communities. Iraqi Jews had been present in Mesopotamia since the Babylonian exile of the sixth century BCE⁶ — they predated Islam by more than a millennium. They were stripped of their citizenship, their property confiscated, their communities destroyed. Around 600,000 ended up in Israel.⁷

No right of return was asserted on their behalf. No UNRWA equivalent was created to preserve their refugee status across generations. The asymmetry is not explicable on humanitarian grounds. It is explicable only on political ones. The Jewish refugee crisis from Arab lands did not serve the political purposes that the Palestinian refugee crisis has been made to serve. It was therefore forgotten.

This silence is not a minor oversight. It is the most revealing single fact about the politics of the Palestinian refugee question. A framework that takes Palestinian suffering seriously must also take this asymmetry seriously. Any compensation framework for Palestinian refugees must address the parallel claims of Jewish refugees from Arab lands. Any honest accounting of 1948 must include both sides of the ledger.⁸

⁴ Potsdam Agreement, Article XIII, 1 August 1945. Primary text: US Dept of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Conference of Berlin 1945*, vol. 2 (US GPO, 1960); R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane* (Yale UP, 2012).

⁵ World Jewish Congress, *Jews from Arab Lands* (worldjewishcongress.org); Hansard HC Deb, 19 June 2019, col. 1WH.

⁶ Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands* (Jewish Publication Society, 1979).

⁷ Hansard HC Deb, 19 June 2019; Justice for Jews from Arab Countries, *Facts and Figures* (justiceforjews.com).

⁸ Hansard HC Deb, 19 June 2019, col. 1WH.

The Architecture of Perpetuation: UNRWA

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees was established in 1949 to provide emergency humanitarian assistance to Palestinians displaced by the 1948 war.⁹ It was always conceived as a temporary measure pending a political solution. Seventy-five years later it employs approximately 30,000 people, operates across five territories, and administers a refugee population that has grown from its original 700,000 to more than five million.

That growth is not a demographic accident. It is the direct consequence of a policy decision unique in the history of international refugee management — the hereditary transmission of refugee status across generations.¹⁰ There are now Palestinians registered as refugees who are the great-grandchildren of the original displaced population — people with no living memory of displacement, who may never have visited the region in question, and who in some cases hold full citizenship in prosperous countries, but who remain classified as refugees for political purposes.

Every other refugee population in the world is managed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees under a framework whose explicit goal is the resolution of refugee status through resettlement, local integration or voluntary return.¹¹ The UNHCR does not transmit refugee status to the children and grandchildren of refugees. Its institutional purpose is to make refugees into citizens — of somewhere, anywhere — and thereby dissolve the refugee population through successful integration into normal life.

UNRWA does the opposite. The beneficiaries of this arrangement are not the refugees themselves, whose lives in camps have not been improved by their classification. The beneficiaries are the Arab states that lobbied for UNRWA's creation and mandate — who found Palestinian refugees more politically useful as a permanent symbol of Israeli illegitimacy than as citizens with jobs and futures. UNRWA must be dissolved. Its functions must be transferred to UNHCR on standard terms. This dissolution must be sequenced to follow, not precede, the establishment of the Palestinian state and its institutional capacity to absorb those functions. A humanitarian vacuum would be as unjust as the perpetuation of the status quo

The Right of Return: Political Instrument or Humanitarian Claim?

The Right of Return is routinely presented as a matter of international law, with UN General Assembly Resolution 194 cited as its legal foundation.¹² That citation does not bear examination. Resolution 194 is a non-binding General Assembly resolution.¹³ Its actual text calls for return or compensation at the discretion of the receiving state, conditional on refugees wishing to live at peace with their neighbours. It has been retrospectively inflated,

⁹ UNRWA established by UNGA Resolution 302 (IV), 8 December 1949. Population figure: UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees* (unrwa.org, 2024); CRS IF12863 (2024).

¹⁰ UNRWA, *Palestine Refugees* (unrwa.org): 'The descendants of Palestine refugee males, including adopted children, are also eligible for registration.'

¹¹ UNHCR durable solutions established by UNGA Resolution 1166 (XII), 26 November 1957. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951 (UNTS vol. 189, p. 137).

¹² UNGA Resolution 194 (III), Paragraph 11, *Official Records of the General Assembly, Third Session* (United Nations, 1948).

¹³ Brownlie, *Principles of Public International Law*, 7th ed. (OUP, 2008); Shaw, *International Law*, 8th ed. (CUP, 2017), Chapter 3.

through decades of political insistence, into an absolute, unconditional, hereditary entitlement that exists nowhere in international law or practice.

