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# I. DOMESTIC CONSTRAINTS ON MIDDLE EAST NEGOTIATIONS

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## Domestic Constraints On Middle East Negotiations - A Palestinian Perspective

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### Introduction

The late 1980s witnessed major changes in the international balance of power and the centralization of the political decision-making in Washington with the full consent of Europe.

In the light of the Gulf crisis and war, the Arab World became more divided than ever before, with each Arab capital pursuing its own domestic agenda. At the same time it became obvious that the Palestine Question was no longer a central issue for the Arab countries and Israel began to enjoy open diplomatic venues with India, China and East European countries, as well as a gradual normalization process with the Arab states.

In the midst of this political environment, the Palestinian people and their leadership lost their international allies, most remarkably Moscow, mourned the retreat of brotherly Arab support, and found themselves at the doorsteps of an unknown future.

### Negotiation Options

Learning from their experiences in the bilateral and multilateral negotiations in Madrid, Washington and Moscow, the Palestinians

realized that they had been left with only three political options, which were as follows:

- 1) to negotiate the initial Israeli agenda, i.e., the Autonomy Plan, which was the maximum the Israeli Government - whether Likud or Labor - was ready to offer;
- 2) to negotiate the American agenda advocating a transitional phase towards self-rule in the OPT, with the eventual objective of reaching arrangements for a future confederation with Jordan. The political scenario Washington put before the Palestinians had not changed since the Reagan Initiative of September 1982;
- 3) to negotiate a Palestinian national plan that had gradually developed in the Palestinian political thinking throughout several stages, from the 1964 PNC resolution calling for an independent state in the whole of Palestine, to a confederation with Jordan (February 1985 Palestinian-Jordanian accords), to the 1988 PNC Declaration of Independence, calling for a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with Jerusalem as its capital.

At one stage US Secretary of State Baker told the Palestinians that if they did not present their own negotiation agenda they would be left with only the Israeli proposal (Autonomy Plan) as a basis for negotiations. After 22 months of negotiations in Washington, the Palestinian negotiating team delivered the PISGA (Palestinian Interim Self Government Arrangements) Plan, which basically consisted of a transitional phase ruled by a national authority, Palestinian elections, and Israeli military withdrawal.

## **Constraints Concerning the Current Process**

### ***1. The Question of Jerusalem***

The Declaration of Principles (DoP), signed by the PLO and Israel in September 1993, states that the permanent status negotiations will commence no later than the beginning of the third year of the interim period and will cover all remaining issues including Jerusalem. Article V, 4 reads: "The two parties agree that the outcome of the permanent status negotiations should not be prejudiced or preempted by agreements reached for the interim period." In the Oslo Agreement, the Palestinians agreed to defer the status of Jerusalem in exchange for

an Israeli commitment to preserve the territorial integrity of the West Bank and Gaza. Despite this and notwithstanding international condemnation of Israeli measures and unilateral actions taken to change the *status quo* of the city, the Israeli Government is constantly violating its commitment by stressing that Jerusalem will remain undivided under Israeli control and the “eternal capital” of Israel and by trying to create more facts on the ground before the commencement of the final status talks, thus leaving nothing to negotiate about.

When the Palestinian negotiators went to Oslo they made it very clear from the beginning that the Palestinians’ minimum demand was an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip with Jerusalem as its capital. Their perspective on the question of Jerusalem that they presented to the Israelis was as follows:

- Jerusalem is divided. The Western part has been under unilateral Israeli control since 1948 without anyone’s consent while the Eastern part has been occupied by Israeli military forces since 1967 - the two parts are not united;
- East Jerusalem is geographically and demographically an inseparable part of the West Bank;
- no party should have exclusive sovereignty over the city;
- no party should control the city at the expense of the other party;
- the political and religious dimensions of the city are inseparable for they deal with people and their rights and beliefs as well as the holiness of Jerusalem and its holy places.

The Israeli negotiators responded in Oslo by saying that they understand the Palestinian position and are very aware of the sensitive nature of the Jerusalem issue and the symbolism of the city, as well as the strong attachment to Jerusalem felt by both peoples. In acknowledgment of this, they drafted Article V of the DoP. Palestinians showed their goodwill by agreeing to this Article.

Meanwhile, however, the Palestinians have realized that the Israeli “threat” regarding the city of Jerusalem still exists, first and foremost in terms of land: less than 14% of the total land of East Jerusalem remains for the Palestinians; 34% of East Jerusalem land has already been confiscated and 52% of the land has been classified by Israel as

'Green Land' on which building is forbidden. As for the Old City, the Jewish Quarter is the only part to have benefited from the development schemes of the West Jerusalem Municipality.

The second threat is of a demographic nature: today, there are 330,000 Israelis living in West Jerusalem, while 160,000 Palestinians and 140,000 Israeli settlers (or 160,000 according to Israeli statistics) live in East Jerusalem. The continuing settlement policy has helped to maintain the population ratio at 1967 levels. Palestinian Jerusalemites are treated as second-class citizens and face numerous regulations, all of which aim at driving them out of the city.

The third threat to Palestinians is the ongoing Israeli closure policy and the subsequent isolation of Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian territories. Jerusalem is the center of Palestine, but the land's symbolic meaning for all Palestinians is lost without the city. As a result of the ongoing closure, Ramallah and Gaza are potentially capable of replacing Jerusalem as the center.

When Israel and Jordan signed the Washington Declaration, in which both sides re-affirmed the present special role of the Hashemite Kingdom with regard to Muslim holy shrines in Jerusalem, they agreed, "When negotiations on the permanent status will take place, Israel will give high priority to the Jordanian historic role in these shrines." With this agreement, Israel and Jordan bypassed the Palestinians and their rights in the city and divided them into ethnic-religious groups by excluding the Christian holy places, marking the first official separation of the Muslim Palestinians from the Christian Palestinians and of the religious dimension from the political one. The agreement also opened the door for foreign churches to make new claims regarding rights and custodianship.

The complexity of the issue is one of the reasons why future scenarios concerning Jerusalem have never been seriously considered by the Palestinian leadership or the Israeli Government.

