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II. THE OPPOSITION AND ITS ROLE IN THE PEACE PROCESS

The Opposition and Its Role in the Peace Process - A Palestinian Perspective

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Thank you very much for inviting me to take part in this workshop. I was asked to prepare a paper on 'the opposition and its role in the peace process'. To summarize in one sentence, I can say the following: there is no role for the opposition.

I have tried to look retrospectively at the traditional role of the Palestinian opposition and how this role - including their participation in the current peace process - has developed to date. In doing so, I have divided my paper into six parts.

1. The Concept of Opposition in the Palestinian Political Context

To begin, I can say a classic Palestinian opposition has never existed. One reason for this is the fact that we have never had elections, and thus no government-opposition situation. What we call 'opposition' is still under the umbrella of the PLO, which nowadays represents the peace process. That is one reason why it is difficult to define 'opposition' in a Palestinian context. Although there is a Palestinian authority (PA) in the making and although there is some sort of opposition to the PA, their respective roles are mixed and there is no clear division between the two sides.

Secondly, if an opposition does exist, then it usually does so in relation to *specific* issues, for example the peace process; there is no *general*

opposition. Some PLO factions define themselves as opponents of the peace process, but in relation to other matters the picture changes and they no longer constitute an opposition. Take for example the issue of Jerusalem; those who oppose the peace process are not an opposition, but sit with the PA and work as one team! The position of the various factions always changes according to the topic that is under consideration. Other issues, such as refugees, can immediately turn a faction from an opposition to an ally. Therefore, opposition in Palestine is limited to specific issues.

Thirdly, the Palestinian opposition lacks experience; it does not know how to behave as an opposition, or how to play the role properly. This lack of experience leads to the confusion that is reflected in the opposition's statements.

The outside was always presented as *the* leadership while there was much less trust in the inside. Moreover, the inside was always loyal to the outside, while the opposite was not the case. A good example concerns the leaflets that were distributed at the beginning of the *Intifada*, calling for a boycott of Israel. The Gaza leadership passed a clear message, saying a boycott would cost a certain amount of money; only if this was provided by the outside, would they make sure that no one would leave Gaza to work in Israel.

2. The Concept of Opposition in Palestinian Public Opinion

The Palestinian people did not develop nor materialize in any form any special feeling for the 'opposition'. As mentioned above, separation between factions occurs only in relation to certain issues but disputes always end with a reconciliation. The occupation has played a very important role here and has created an excellent atmosphere for this situation: differences between the factions faded in the struggle against the common enemy. For example, the Islamic movement, on the whole, never presented a threat to the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. It emerged relatively late, in the 1980's, while other factions have much longer histories.

Furthermore, the concept of opposition found no space within the PLO system, which is based on, and functions by consensus. Therefore, even during the last 18 months, perhaps with one exception (the November 1994 clashes), the public never witnessed a serious confrontation between the PA and the opposition. Relations were characterized rather

by the seeking and developing of a dialogue between the two camps. Thus, with few exceptions, the public never felt that the PA-opposition relationship posed a real threat. The public's view of the opposition is determined by two main issues:

- (1) The theme of the opposition is becoming more complicated. The newly emerged and widely debated idea of 'civil war' - which is instantly related to the opposition - is a totally new phenomenon. Without a strong opposition, however, civil war should not be a major concern of the public.
- (2) The emergence of a reconciliation process after every disagreement over the last two decades makes people feel that whenever a crisis occurs, it will only be a matter of time before it is settled by the conflicting parties. Since solutions are always found, people don't know whether to regard the opposition as initiators of crises, which will be solved anyway, or as the potential perpetrators of civil war.

As a result of these circumstances there are two options for the opposition in the future; they could find an entirely new role or alternatively, continue their traditional role with some possible extensions. In the event of them choosing the first option, the threat of a civil war might become more likely, whereas in the second scenario, the cycle of crisis and solution will continue.