The demographic implication of the Right of Return as actually demanded — the physical relocation of five million people into a country of 9.7 million¹⁴ — is not a humanitarian proposal. It is a proposal for the demographic transformation of Israel into a majority Arab state. Its effect, if implemented, would be the end of Israel as a Jewish state without a military operation. This is understood by everyone involved in the debate.

The Right of Return is the continuation of the 1948 war by other means. Dressing it in the language of international humanitarian law does not change its strategic function. It must be formally relinquished as part of any final status agreement.

Arab State Responsibility and the Compensation Framework

The most glaring and least discussed dimension of the Palestinian refugee crisis is the responsibility of Arab states for its perpetuation.

Lebanon has been among the most egregious offenders. Palestinian refugees in Lebanon — now numbering several hundred thousand and including people who have lived there for three generations — are denied Lebanese citizenship, denied the right to own property, and restricted from practising dozens of professions.¹⁵ They live in camps in conditions of enforced poverty and legal exclusion, in a country that is not poor by regional standards, maintained in deliberate marginalisation by a state that has consistently found their political utility more valuable than their welfare as human beings.

Jordan is the partial exception — Palestinian refugees in Jordan have generally been granted citizenship¹⁶, and the country's population is now majority Palestinian in origin. But Jordan's example illuminates rather than contradicts the broader point: integration is possible, it works, and the Arab states that chose not to pursue it made that choice for political reasons.

Arab states must contribute substantially to the international compensation fund as acknowledgment of their own role in sustaining the crisis for seventy-five years.¹⁷

Relinquishment of the Right of Return does not mean relinquishment of all claims arising from the displacement of 1948. The appropriate vehicle for those claims is financial compensation, delivered through a dedicated international fund. The fund's contributors should reflect the distribution of responsibility. Israel bears responsibility for the displacement that occurred in the context of its establishment. Arab states bear responsibility for their deliberate perpetuation of the crisis. Western donor governments bear responsibility for funding the institutional architecture that sustained it.

The parallel claims of Jewish refugees from Arab states must be addressed within the same framework.¹⁸ Any settlement that compensates Palestinian refugees while ignoring the

¹⁴ Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, *Population of Israel* (cbs.gov.il, 2024).

¹⁵ Amnesty International, *Exiled and Suffering: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, Index MDE 18/010/2007 (October 2007).

¹⁶ UNRWA, *Jordan Field Operations* (unrwa.org) and UNRWA annual reports.

¹⁷ Arab League, *Protocol for the Treatment of Palestinians in Arab States* (Casablanca Protocol, 1965); Randa Farah, *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, 28:2–3 (OUP/UNHCR, 2009), pp. 286–314.

¹⁸ Hansard HC Deb, 19 June 2019, col. 1WH.

equivalent dispossession of Jewish communities from Arab lands is not a humanitarian settlement. It is a political one, and its partiality will undermine its legitimacy.

Justice for Palestinian refugees does not require the Right of Return. It requires what justice has required of every other displaced population in the history of the modern world — acknowledgment of the wrong done, material restitution for what was lost, and a future in the countries where three generations have actually lived their lives.

Paper Three: Regional Normalisation

Regional Normalisation: Recognition, Legitimacy and the Architecture of Durable Peace

Abstract

No settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is durable without the full normalisation of relations between Israel and the Arab world. This paper argues that regional recognition of Israel is not merely a desirable accompaniment to a final status agreement but its structural precondition — that without it, Israeli security concerns will continue to generate the political conditions that make Palestinian statehood impossible, and that with it, the Israeli political landscape transforms in ways that make concession not only possible but rational. Drawing on the Abraham Accords as a partial and instructive precedent, it examines what genuine normalisation means, why cold peace is insufficient, and how full regional recognition functions as both the precondition and the consequence of the comprehensive settlement proposed in this framework.

Why Recognition Is the Load-Bearing Wall

Every element of the framework proposed in this suite of papers depends, ultimately, on Israeli willingness to make concessions that Israeli political culture has consistently refused to make. Understanding why that refusal has been so persistent requires understanding the security environment in which Israeli political culture has formed.

Israel is a country that has fought existential wars in 1948, 1967 and 1973.¹ It has faced decades of terrorism, two intifadas, sustained rocket campaigns from Gaza and Lebanon, and the explicit genocidal rhetoric of Hamas, Hezbollah and the Iranian state. Its borders have never been fully accepted by its neighbours. In this context, the territorial and political concessions required for a just settlement require Israeli society to accept a level of vulnerability that its historical experience makes genuinely terrifying. The argument of the Israeli right — that territorial concession produces security threats, as the Gaza withdrawal demonstrated in 2005 — is not irrational. It is drawn from lived experience.