## ***2. The Question of Palestinian National Legitimacy***

Palestinian national legitimacy is institutionalized in the PLO with its various bodies. Since Oslo, however, the authority of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people has been

challenged by the new institutions established on national soil. The Palestinian National Council (PNC) with over 450 appointed members assembles 'outside'. The PLO Central Council with its 100 members is another example of an outside institution that has remained in the Diaspora and not become part of the new inside structure. The Executive Committee, which has always been the central decision-making body in the PLO, is fading away as the PA becomes established. The overall question is whether these long-time national bodies will maintain their roles and functions or whether their future role will be limited to the Diaspora. Will the Palestinians have two representative bodies, one inside and one outside, or will Chairman Arafat as the head of both be able to merge them under his direct authority?

The conflict of interest between the inside and the outside since Oslo cannot be denied. Previously, the PLO maintained 'harmony' between both sides, but now competition dominates, due to the fact that the agreement is not fully accepted by all while a new official internal leadership is emerging.

What many people now regard as acceptable would be for the PLO to play a role from the Diaspora as the Jewish Agency did in the pre-state era of Israel. The PLO created another option during the *Intifada* in the form of the UNLU [Unified National Leadership of the Uprising], which united and linked the inside with the outside.

Another main question relates to the Palestinian leadership, which is in a serious crisis. If we look at recent academic polls relating to the names of Palestinian leaders we hardly find any name other than 'Arafat'. This is a big constraint since the absence of a leadership means no representatives and no legitimacy. The new Arafat-appointed figures are not real leaders, neither are they recognized as such. Only elections can legitimize leaders; elections deliver new faces, new blood and new thinking. But as of now, we have only leading notables, faction representatives, professionals, and businessmen.

Another constraint in the Palestinian national political agenda is the advancement of local interests and concerns at the expense of national unity. The Palestinian towns and districts are separated under the recent Israeli concept of re-deployment, which not only divides them into Zones A, B and C, but virtually isolates them from each other.

This aims at the 'ghettoization' of Palestine, i.e., the loss of the territorial integrity and opens the door for local agendas that may widen the gap between the people. Hebron, for example, is a special case with many specific problems and issues. The daily life of Hebronites is so dominated by the confrontation with radical settlers and the Israeli Army, which affects schools, businesses and institutions, that they have become less concerned with wider national issues. The cause of cities and towns threatens to replace the national cause. Such 'special city cases' make it almost impossible to unite everyone under one agenda. Gaza is another example: I, as a Palestinian Jerusalemite, now need an Israeli-issued permit to enter Gaza! There is not one place left to which everyone has access and where all Palestinians can meet to discuss and exchange their ideas and plans for the future or to follow up on a dialogue or united national agenda. This geopolitical fragmentation is leading to a national fragmentation of the people, and to division and competing interests.

### ***3. The Question of the Performance of the PA***

The 'non-performance' of the PA is a serious constraint since the PA is losing credibility day by day, which is a big obstacle to the continuation of the peace negotiations and to making any progress on the Palestinian-Israeli track, as it weakens the legitimacy of the authority. We have police forces, ministers, institutions, civil servants and so on - but nothing moves.

There is also no consistency in the negotiations. The PA Executive functions in an autocratic manner, and no one knows if the negotiator of one round will still be in that position for the next round of talks, not even the negotiator himself. Nabil Sha'ath, for example, started to negotiate on elections, but now it is Abu Ala's turn; Faisal Husseini, meanwhile, began the talks on detainees but was then replaced by Nabil Sha'ath. Maybe things will improve and become more organized once we have elections. The basic problem was and remains, that since Oslo, the PLO resigned from armed struggle and became a negotiator, but one in a weak position. Confusion and instability prevail with regard to spending, accountability and legal matters and no one really knows what is going on or who is responsible. The drafting and passing of a Basic Law should therefore be a top priority on the agenda of the to-be-elected members of the PA assembly.

#### ***4. The Question of the Legal System***

The current legal system in the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip is still a 'jungle', combining Egyptian, Jordanian, Israeli and British (Mandate) laws and bylaws. At the same time, there are still many open questions regarding the shape of a future Palestinian constitution: Will it be according to the old PNC charter? What will the state be like? What will the security arrangements be? What will be the role and position of religion and will there be secular or Islamic laws? These uncertainties do not help in building confidence in the current interim phase among the people.

In terms of internal security we have the 'Jericho example', i.e., military people such as Jibril Rajoub with their followers taking control. In Gaza, Arafat governs and rules, while in the West Bank, it is still the Israeli security apparatus that is in control. The unanswered questions are: Who will take over, when and how?

#### ***5. The Question of the Israeli Agenda***

Amongst the biggest obstacles to peace are the settlements and settlers. The settlers are partly backed by Israeli army generals who are against leaving the OPT and who want to maintain full control over the Palestinian Territories. The Palestinians have repeatedly stressed that without finding a real solution to this problem it will be impossible to reach stability, security and a lasting future agreement.

Another item on the Israeli agenda is the plan of 'zoning' and dividing the West Bank under the cover of redeployment (Zone A, B and C). The aim of the Israelis is to cripple the PA and to separate and fragment the West Bank even further. What is Ramallah, for example, without its surrounding and neighboring villages? Real re-deployment is not likely nor expected; most people anticipate that even after the 'withdrawal' the Israeli presence in the Palestinian Territories will continue in a modified way. What we will witness is not withdrawal according to the true sense of the word but military rearrangement within the Palestinian territories in accordance with Israeli security interests.

The fact that Israel is not as seriously committed to the peace process as it would like to make the world believe is reflected by the current situation of the prisoners and detainees who are still in Israeli jails, despite the signed agreements. How can Palestinian negotiators convince the people to progress on the Palestinian-Israeli track if there is hardly a Palestinian house without a family member still behind Israeli bars?

## ***6. The Question of the Economy***

The Palestinians attach very high priority to the need to restructure economic relations with Israel on more equitable grounds, so that they are based on free choice and inter-dependency, and not on subordination and unilateral dependency. Yet, a great majority of Palestinians would still perceive continued economic interaction with Israel to constitute the cornerstone of their economy, at least for many years to come. However, while people continuously hear about projects, donor conferences, funds, new banks and financial institutions, their socioeconomic situation has undoubtedly deteriorated since the signing of the DoP. Palestinian laborers have been replaced by foreign workers, and commerce and trade in the Palestinian territories is crippled by the Israeli-imposed restrictions on movement. Moreover, foreign and Palestinian investors are reluctant to invest in the region in the light of the prevailing political situation.