Regional recognition changes this calculus fundamentally. A Middle East in which every Arab state has formally recognised Israel's right to exist is a Middle East in which the existential threat that has shaped Israeli politics for seventy-five years has been genuinely resolved. In that Middle East, the argument for territorial maximalism loses its security logic. Regional recognition is therefore not a reward for Israeli good behaviour. It is the precondition that makes Israeli good behaviour politically possible.

What Cold Peace Has Failed to Deliver

Egypt recognised Israel in 1979. Jordan recognised Israel in 1994. Both peace treaties have held. Both have been, in human terms, almost entirely without content.²

¹ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims* (Knopf, 1999); Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor, *International Studies Perspectives*, 24:1 (2023), pp. 67–88.

² *Treaty of Peace between Egypt and Israel*, UNTS vol. 1136, No. 17813 (UN, 1979). Washington Institute for Near East Policy, *Reviewing Egypt's Gains from Its Peace Treaty with Israel*; Pew Research Center, *Global Attitudes Survey, Spring 2013*, Chapter 5; Arab

The Egypt-Israel peace is a relationship between governments, not peoples. Egyptian public opinion remains overwhelmingly hostile to Israel. Trade between the two countries is minimal. Cultural exchange is negligible. The Muslim Brotherhood and its successors have consistently used the peace treaty as a symbol of governmental betrayal of popular sentiment. The treaty has prevented war. It has not produced peace in any meaningful sense.

The Jordan-Israel relationship is warmer at the governmental level but faces similar constraints. The Wadi Araba treaty has been more substantive than Camp David — there is genuine security cooperation and a working relationship between the royal family and Israeli governments — but it remains a cold peace dependent on governmental will rather than popular acceptance.

The Abraham Accords of 2020 represented something genuinely different in tone and ambition.³ The UAE in particular pursued normalisation with evident enthusiasm — direct flights, open embassies, business relationships and Israeli tourism. For the first time, normalisation appeared to have popular as well as governmental dimensions in at least some participating states. But the Abraham Accords also illustrated the limitation of normalisation achieved by bypassing rather than resolving the Palestinian question.⁴ When October 7 and its aftermath convulsed the region, the fragility of normalisation built on strategic convenience rather than genuine resolution became apparent.

The Anatomy of Genuine Normalisation

What distinguishes genuine normalisation from cold peace is the depth of engagement it produces and the popular legitimacy it commands. Genuine normalisation means embassies, open borders, trade, cultural exchange — and governments willing to make the public argument to their own populations that Israel is a legitimate state. Arab public opinion has been shaped by decades of anti-Israel discourse. The political costs of genuine normalisation are real. They are also manageable — if normalisation is accompanied by a genuine resolution of the Palestinian question that allows Arab governments to argue that they have achieved something for Palestinians rather than merely abandoned them.

The Gulf states' strategic calculations have been shifting toward Israel on the basis of shared Iranian threat perception.⁵ A comprehensive Palestinian settlement would provide the political cover that Arab governments need to convert strategic alignment into genuine normalisation. This framework treats normalisation and Palestinian statehood as simultaneous rather than sequential — as components of a single comprehensive agreement, neither preceding the other.

The Iranian Dimension

Any honest account of the regional normalisation question must address Iran, whose strategic interest in the perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most significant obstacles to resolution. Iran's support for Hamas, Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic

Barometer, *MENA Publics and the Future of Normalization with Israel* (arabbarometer.org, 2025).

³ *The Abraham Accords Peace Agreement* (US Department of State, 2020); Carnegie Endowment, *The Abraham Accords After Gaza* (April 2025).

⁴ Institute for National Security Studies, *Five Years On: Are the Abraham Accords Here to Stay?* (inss.org.il, September 2025).

⁵ Arab Barometer, 'A Hidden Force in the Middle East', *Foreign Affairs* (June 2025); Atlantic Council, *The Abraham Accords at Five* (September 2025).

Jihad and other armed groups is not primarily an expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people. It is a strategic instrument for projecting power.⁶ A resolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with full Arab normalisation, would represent a strategic defeat for Iranian regional ambitions of the first order.

A genuine and widely recognised Palestinian settlement degrades the political legitimacy of the proxy network in a way that no military operation can replicate.⁷ The Axis of Resistance derives its popular support from the Palestinian cause. Its claim to be a resistance movement depends on the continued existence of Palestinian dispossession as a mobilising grievance. A Palestinian state with recognised sovereignty removes the cause that gives the proxy network its popular legitimacy. This does not dissolve the Axis of Resistance. It exposes it for what it is — not a resistance movement but an Iranian power projection instrument.

What Arab States Owe

The framework's demand of Arab states goes beyond diplomatic recognition. Arab states that have maintained Palestinian refugees in camps for three generations owe those refugees citizenship, property rights and professional equality.⁸ They owe a financial contribution to the international compensation fund. A normalisation that asks Arab states only for diplomatic recognition while leaving their obligations to Palestinian refugees unaddressed is incomplete. It resolves the conflict at the level of states while leaving its human consequences unaddressed at the level of the people it has most damaged.

The Economic Architecture of Durable Peace

The case for regional normalisation is most often made in security and political terms. This paper has made both. But there is a third dimension that is at least as powerful and considerably more underappreciated — the economic one. And it is, in important ways, the most durable argument of all, because economic interdependence, once established, creates constituencies for peace that are self-reinforcing in ways that security guarantees and political agreements are not.

Paper One notes that Israel has produced, per capita, one of the most remarkable concentrations of technical, scientific and entrepreneurial talent in the world⁹ — and examines what that means for a Palestinian state that inherits a Jewish minority. But it is worth dwelling on what that same concentration means at a regional scale. In a territory the size of Wales, Israel has built something with few parallels anywhere — a compressed Silicon Valley sitting at the edge of one of the world's most developmentally underserved regions¹⁰.

⁶ International Crisis Group, *Iran's Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East*, Middle East Report No. 184 (ICG, 2018); CRS Report IF12587 (Library of Congress, 2024).

⁷ International Crisis Group, *Ending the War in Gaza: The Day After and the Broader Regional Puzzle* (ICG, 2024).

⁸ Amnesty International, *Exiled and Suffering: Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon*, Index MDE 18/010/2007 (October 2007); UNRWA, Jordan Field Operations (unrwa.org); Arab League, Protocol for the Treatment of Palestinians in Arab States (Casablanca Protocol, 1965).

⁹ Ran Reznick, *The Drip Irrigation Revolution* (Tahal Group, 2018); FAO, Crop Yield Response to Water, FAO Irrigation and Drainage Paper 66 (Rome, 2012).

¹⁰ Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle* (Twelve, 2009); OECD, Main Science and Technology Indicators (oecd.org, 2024).

The Arab world's situation is structurally different — and structurally urgent. The Gulf states face an existential economic transition. Their sovereign wealth funds are vast, their ambitions for diversification genuine and substantial, but the knowledge economies they are attempting to build require precisely what Israel has in abundance: deep technological expertise, research culture, engineering talent, and the innovation networks that connect a small country to global capital and global markets. Egypt, Jordan and the wider Arab world face chronic underemployment, inadequate infrastructure and developmental deficits that decades of international aid have failed to resolve.

What genuine normalisation unlocks is not incremental. It is transformational. Arab capital — which is substantial, patient and increasingly sophisticated — combined with Israeli technology, expertise and innovation networks, operating across a regional market of some 400 million people with a combined GDP approaching four trillion dollars¹¹, would constitute one of the most significant economic integrations of the twenty-first century. The potential is not at the margins. It is the difference between a region that manages a difficult transition and one that builds something genuinely new.

The economic argument does not stop at growth projections and investment flows. The political and cultural benefits are not far behind — and are in fact the deeper argument. The European project's foundational insight was not primarily economic. It was strategic: that nations whose businesses are intertwined, whose citizens travel and study and work together, whose commercial relationships create mutual dependence, do not go to war with each other. Not because they have signed treaties promising not to, but because the cost of conflict has become structurally irrational and the human connections have made the other side real rather than abstract. Sixty years of peace between France and Germany — nations that had gone to war three times in seventy years — is not an accident of goodwill. It is a consequence of economic architecture.

The same logic applies here with particular force. A Middle East in which Israeli and Arab businesses are partners, in which Palestinian entrepreneurs access Israeli networks and Israeli companies operate in Arab markets, in which the movement of people generates the cross-pollination of ideas that all knowledge economies require — that is a Middle East in which the political incentives for conflict are structurally different. Peace ceases to be merely a moral aspiration and becomes a material interest. Trust, once it has commercial expression, is harder to destroy. The entrenchment of peace through mutual benefit is not a soft argument. It is the most resilient foundation any settlement can have.