As for the future of the Palestinian economy, there are two main schools of thought: One is calling for a clear divorce from the Israeli economy and to revive economic relations with the Arab countries in the region. Its adherents argue that the Palestinian economy cannot continue to depend solely on Israel and that a separate economic system and structure must be developed. The other school of thought advocated the Benelux model (future regional cooperation between Palestine, Israel, and Jordan) as a separate Palestinian economy is not viable.

## ***7. Conclusion***

Taking into consideration the various above mentioned constraints on the Palestinian domestic level, the following potential future scenarios

for the current peace process as well as for the future of the parties involved are thinkable.

If the current peace process will proceed and achieve some success in spite of the delayed implementation of what was agreed upon or the expected difficulties and obstacles that may emerge regarding certain issues, the Palestinian national struggle will reach its objectives of freedom and independence. The Palestinians, therefore, will be able to enjoy self-determination and build the new Palestine in the territories of their homeland that was occupied in 1967.

However, if the Israeli Government will retreat and not fulfill its commitment to the Oslo Accords, continues to challenge the Palestinians on major issues such as the question of Jerusalem, land confiscations, settlement expansion, and make further attempts to weaken the PA, this will open the door for division among Palestinians and lead to a state of chaos and possibly a Palestinian civil war. As a result of this, Israeli forces will continue to occupy the OPT, while the Palestinians will continue to be deprived of their independence, freedom and self-determination. A potential outcome of such a scenario is the existence of a *de facto* bi-national state, in which the Palestinian people will always have less rights and opportunities than the Israelis, and the situation will be similar to that which exists within an 'apartheid' system.

Another possible scenario is that the Israeli Government will push for the achievement of a revised 'Jordan Option' in such way that Jordan will have a say in the future of Palestine and its people. Jordan will avoid these attempts for various reasons: first and foremost in order to maintain its sovereignty, independence and to prevent the establishment of a Jordanian-Palestinian state on Jordanian soil. Palestinians, also, will reject such attempts.



# Domestic Constraints On Middle East Negotiations - A Jordanian Perspective

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Before I start I would like to make clear that when I say "we" I refer to Jordanians and Palestinians.

A first constraint to normalization on the part of Jordan is a lack of information. For example, Jordanians were not aware about Jordanian land occupied by Israel until Madrid, when this issue was put on the agenda. The issues of the past were Jaffa, Jerusalem, etc. Then the peace process began and now, after the peace treaty signed between Jordan and Israel, the Jordanians do not see any changes in the Israeli attitude towards them, no corresponding shift from the former stereotypical perception. Nothing has changed to the advantage of the Jordanians.

Secondly, the expected economic dividend has not been felt. Now it is even denied that it was ever promised. For the people it is as if they contributed to the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict but did so while failing to settle the refugee problem or the Jerusalem question, and by selling out the Palestinian people on the West Bank. At the beginning, the peace treaty was highly supported and there were high expectations although the people still mistrusted Israel. Now, however, the mistrust has increased and even prevails. Before, more than 80% believed that an economic boom would result from the peace treaty, but we all know that nothing occurred. The support for normalization has declined considerably.

A third constraint is the government's - here I mean the King as well as Majali - attitudes and policies. The King panicked; he wanted to settle the peace treaty with Israel and he did it in secret. Since last summer, we have seen a lot of censorship and other forms of oppression on the part of the government. On TV and radio programs, for example, the newly emerged democratic debates were replaced by discriminatory, tribal and antiquated ceremonies and parades praising

the King's efforts toward peace. This kind of control has shifted even more people towards the opposition. Last summer, the opposition was in defense and adopted an attitude of "we accept you are signing the treaty but don't expect us to support it". Now the government is in defense and the opposition takes action; some - especially from the Islamist camp - call on the King to cancel the peace treaty. For many others there is no reason to support the peace treaty (anymore) since nothing has changed and the government even steps backwards, dropping certain democratic achievements. Nevertheless, the agreement remains intact and has made the Jordanian-Palestinian relationship inside Jordan, which had declined notably since the Gulf War anyway, worse than ever.

I think the King enjoys at least 40-50% support among the Jordanian population, but this support is not necessarily connected with the peace process. The peace treaty has definitely isolated him and the core of the Jordanian state has gone backwards, emphasizing tradition and old forms of control, which were believed to have been overcome. These developments have not contributed positively to the King's popularity, but they concern the new invention of old mechanisms rather than the peace treaty itself.

Additionally, the links between Israel and Jordan are not cut, only hidden. Every side just looks at what's in it for them. On the other hand, Arafat's standing is not too great; were there elections, the King would win with a clear majority against Arafat. The King is very aware about the possibility or alternative of the Palestinian link but he is also scared - just remember the events in the 1950-60s. He appreciated, though, people like Hanan Ashrawi and Faisal Husseini with their modernity, wishing he had more people like them at his own disposal. The fact is, the King and Arafat mistrust each other and that is a big obstacle.

As for what comes after the King - honestly, I don't know. But I can say that the more democratic Jordan becomes and the more it is regarded as Pan-Arab, the better are the chances and prospects for the future of Jordan, and the more democratization slows down and the Pan-Arab approach declines, the worse it will be. We need to be more innovative. You cannot stress Jordanization, for example, since there are also Palestinians. We have to be more open and liberal.

The political elite will not be able to lead the Jordanian state into the 21st century. Economically, we have to reduce the army, we have to fight unemployment and to push economic development, and we also have to be open to the Palestinians in terms of employment and political representation. The shape that the Jordanian state takes today must and will fade away and be replaced according to Jordan's demographic structure and needs. And within this, there is no place for the old elites and their attitudes. This is why Jordan has to be transformed and adjusted to the political and demographic requirements of the future.

The Israeli issue in Jordan is very difficult. Hence, I was shocked by the maturity of negotiations in South Africa between the ANC and the Afrikaans. Their common goal was a better future for all and to work equally together to achieve this end. This should be taken as a precedent for us. It is time now for us to go beyond Pan-Arabism, and for the Israelis to go beyond Zionism.

I do not think Jordan is a democratic and social welfare state. It is not. The distribution of the cake was nothing except a measure to secure support through the establishment of a wide patron-client system. The King has taken people he trusts and who owe everything to him. He wouldn't take the risk of involving people of whom he is not one hundred percent sure. And now, for some reason, he has stopped the process of democratization and modernization.

The law of order and the rule of law are increasingly taking over in Jordan. They are being applied in all spheres of life, replacing tribal law. Basically, fragmentation is promoted by stressing Jordanian and Palestinian, south and north, instead of combining and uniting things. By the way, just the other day I listened to the PLO Radio and lost all my hope. It's worse than Amman!



# Internal Constraints On The Arab-Israeli Peace Process: An Israeli View

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## **I. Introduction**

I wrote the first draft of this paper several months prior to the May 1996 Israeli election and it is no longer clear whether I should be writing about the internal constraints on the road to peace or on the internal Israeli factors that have sabotaged the peace process.

The opening sentence may sound overly pessimistic. Doubt, however, is not a prognosis. Only the future will show whether the desire for peace has, in all camps, overcome its opponents. Healthy skepticism may, however, serve as a tonic for clear thinking. For the peace process to succeed, it must remain the top priority on the national agendas of Israel and the Arab nations for a long time. As I will detail below, there is no lack of other values, aspirations, and interests that may shunt peace aside if given the opportunity.

Clearly, it is not solely Israel's internal politics that will determine whether the peace process continues. There are obviously ideologies, interests, and people in the Palestinian camp that have the potential for torpedoing it as well. But while I will, during the course of the analysis, refer to some Palestinian obstacles, the focus of the article is the obstacle within Israel. I believe that the dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians will lead to the greatest benefits if each of us first looks after the briars growing in one's own backyard. Furthermore, my own work of many years with Israeli society has trained me to direct my gaze inward, even if the view outside is no less interesting and relevant.

## **II. One Hundred Years of Animosity**

More than Israel and its neighbors have caused the conflict between them, they have been shaped by it. At the beginning of this century,

there was a Zionist movement (which had the allegiance of only a small minority of European Jewry), but there was no Israeli nation. Zionism took form as part of the effort to settle Palestine with Jews. These attempts were met with the opposition of the local residents. The need to oppose Jewish settlement, or to counter that opposition, became the major motive in the establishment of both national movements, and later in the emergence of three peoples - the Israelis, the Jordanians, and the Palestinians. Students of Israeli society could hardly overlook the contribution of the external conflict to the creation of their nation. The conflict made it possible to recruit both material and political support from Diaspora Jewry and friendly governments; the requirements of national security could be used by the government to silence or at least moderate criticism. Everything, from the estimation of economic feasibility to the fine points of democratic legitimacy, from the demands of universal morality to the strict standard of Western culture, was made contingent on the need to ensure security and survival. Security needs thus became a kind of 'environment' to which Israeli leaders in all areas had to adjust as a precondition for their success. Whoever did not prove his ability to contribute, if only indirectly, to Israel's military strength generally did not succeed in reaching the political top and staying there. The minuscule influence of great men like Martin Buber and his associates shows how little people who were not involved in the security enterprise could affect Israeli society, while the important place former commanders and generals play in the country's political and economic leadership shows how the military aura has given such men influence in all walks of life<sup>1</sup>.

The senior officer corps' penetration of leadership echelons in so many fields can be traced back to the decision made in the mid-1950s by David Ben Gurion and Moshe Dayan to keep the army young by discharging senior officers when they reached their early 40s. These young but seasoned men, equipped with a modest but stable income, and with the glamour of their association with a powerful and victorious organization, were assets that could hardly be disregarded by enterprises that were then just beginning to develop. Like many successful processes, this military penetration of the political and business communities became a self-perpetuating phenomenon. When the first generation of former officer leaders needed aides, deputies, and

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<sup>1</sup> See Ben Eliezer, A. [1995], *A History of Israeli Militarism 1936-56*.

heirs, they turned quite naturally to their deputies and adjutants from their army days. An army man could be expected to succeed in a place where a mere civilian would fail, especially when he was being judged by another former army man.

During one hundred years of Arab-Israeli conflict, the military tenaciously gained vested interests not only in leadership positions, but also in all other areas of life. The defense system is one of the largest customers of Israeli industry. The army wanted to reduce its dependence on weapons supplies from overseas, and was therefore willing to pay the prices necessary to ensure the local production of weapons that could compete with foreign products. Afterwards, in order to cover, or at least minimize, these industries' losses, the government encouraged massive exports to almost any country that was willing to purchase them. Unfortunately, these countries underwent a process of 'negative selection', and were often those states whose international stature (determined in many cases by their internal regimes) did not permit them to purchase weapons on reasonable terms from one of the western industrial states.

Military activity and the sale of 'commercial' weapons sustained each other. Israeli weaponry was tried in battle again and was identified as a factor contributing to victory' simultaneously overseas arms sales allowed continued production and development of new generations of weapons. An ever-growing portion of the Israeli economy became dependent on the state of tension and enmity between Israel and its neighbors. Thus the economic, political, and military profits of war became part of the price of peace.

### **III. External War and Internal Conflict**

It is well known that nothing subdues internal conflicts like a common enemy. Such is the case in families, communities, countries, and even in entire regions (for example, west-European unity in the face of the threat from the east). It is almost inevitable that political elites will exploit real or imaginary external dangers in order to rally the public around them. Every foreign policy move has implications for internal policy, and *vice versa*. Let us explore the actual effects of these general principles in the Israeli context.