A Middle East in which Israel is fully normalised within its regional environment is one in which Israeli economic and technological capacity flows freely into a region that desperately needs investment, innovation and institutional development. It is a Middle East in which the Palestinian state, freed from occupation and the political economy of permanent grievance, can begin the work of building institutions, attracting investment and developing the civic culture that statehood requires. Regional normalisation is the key that unlocks it. Not because it is sufficient on its own. But because without it, nothing else in this framework can hold.

¹¹ World Bank, *Middle East and North Africa Overview* (data.worldbank.org, 2024); Arab Monetary Fund, *Arab Economic Outlook* (amf.org.ae, 2024).

Paper Four: Jerusalem

Jerusalem: The Hardest Question

Abstract

Jerusalem is the hardest problem in the framework and the one most resistant to clean resolution. Both peoples have claims to the city that are ancient, deep and non-negotiable at the level of identity. Any solution that awards the city entirely to one side does violence to the other in ways that no political settlement can survive. This paper proposes a division that reflects both the demographic and the symbolic reality of Jerusalem — West Jerusalem as the seat of Israeli government, East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine, and the Old City under joint Israeli-Palestinian administration with international guarantees and a specific legal framework for its sacred sites.

Why Jerusalem Is Different

Every other element of the framework is, in principle, resolvable through the application of legal and political creativity. The refugee question has a clear humanitarian logic. Regional normalisation has clear strategic logic. The settler question has a legal architecture that can accommodate it. Jerusalem resists this treatment. Not because it is legally more complex — it is not, in most respects — but because it sits at the intersection of the two peoples' deepest relationships with their own identities in a way that no other issue does.

For Jews, Jerusalem is not merely a political capital. It is the city of David, the site of the Temple, the direction of prayer for three thousand years of exile, the place whose name closes the Passover Seder and the Yom Kippur service. The modern Jewish state did not invent this relationship. It inherited and gave political expression to something that had been the centre of Jewish religious and cultural life since antiquity.

For Palestinians, Jerusalem is the cultural, religious and political heart of their national aspirations. East Jerusalem — with its Muslim and Christian holy sites, its ancient families, its claim to be the capital of a future Palestinian state — is not peripheral to the Palestinian national project. It is its centre. A Palestinian state without East Jerusalem as its capital would lack the symbolic legitimacy required to command the loyalty of its own population.

These two relationships are both genuine, both ancient and both non-negotiable. The framework acknowledges both without privileging either.

The History of Failed Solutions

Jerusalem's status has been contested at every stage of the modern conflict and no proposed solution has commanded sufficient acceptance to be implemented. The 1947 UN partition plan proposed internationalising Jerusalem entirely. It was overtaken by the 1948 war, after which West Jerusalem came under Israeli control and East Jerusalem under Jordanian control.

Between 1948 and 1967, Jordan administered East Jerusalem including the Old City. Jewish access to the Western Wall and Jewish holy sites was denied.¹ A fact that shaped the Israeli determination, after capturing East Jerusalem in 1967, never to relinquish control of the city again. Israel formally annexed East Jerusalem in 1980, a move not recognised by any government including Israel's closest allies.

The Camp David negotiations of 2000 came closer to a Jerusalem agreement than any previous attempt. Various formulations were explored — Palestinian sovereignty over Muslim and Christian quarters, Israeli sovereignty over Jewish and Armenian quarters, shared sovereignty over the Temple Mount. None proved acceptable.² The failure of Camp David on Jerusalem has shaped the subsequent two decades of diplomatic thinking. Most serious analysts have concluded that Jerusalem cannot be resolved through a simple sovereignty partition and that more creative arrangements are required.

The Division That Reflects Reality

West Jerusalem is Israeli. It has been Israeli since 1948. Its population is overwhelmingly Jewish and it functions as Israel's seat of government. No realistic framework changes this.

East Jerusalem is Palestinian in population and in character. As of 2020, its approximately 595,000 inhabitants were 61% Palestinian Arab and 39% Jewish Israeli.³ Its Arab neighbourhoods have been home to Palestinian families for generations. A Palestinian state whose capital is not in East Jerusalem is a state that will struggle to command the legitimacy it needs to function.

This division — West Jerusalem Israeli, East Jerusalem Palestinian — reflects the reality on the ground rather than requiring its transformation. The difficulty is not with this division. The difficulty is with the square kilometre that sits between them.