Immigrant societies are by definition pluralist. Ethnic groups are formed by immigrants according to their country of origin. Such ethnic groups emerged in the pre-state Jewish community in Palestine. During the 1950s and 1960s these dozens of groups consolidated into two major blocs: Orientals (Sephardim) and Ashkenazim. This division was given religious sanction as early as the era of Turkish rule, when the government appointed two Chief Rabbis, each of whom headed, and still heads, his own administrative and juridical system. Later, the definition of the blocs changed, de-emphasizing the religious and historical background and focusing on the geographic origin: Jews from Asia and Africa versus Jews from Europe and the Americas. Under either definition, the majority of Sephardim are people with an Arab cultural background, in contrast with the Eastern European background of most of the Ashkenazim. As the Arab World was publicly defined as 'The Enemy', mid-Eastern Jews faced a choice: to align themselves unambiguously with the largely Ashkenazi Jewish community or to remain, in the long run, a marginal group whose political loyalty was in doubt. The low (collective) status of the Arab minority in Israel may have been an indication to the mid-Eastern Jewish immigrants of the hardships faced by 'enemy affiliated' ethnicities. The Oriental response to this situation was far-reaching. Their unequivocal adherence to the Israeli nation was expressed by manifestations of alienation and animosity towards Arabs in Israel and outside it. The Arabs became a negative reference group at which the members of minority groups could throw any 'disadvantages' they wished to divest themselves of. Many Orientals tried to rid themselves of the remnants of Arabism that interfered with their full acceptance into Israeli society, by adopting nationalist political positions.<sup>2</sup>

It was the Oriental vote that made the Likud first into the main opposition party and then, between 1977 and 1992, into the ruling party. In this way the majority of Orientals strengthened a political force who became identified with a hard line towards the Arab World in general and Palestinians in particular.

The relations between the Oriental community and the Likud became in time complex and symbiotic. The Likud leadership, most of which was still of Eastern European origin, used the Oriental community as a

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<sup>2</sup> See: Michael, S. [1974], *Equal and More Equal*, Tel Aviv, Bustan Publishers; and Y. Peres [1977], *Ethnic Relations in Israel*, Tel Aviv, Sifriat Poalim.

constituency while the Orientals used the Likud as a channel towards political power, to the point of shunting aside the historical leadership of the Labor party. The Likud's hawkish nationalistic character facilitated the attraction of Oriental-Jewish voters without becoming identified in the process as an ethnic party that plastered an ethnic label on its members and voters. The identification of the majority of oriental Jews with the right-wing in Israeli politics thus became one of the major internal obstacles on the road towards peace.

#### **IV. A Matter of Consistency**

Both Zionism and Palestinian nationalism seem to be more ideological and dogmatic than other national movements. Ostensibly they do not fight just for their national interests, but rather for 'sacred universal values' that cannot be compromised. Why?

In order to survive, and all the more so to win, both the Israelis and the Palestinians (and even the Jordanians) need external support. Israel's closest circle of support consists of the economically and politically advanced Jewish communities in the West; beyond that is a circle containing the Western democracies, centered on the US. The Palestinians' circles of support also begin with its own Diaspora and proceeds with the Arab World and large parts of the Afro-Asian 'Third World'. Over the years, each side has made many attempts to penetrate the rival's circles of support. Thus Israel developed aid and advisory relations with various countries in Asia and Africa, while the Palestinians penetrated various radical groups in the West and enlisted their political, and in extreme cases also military, support.<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that these attempts at penetration generally did not lead to lasting achievements. The support that each side was able to depend on in its hour of need still comes from its traditional sources. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was thus like a play presented on the world's stage. To keep its circles of support, each side had to keep its public both interested and convinced. This demanded constant activity: violence of all types, provocative, mutual boycotts, expressions of

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<sup>3</sup> Especially interesting in this context is the concept of indirect responsibility that was developed by leftist groups in Germany. The Israeli refusal to repatriate Palestinian refugees in 1948 was possible, according to this doctrine, because of European guilt feelings towards the Jews after World War II. This being the case, Germany and the Germans are indirectly responsible for the plight of the Palestinians and for rectifying the injustice done to them.

poverty, distress and tragedy. All this was meant to prevent the Israel-Palestinian issue from slipping from the global agenda. Such activity was necessary but not, however, sufficient. To maximize the impact of these continuous national campaigns they had to be located within an ideological context that supporters could identify with. So, brick by brick, a system of key concepts was built, one appropriate to Western culture (in Israel's case) and to the Third World, including leftist supporters (in the Palestinians' case).

The Israeli concepts included the following assertions:

- The Jewish people has both a need and a right of self-determination.
- The land of Israel belongs to the Jews on the basis of a divine promise recognized by the three monotheistic religions. This promise is not limited in time thus occupation of the land by another nation, even for hundreds of years, cannot nullify it.
- The first Israelis were pioneers who settled on empty land (or one inhabited by primitive nomads without any unique national identity).
- The Israelis are entrepreneurs who contribute scientific, economic, and social progress to a backward region.
- Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East.
- Israel is a place of refuge for the wandering and persecuted Jews.
- Israel is a center and guardian of Jewish culture. Each circle of support for Israel can identify with at least some of these slogans; even post-colonialist developing nations can derive some useful ideas or practices.

Palestinian national ideology, meanwhile, sounded in the beginning like an emotional manifestation of protest against the concepts and practices of Zionism. However, in the 1960s, a Palestinian national myth evolved that looks like a mirror-image of the Zionist-Israeli parallel:

- The Palestinians never immigrated; they have lived in Palestine since time immemorial (the ultimate form of this argument is the claim that the Palestinians are descendants of the ancient Canaanites, who were victims of the Biblical Israel invasion).
- The Zionist invasion is by nature colonialist so are its goals: the exploitation and/or eviction of indigenous populations.

- Just as the Zionist invasion is part of the European attempt to take over Asia, Africa and Latin America, so is the Palestinian resistance a component of the Third World's self-defense.
- European colonialization will end in failure, even if it scores impressive successes along the way.
- Israel must be replaced by a secular democratic state in which Jews and Palestinians will have civil rights as individuals.

A cautious analysis of each national myth will reveal a wealth of half-truths and internal contradictions. However, the explosive might of these ideologies is independent of their logical or historical validity. The main source of the credibility of such belief systems is in their completeness, so that compromise on any particular principle calls all the others into question.

If there was indeed a divine promise, as the Jewish claim goes, it applies to the entire land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean (and some would also say to present-day Jordan). If, however, the State of Israel is no more than a branch of European imperialism, as the Palestinian creed argues, then any compromise other than a 'secular democratic state' cannot be more than temporary. If the Israelis are the vanguard of the Jewish people and of secular values such as democracy and progress, then any concession or compromise contains at least an element of betrayal of those who supported Zionism and the values that lay behind that support. What turns the game the Israelis and Palestinians play on the global stage into something so authentic and persuasive is the huge investment in property, life, thought, and emotion guided by these two contradictory heroic mythologies. A leadership that compromises 'too hastily' conveys, involuntarily of course, the message that the past sacrifices were in vain. According to rational considerations, the horrible costs of war should be strong incentives to peace, but cognitive dissonance may turn rational thought on its head. A present compromise casts doubt on our righteousness in the past, and therefore also on the validity of our demands in the future. I will demonstrate this way of thinking by citing an internal debate in which the Israeli right over Sheikh Munis and Hebron were compared.

Sheikh Munis is the name of an Arab village on whose ruins Tel Aviv University was built in the 1960s. There is no evidence of the existence

of an ancient Jewish settlement on this site; on the contrary, a Philistine city has been uncovered on nearby Tel Kasila. Right-wing intellectuals have ironically 'proposed' returning Sheikh Munis to its Palestinian owners but holding on to Hebron and Bethlehem, which were Jewish in biblical times.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the quest for consistency requires acting today in a way that will justify actions taken in the past and demands which might be put forward in the future ...

In the complex reality of Israel/Palestine, in which two peoples occupy a small area, there are no internally consistent compromises from which both parties will emerge faithful to the doctrine they have preached to themselves and to others over the years. The inclination to be consistent is thus one of the forces that perpetuates the conflict.

## V. The Masada Complex: A Matter of Honor

High above the Dead Sea towers Masada, the last outpost to be captured by the Romans after they destroyed the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. Why should a fortress destroyed in the first century be a barrier to peace at the end of the twentieth century? As with any complex, this is a convoluted story that touches on the most sensitive and painful points of Jewish and Israeli identity. The uniqueness of Masada is that its defenders did not go into exile like the rest of the nation, but rather killed themselves, their wives, and their children. The message of this deed and of the speech that accompanied it is unquestionable:<sup>5</sup> survival of the individual, and even of the nation, are not supreme goals that override all others. Honor and freedom are to be preferred over life itself. Proud people do not go into exile so long as

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<sup>4</sup> See R. Pasternach & S. Zidkiahu (eds.), *A New Era or a Loss of Direction*, pp. 109-114.

<sup>5</sup> The only source for the Masada story is the history Josephus Flavius, himself a traitor and collaborator with the Romans. Since all the defenders of Masada, with the exception of two frightened women and a child, died on the mountain, Flavius could not have heard the speech he quotes verbatim. It is reasonable that a man who had chosen life with the Romans over death in war against them, constructed a noble rhetorical monument to those who had taken the opposite path. After 1900 years of mystery, this combination of poetic imagination and guilty conscience became a "historical document" symbolizing tragic Jewish heroism. In recent years several books have been published that include an in-depth and comprehensive discussion of the conditions under which the Masada myth was created and its revival in our times:

1. Ben-Yehuda, N. (1995), *The Masada Myth, Collective Memory, and Mythmaking in Israel*, Madison, Wisc., University of Wisconsin Press.
2. Zerubavel, Yael (1995), *Recovered Roots, Collective Memory, and the Making of Israeli National Tradition*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

they, or their bodies, can remain on the land. Obviously the symbol of Masada opposes the 'survival strategy' of the Jewish Exile, which perceived dispersion as destiny to be endured until the Messiah's arrival. Zionism challenged the ethos of the eternal Exile and aspired to replace it with a vision of revival and homecoming. The debate between the Zionist camp and its critics continued until the Holocaust buried most of the critics and most of their arguments - the strategy of survival through dispersion (and through lowering one's profile in order to avoid provoking the gentiles) has not proven its merit. Paradoxically, 50 years later it seems as if the Zionist solution did not provide a more complete sense of security than Western nations for their Jewish citizens. The only dimension that differentiates the existential anxiety that became part of the 'cultural genotype' of European Jewry from anxiety prevalent among Israelis boils down to a deeply felt, ever-present sense of pride. This bitter pride easily transforms into the conviction that 'the whole world is against us' and therefore 'we should stand up against the whole world'. Why is the Masada Complex a barrier to peace? Because it leads to a combination of suspicion and over-reaction. Every anti-Israeli expression or deed is perceived as a threat to the country's very existence, which in turn 'justifies' almost any response.

## **VI. Electoral Considerations: A Matter of Balance**

In many democratic regimes, the voting public is divided more or less equally between the party (or group of parties) in power and opposition. Political scientists explain this phenomenon in terms of the tendency of both major parties to 'conquer' the *center* of the political map. If the distribution of voters between political attitudes is more or less symmetrical and the major parties (or candidates) meet in the center then each of them will be supported by approximately 50% of the electorate.

Beginning with the elections of 1973 (which took place a short time after the October 1973 War), Israel entered the ranks of those democracies whose voting publics are 'balanced'. No government that has ruled since then (with the exception of the national unity governments in which both major parties participated) has had a secure parliamentary majority. At about the same time the future of the territories had become the dominant issue that determined the

country's political contours. These two processes - the focus on foreign policy and defense issues and the balance between the two major political blocs - created opportunities for relatively small political parties to serve as 'tie-breakers' and to exert a major influence on policy. I define a tie-breaker as a party that can, politically and psychologically, join a coalition with either of the main camps, and whose number of voters is greater than the difference in votes received by the two camps<sup>6</sup>.