The Old City: Where Sovereignty Fails

The Old City contains the Western Wall — the holiest accessible site in Judaism; the Church of the Holy Sepulchre — the holiest site in Christianity; and the Haram al-Sharif, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock — the third holiest site in Islam.⁴ Nowhere else on earth are competing sacred claims so intensely concentrated in such a small physical space.

Conventional sovereignty frameworks fail the Old City for a simple reason: they require a determination of who governs, which implies a determination of whose claim is primary, which neither people can accept without betraying something essential to their identity. The framework proposed here resolves this by removing the Old City from the sovereignty question entirely and placing it under a distinct legal regime — joint Israeli-Palestinian administration with international guarantees.

The joint administration body — provisionally the Jerusalem Old City Authority — shall be constituted equally by Israeli and Palestinian representatives, with a small international component. Its mandate covers the physical administration of the Old City but not the

¹ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims* (Knopf, 1999); UN, *General Armistice Agreement between Jordan and Israel*, 3 April 1949, UN Doc S/1302/Rev.1.

² Dennis Ross, *The Missing Peace* (FSG, 2004), pp. 691–730.

³ Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, cited in: WCC, *EAPPI Fact Sheet: Demographics of East Jerusalem* (oikoumene.org, 2024).

⁴ Bernard Wasserstein, *Divided Jerusalem*, 3rd ed. (Profile Books, 2008).

governance of its residents, who shall be citizens of whichever state they choose, with freedom of movement between the two.

The existing Jordanian Waqf custodianship of the Islamic holy sites on the Haram al-Sharif — formally codified in Article 9(2) of the 1994 Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty⁵ and longstanding in practice — shall be formally incorporated into the framework and continued. Jewish access to the Western Wall shall be guaranteed under equivalent terms. Christian access to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and other Christian holy sites shall be guaranteed with equivalent force.

The Temple Mount

No paper on Jerusalem can avoid the Temple Mount directly. It is the single most contested piece of ground on earth and the place where the framework faces its hardest test.

The current arrangement — Muslim administration of the Haram al-Sharif by the Jordanian Waqf, with Jewish access to the exterior Western Wall but not to the mount itself for prayer — has operated with varying degrees of stability since 1967. It is deeply unsatisfactory to Jewish religious nationalists who regard the mount as the holiest site in Judaism. It is non-negotiable for Muslims, for whom the presence of Jewish prayer on the Haram al-Sharif represents an intolerable challenge to the sanctity of Al-Aqsa. Every serious escalation of violence at the site in recent decades has demonstrated how quickly instability there becomes instability everywhere.⁶

The framework does not attempt to resolve the theological question — which is irresolvable — but to manage the practical one. The Jordanian Waqf's custodianship is preserved and formalised. The question of Jewish prayer on the mount itself — which has no historical precedent in the modern period and which carries catastrophic destabilisation risk — is referred to an ongoing dialogue body within the Jerusalem Old City Authority, with the explicit understanding that any change requires consensus of all parties and international agreement.

This is not a resolution. It is an honest acknowledgment that some questions are not ready to be resolved and that the attempt to resolve them prematurely produces more violence than the ambiguity they currently contain. The Good Friday Agreement's deliberate constitutional ambiguity — which allowed incompatible claims to coexist within the same legal text — is the appropriate model. Managed ambiguity in service of practical stability is not a failure of imagination. It is, in this context, the highest form of political wisdom.

Joint administration asks Israelis to accept that Jerusalem is not exclusively theirs — that the city they regard as their eternal and undivided capital contains a dimension that is shared, and that the practical expression of that sharing requires genuine Palestinian partnership in its governance. It asks Palestinians to accept that their capital in East Jerusalem exists alongside an Israeli West Jerusalem and a jointly administered Old City. Neither ask is comfortable. Both are honest. And both are worth making — because the alternative is a city that continues to be the place where peace goes to die.

⁵ Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty, Article 9(2), 26 October 1994 (Avalon Project, avalon.law.yale.edu); Arab Center DC, *Jerusalem's Status Quo Agreement* (arabcenterdc.org, 2022).

⁶ Institute for National Security Studies, *The Risk of Changing the Status Quo on the Temple Mount* (inss.org.il, 2025).