The ultra-orthodox political parties are ideally suited to be tie-breakers. They have a clear individual and public commitment to the strict orthodox shade of Judaism. Being able to live an orthodox life for themselves and to instill at least part of this way of life into the Israeli Jewish public is much more important to them than foreign policy issues so central to other Israelis. In abstract terms an extremely dogmatic stand on one issue makes rather opportunistic conduct on all other issues inevitable. This combination of firmness and flexibility gained, for the orthodox parties political power, far beyond their share in the electorate. To preserve their outstanding influence the tie-breakers have done their best to preserve the balance between the two large camps. Until very recently they have refrained from expressing a committing attitude. In fact, the weakest political position is that of the adjunct parties that not only belong to one of the camps but have developed a more consistent and clearer version of the camp's strategy. Since their platform and their voters make it impossible for them to support the other side (by outflanking the left-wing camp on the left or the right-wing one on the right) they have no political room for maneuver. The stagnation of the balanced system and the disproportional strength of the ultra-orthodox parties were the major motivations for the recent electoral reform that provides for the direct election of the prime minister. It remains however to be seen if the reform will achieve this objective and at what price. Up to this point it may seem as if the structural balance is neutral with regard to the peace process - it does not allow either of the major parties to stray too far from the *status quo*. If, however, we recall that the *status quo* of the last 29 years has been one of occupation, we will realize how much the electoral equilibrium burdens peace initiatives, which by nature involve

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<sup>6</sup> See; Y. Peres [1988] 'Structural Balance in Israeli Politics', *Middle East Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4, pp. 27-42.

huge changes. One of the principles of democratic procedure is that a decision on change (especially a large change) requires a larger majority than a decision on maintaining stability. Under conditions of electoral equilibrium and in a system of proportional representation, it is difficult to put together a large majority. Therefore, all that the hawkish camp needs to do in order to tie the dovish camp's hands is to instill in the public the norm that 'a critical decision cannot be made by a majority of a few votes'. Since the two large camps are composed of a variety of parties and population sectors, it is always possible to disqualify one of them in order to restrict the majority's decision-making power. In the Israeli context, the right-wing leaders expressed their doubts as to whether Arab voters, and those parties whose voters are largely Arabs, can cast the deciding votes in a critical political conflict.

Two justifications have been raised in support of these doubts. First, the State of Israel was created in order to be 'the Jewish State' or 'the State of the Jewish people' (a formulation recently confirmed by the Knesset). The debate over the country's borders may thus be seen as an internal Jewish matter. Second, the position on the issue taken by the Arab representatives, it is alleged, is predetermined and motivated by alien interests - the very same interests the State of Israel was founded to protect the Jewish people against.

It should be noted that the Right-wing did not propose to abolish the Israeli Arabs' right to vote. Instead, they demanded that territorial concessions be conditioned on a majority so large that even the enlistment of all the Arab votes in favor of them would not allow it to pass. The problem of equality in civil rights is only one among many aspects of the dilemma between western-type democracy that endeavors reconciliation and peace in contrast to 'ethnic-democracy' committed primarily to the doctrines of Zionism.

If the State of Israel is characterized as having a mission that stands above the wishes of a majority of its citizens, sooner or later restrictions will have to be introduced. There will be residents who may not become citizens, and/or citizens who may not vote, and/or people whose political positions disqualify them from being elected to public office. Up until now, each of these possibilities occurred only on a small scale. Israel's political system maneuvered with impressive success between the fear of losing its Jewish-Zionist identity because of

demographic change (the birth rate of Israeli Arabs is still 75% higher than that of Israeli Jews) and the erosion of democracy.

In collaboration with my colleague, Professor Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar, I have conducted several examinations of the Israeli Jewish public's preferences for Zionist values versus democratic values (in cases where there is an unbridgeable contradiction between them). It turns out that in almost all cases (over different formulations of the questions and over time) there is a slight majority that favors democratic values. Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the fact that the fundamental balance between the hawkish-religious camp and the dovish-secular one has to contend with the extent and nature of democratic practices along with national strategies. When the debate on democratic procedures overlaps (even partially) the substantive political struggle, there is an erosion of the majority's base of legitimacy. This is particularly true if the majority is a rather small one. These deliberations bring us close to the toughest dilemma which confronts any Israeli government when establishing its relationship with the Palestinians: peace at home and war outside versus peace outside but war at home.

The genuine nature of this dilemma was tragically revealed immediately after the assassination of Prime Yitzhak Rabin. On the face of it, the emotional response to the murder was a victory for the peace camp. A second look led most observers (and more importantly, most of the political elite) to an extremely different conclusion: Israel had come dangerously close to a complete split that might descend into civil war. The use of murder as a means of settling internal dispute is not only a deviation from democracy and national solidarity, but also a message from the extreme right to the Labor-Meretz government that it has reached the limits of its tolerance. It claims that the Rabin government took unreasonable advantage of the majority's right to make decisions. A move so decisive and irreversible as a withdrawal from populated territory which turns Jewish settlements there into 'islands' should according to this view have been made only with the support of a massive majority. In the context the Camp David Agreement (which concluded peace with Egypt at the price of withdrawing from the Sinai Peninsula) is often mentioned. That agreement was approved by 90 (out of 120) members of the Knesset.

Rabin's willingness to pursue a policy of 'territories for peace' without such a broad national consensus led to personal attacks on him that

reached their climax when, at a Likud party rally, some people waved posters of the Prime Minister dressed in an SS officer's uniform. According to this interpretation, the Prime Minister's assassination rose out of the heart of the religious-right camp, and not just out of its lunatic fringe. This notion cannot, of course, be proven. Neither is it necessary to prove it, because the mere possibility is frightening enough. Nevertheless, I wish to provide an example of this claim by recalling a marginal episode that is not well-known outside Israel. A few months after the assassination, an organization of supporters of Bar Ilan University - a university with a religious character located in the Tel Aviv area - put out a fundraising booklet outlining the university's achievements. The booklet (which has since been recalled) contained more than ten photographs of law student Yigal Amir, the Prime Minister's murderer. The university's administration worked hard to persuade the public that this was an innocent mistake by the booklet's editors (who live in the US). But a minor error in an organization's publications can at times reveal deeply held values far better than well-considered, edited statements. The murderer's appearance in the booklet as a model student is an indication that he was not a marginal fanatic but someone well-regarded by his social environment. Among the condemnations of the murder voiced by right-wing and religious groups there was a whisper that became more and more clear as time went by: If such a positive boy did such a negative thing, hasn't provocation gone too far?