Paper Five: The Iranian Dimension

The Iranian Dimension: Proxy Armies, Nuclear Ambition and the Architecture of Regional Security

Abstract

The framework developed in the preceding papers describes what a just and durable Israeli-Palestinian settlement looks like. It does not, on its own, describe what makes that settlement survivable. This paper addresses the gap. Iran is not merely a complicating factor in the regional normalisation process — it is the primary strategic force whose explicit doctrine requires the perpetuation of the conflict and whose military architecture is designed to prevent any settlement that normalises Israeli existence. A Palestinian state achieved without addressing the Iranian dimension would be born into a security environment that makes its survival deeply uncertain.

Iran as Strategic Architect

Iran is not a spoiler in the way that extremist factions on both sides are spoilers. Iran is a sovereign state with a deliberately constructed ideology that designates the elimination of Israel as a constitutional commitment¹ — a founding feature of the Islamic Republic — and a deliberately constructed network of armed proxies stretching from Lebanon to Iraq to Yemen to Gaza, through which it actively pursues that goal. Its opposition to any Israeli-Palestinian settlement is not incidental to its foreign policy. It is its foreign policy. Iran does not merely oppose this framework. It opposes the premise on which this framework rests: that Israel has a legitimate right to exist in the Middle East.

The Proxy Network

Iran's proxy network is not a collection of independent actors who happen to share ideological sympathies with Tehran. It is a deliberately designed strategic architecture — the Axis of Resistance — whose components are funded, armed, trained and in varying degrees directed by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force.²

Hezbollah is the most developed component — a state within a state in Lebanon, with an arsenal estimated at over 150,000 rockets and missiles prior to the 2024 conflict,³ conventional military capability that exceeds that of most regional armies, and complete financial and military dependency on Iran. Hamas is a different kind of Iranian instrument — one whose relationship with Tehran has been complicated by sectarian tensions but which has consistently returned to Iranian patronage when material necessity required it. The October 7 operation demonstrated both the effectiveness of Iranian-supplied military capability and the catastrophic consequences for the Palestinian population of Gaza. Hamas's use of Palestinian territory, civilian infrastructure and ultimately Palestinian lives

¹ Karim Sadjadpour, *Reading Khamenei* (Carnegie Endowment, 2008); Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution* (OUP, 2009).

² US Department of the Treasury, *United States and United Kingdom Take Coordinated Action Against Hamas Leaders and Financiers* (treasury.gov, November 2023).

³ Institute for National Security Studies, cited in *Jerusalem Post* (jpost.com, 2023); Shaan Shaikh, *Hezbollah's Missiles and Rockets* (CSIS, csis.org, 2018).

as instruments of Iranian regional strategy is the most vivid illustration in the present conflict of the instrumentalisation of Palestinians for others' purposes.

A Palestinian settlement degrades the political legitimacy of the proxy network in a way that no military operation can replicate. Hamas cannot credibly claim to be fighting for Palestinian liberation when a Palestinian state exists. The Axis of Resistance derives its popular support from the Palestinian cause. A Palestinian state with recognised sovereignty removes the cause that gives the proxy network its popular legitimacy and exposes it for what it is.⁴

The April 2024 Moment

On the night of 13–14 April 2024, Iran launched a direct attack on Israeli territory for the first time in its history — over 300 drones and ballistic missiles aimed at Israeli military and civilian infrastructure. The attack was almost entirely intercepted. Israeli air defences, American military assets, British forces and — crucially — Arab state military cooperation combined to defeat the Iranian strike with remarkable completeness.⁵

The participation of Arab states in the defence of Israeli territory against Iranian attack was the most significant and least reported strategic development of the recent conflict. Jordan allowed its airspace to be used and actively participated in interceptions. Saudi Arabia shared intelligence. The Arab-Israeli security cooperation that Israeli and Gulf governments had been developing discreetly for years was activated in a live combat environment and performed.

This moment revealed something of enormous strategic significance: the embryonic architecture of a regional security coalition against Iran already exists. It is not formalised. It has no treaty basis. But it functioned when tested. This paper argues for the formalisation of that embryonic coalition into an explicit, structured, treaty-based regional security arrangement — provisionally the Middle East Security Compact.

The Architecture of a Regional Security Arrangement

A formal regional security compact would have several distinct components. Collective air and missile defence — building on the April 2024 interception to institutionalise shared early warning systems and coordinated interception protocols. Structured intelligence sharing on Iranian military movements and proxy activities — again, already occurring informally between Israel and several Gulf states. Proxy containment obligations — member states would undertake explicit commitments to prevent Iranian-backed armed organisations from operating on their territory. And a joint security guarantee for the Palestinian state — a commitment by member states to defend Palestinian sovereignty against armed destabilisation by any actor, including explicitly Iranian-backed organisations.