## **VII. The Settlements: A Matter of Self-Entrapment**

The Israeli settlements in the occupied territories are the heaviest burden weighing on the shoulders of the peace process. The issue involves not anxieties or principles but human beings whose fate will be determined by the direction in which Israel's relations with the Palestinians develop. About 120,000 Israelis live today in the West Bank, with an approximately equal number in east Jerusalem that came into Israeli hands in 1967. For all the settlements, or the great majority of them, to remain within Israel would mean a convoluted border that will require both Israelis and Palestinians to travel along 'impossible' detours in order to get from one of their settlements to

another. The settlement's security, and the special roads paved to them, will require the long-term presence of Israeli forces, which in time will frustrate Palestinians and motivate them to attack and harass the settlements. Most of the settlers are employed within sovereign Israel, since the employment possibilities in the settlements themselves are limited. This fact requires them to commute daily between the settlements and Israel-proper. Thus, the preservation of the settlements must create dangerous Palestinian-Israeli friction.

How did we get to this point? What was the rationale behind the establishment of settlements that rob Israel of its freedom to maneuver?

One of the answers is that this was precisely the intention of the planners, if not of the settlers themselves - to block the path towards an agreement of 'land for peace'. The settlement tactic served several other strategic goals as well, some of them contradictory, others controversial.

- The leaders of the Labor party, who considered the territories to be first and foremost bargaining chips in a 'territories for peace' agreement, saw that the Palestinians were in no hurry to enter into negotiations. The settlement process was meant to show them that time was not in their favor.
- A similar approach saw settlements as indications of what territories Israel intended to keep even after peace is achieved. Israel might claim this land for strategic, religious, or historic reasons.
- Finally, there was the approach that saw the settlements as a basis for claiming all the occupied territories. This approach, that of the settlers themselves, gradually took precedence over all others.

The settlements reshaped the image of religious Zionism in Israel. The archaic Hebrew mythology was restored as the mountainous swathe of land that stretches from Hebron in the south to Nablus in the north was the first area in which the ancient Hebrews settled, whereas modern Zionist settlement was concentrated on the coastal plain. The return to the cradle of ancient Hebrew culture became an exhilarating religious precept unique to religious Zionism. The establishment of

settlements in the face of opposition from the Palestinians, and at time also from the Israeli government, gained an aura of heroism in the religious Zionist community and was looked on with respect in other sectors. Graduates of religious youth movements turned from being marginal both in the secular camp (where they had been considered 'not pioneering enough') and in the religious camp (where they had been considered 'not religious enough') into a central force that realized the combination of religion and patriotism. Simultaneously, these new pioneers were given tools and resources - spacious areas to live in, weapons for self-defense, funds for educational and cultural institutions, and more. Gradually, settlement of the territories turned from being a political means into an end in and of itself. The talk about splitting away from the hedonist State of Israel with its weak national will in order to found a pious and proud 'State of Judea' should not be seen as 'a political program', but it expressed an ideal. The possibility of giving up what had been achieved over years of toil and struggle seems to the settlers totally unacceptable. Today, 25 years after the first settlements, there are young people who were born and educated in the settlements and who know no other home. Why, these young people ask, does the Left consider the transfer of Arabs from the territories to Arab lands 'criminal deportation' when, at the same time, it considers our transfer back to sovereign Israel as just and even desirable?

One does not have to be a Palestinian to understand that leaving the settlements where they are will cause incessant ferment in the future of Palestine, and one does not have to be Israeli to understand that dismantling the settlements is liable to lead to severe and long-term chaos in Israel.

## **VIII. Peace, A Matter of Social Change**

After comprehending the multitude of internal Israeli constraints on the peace process, and adding a parallel list of Palestinian constraints, the reader might despair. If the obstacles to peace are rooted firmly in the history of the struggling nationalities, if these nationalities were actually shaped by their mutual animosity, how can this terminal reality be changed?

To help the reader recover, I will tell an old story. A learned rabbi who had rejected all the trivialities of this world, spent his entire life

studying and teaching. When he had reached old age, in a moment of weakness, the rabbi gave in to the pleadings of his grandson and went with him to the zoo. When the two of them reached the giraffe's cage, the rabbi gazed at the strange creature for several long moments. Then he issued his ruling: "That can't be!"

The fact that 'that', meaning the peace process, exists and is even progressing, shows that some developments that seem implausible, nevertheless can be. Powerful forces have developed that are countering the obstacles and pushing the Israelis and the Palestinians toward each other.

The spiraling cost of modern warfare and the diminishing chances of coming out of it whole, the close supervision of an international community under the leadership of a single great power, the limitations of force under the existing circumstances - these are only some of the motivations for peace. But the major source of optimism in the face of such a pessimistic history lies in the fact that the Israelis and the Palestinians are changing, and want to change<sup>7</sup>. Past-oriented nationalism that isolates itself, and spends its time licking its wounds, is being pushed into the margins of history. Just as the beginning of the next century does not allow victory (because the world, almost automatically takes up the cause of the 'underdog'), so it looks with favor on the shattering of walls and on the establishment of flexible boundaries. It becomes increasingly clear that territorial compromise does not exhaust the price of peace, nor does it express the meaning of the process. Territorial concessions are only the down payment.

For two nations who have fought from their very inception, adjustment to peace means the initiation of major changes in respective national identities. A national identity is, perhaps the most powerful guardian of that nation's unity and continuity. Thus, introducing socio-cultural change exposes both nations to internal risks. Peace may be almost as risky as war. On the other hand, the benefits of peace are also more comprehensive than traditionally expected. For Israelis and Palestinians making peace *now* means exploiting a rare opportunity to adjust to a new world-order while benefiting from world-wide consent and

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<sup>7</sup> See Peres, Y. [1994], 'What Will Peace Do to Israeli Society' [Hebrew], in: R. Pasternak and S. Yermiyahu [eds.], *A New Era or a Loss of Direction: Israelis Speak About Peace*, Tel Aviv: Itayav Publishers.

cooperation. The American and international interest in the resolution of the eternal conflict in the Middle East gives both these small nations an opportunity to transform themselves from a burden into an asset to the rest of the world. Striving for peace is by no means costless, but it still remains a sound investment.