The compact cannot function without American and European engagement. The United States provides the ultimate security guarantee that makes Arab state participation credible. European engagement provides economic incentives for Iranian restraint and the multilateral legitimacy that purely American or Israeli-led arrangements lack.

⁴ International Crisis Group, *Ending the War in Gaza: The Day After and the Broader Regional Puzzle* (ICG, 2024).

⁵ UK House of Commons Library, *Israel-Iran April 2024*, Research Briefing CBP-10002 (April 2024); CSIS, *The Iran-Israel Air Conflict, One Week In* (csis.org, April 2024); FDD, *What We Can Learn from Iran's Attack on Israel* (fdd.org, April 2024).

The Nuclear Question

Iran is, by the assessment of most serious analysts, a threshold nuclear state.⁶ Its enrichment programme has advanced to levels that leave minimal breakout time. The JCPOA's partial constraints have been progressively eroded since the American withdrawal in 2018.

The available policy options are genuinely unappetising. Military strikes can delay but almost certainly cannot eliminate the Iranian nuclear programme, and carry severe escalation risks. Diplomatic engagement has proven unable to produce verifiable limits on Iranian enrichment. Deterrence — accepting Iranian nuclear capability and building a security architecture that contains its strategic consequences — is the most intellectually honest available option, even if it is also the most uncomfortable one.⁷

This paper does not pretend to resolve the nuclear question. It argues that the regional security compact is the appropriate framework within which to manage the nuclear dimension — that a formalised Arab-Israeli security arrangement with American and European backing provides the deterrence architecture that makes Iranian nuclear use strategically irrational.

The Palestinian Settlement and Iranian Penetration

A newly sovereign Palestinian state will inherit a political landscape in which Iranian-backed organisations have deep roots, established military infrastructure, and genuine popular support among parts of the Palestinian population. The Palestinian Authority's inability to exercise effective control over Gaza before October 7 illustrates the scale of this challenge.

The framework cannot disarm Hamas by diplomatic instrument. What it can do is create the political conditions under which Hamas's military role becomes politically illegitimate and strategically untenable.⁸ A Palestinian state whose sovereignty is internationally guaranteed, whose borders are monitored, and whose Arab neighbours have explicitly committed to preventing Iranian proxy penetration, creates a fundamentally different political environment than the current one. The Lebanese experience with Hezbollah demonstrates how difficult the disarmament of entrenched Iranian-backed organisations can be — but the legal and political framework within which the attempt can be made is entirely different for a sovereign Palestinian state than for a stateless authority.

Conclusion: The Settlement That Requires a Security Architecture

The Palestinians require dignity. The Israelis require security. Those two requirements are the essence of what resolution must deliver. But Israeli security in the presence of a nuclear-threshold Iran, an Iranian proxy network designed to encircle and destabilise, and a Hamas organisation whose survival depends on the perpetuation of conflict — that security cannot be delivered by a bilateral peace agreement alone, however carefully constructed.

What the April 2024 moment demonstrated is that the regional coalition capable of providing that security architecture is not a utopian aspiration. It functioned. It exists in

⁶ Arms Control Association, *The Status of Iran's Nuclear Program* (armscontrol.org, updated 2024); IAEA, GOV/2024/41 (August 2024); UK FCDO, E3 Statement (gov.uk, September 2024); CRS Report R40094 (Library of Congress, 2024).

⁷ Arms Control Association, *The Status of Iran's Nuclear Program* (armscontrol.org, 2024); Lawrence Freedman, *Deterrence* (Polity Press, 2004).

⁸ International Crisis Group, *Ending the War in Gaza* (ICG, 2024); CRS Report R47754 (Library of Congress, 2024).

embryonic form.⁹ The political will to formalise it is present in the Gulf states, whose fear of Iranian power projection is more immediate and visceral than their historical solidarity with the Palestinian cause. It is present in Israel, whose strategic interest in formalised Arab security cooperation is self-evident. And it is present — or should be — in Washington and European capitals.

The Iranian problem does not have a clean answer. What this paper argues is that the absence of a clean answer is not an argument for ignoring the problem — it is an argument for building the most robust available architecture for managing it. A Palestinian state and a secure Israel are possible. They are more possible than the dominant discourse suggests. But they are possible only within a regional security environment that takes Iran seriously as a structural problem rather than a manageable inconvenience.

⁹ CSIS, *The Iran-Israel Air Conflict, One Week In* (csis.org, April 2024); FDD, *What We Can Learn from Iran's Attack on Israel* (fdd.org, April 2024).