The opposition at the moment, as I see it, has opted for the its old role with certain extensions. The opposition's behavior in the last months vis-a-vis the PA has shown very clearly that they will not try to destroy what the PA tries to build. Rather, they 'swallow' policies and decisions rather than openly oppose the PA.

This gives the public the impression that neither side is taking the other seriously, and thus, is doing nothing significant in order to harm or challenge the other; were the two sides to take each other seriously, the opposition would become stronger. Now it is a *loyal opposition* at best. The PA, of course, is interested in maintaining the opposition's traditional role since this allows for a degree of co-option. Accordingly the PA has no interest in a new definition of the relationship with the opposition.

If the current situation does not change, reconciliation between the PA and the opposition will continue and become stronger. If, on the other hand, relations become more hostile, the use of arms - which are

available everywhere - could lead to chaos and insecurity. Therefore one can say that neither side is interested in the deterioration of the relationship.

3. The Historic Position of the Palestinian Opposition Towards the Concept of Peace

There are three main events in Palestinian history that have highlighted the opposition's attitude towards peace: the Geneva Conference of 1974, the Camp David Accords of 1978 and the Amman Agreement of the mid 1980's.

The relevant question here is whether the historical position of the opposition was always positive/supportive or negative/preventive with regard to peaceful solutions to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In other words, did the opposition work towards or against peace?

The three events mentioned above have shown that the opposition had a substantial influence in preventing any peace initiative that they regarded as failing to achieve justice and the recognition of Palestinian rights.

From Madrid to Oslo

In order to evaluate the opposition's stand, their behavior in the current peace process must be examined. Does their attitude nowadays differ from previously, for example towards Camp David?

I believe that after the Gulf War and the disappearance of the Soviet Union, new realities have emerged that makes it impossible to talk about a 'just' and 'peaceful' solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Now, the opposition is forced to find new expressions; 'just' for example, can no longer mean historical Palestine. This altered situation made the opposition look at Madrid in a different, new way. Their new view could best be described as the *concept of phases*. This became a Palestinian concept in general and one of the opposition's in particular: the distinction was made between an immediate Palestinian state and different *mahalia* (phases) towards this goal. The opposition's way of thinking became more pragmatic and more receptive to the idea of having various stages that will eventually lead to a Palestinian state. During the *Intifada* leaflets were distributed (in particular leaflet 26) that mentioned the necessity of a staged process leading to Palestinian

independence. Today, the opposition sees two stages in the existing peace process:

- the Jerusalem-Madrid-Washington stage; and
- the Oslo/post-Oslo stage.

In this context, the first stage is considered the '*premature stage*' since Israel and Palestine were always dependent on the interference of a third side, the US. Consequently, the Oslo-stage is seen as the '*mature stage*': both sides decided to get rid of the third party, perceiving themselves as 'mature' enough to go ahead alone.

During the Jerusalem-Madrid-Washington stage, the opposition was still in the making, that is, the concept of opposition towards the peace process did not materialize in terms of actions and/or statements.

The leaders of opposing factions attended PLO meetings in spite of the Madrid talks. We also used to attend briefings with the negotiating teams. I believe that the opposition always looked at this stage as another Geneva, convinced it would also fail. Therefore, they didn't attempt to mobilize support for their stand, which was totally against the talks. I remember George Habash saying at a PNC meeting that Arafat will never cross a certain line. In short, it was not felt that there was a need to develop a real opposition.

Then the Oslo Agreement came and created the real rupture! Following Oslo, the opposition boycotted the PLO Executive Committee meeting. Some people - including myself - even boy-cotted Orient House. With the shock of Oslo, the opposition felt for the first time that they had to respond and to articulate their opposition. Tension accumulated and led to disintegration, which is well reflected in the leaflets distributed at that time: it was a period of mutual animosity and blame. Oslo was the turning point at which the opposition began to take action.

The measurement of opposition activity can be seen in two dimensions:

- political versus military actions;
- the progression from the Jerusalem-Madrid-Washington stage to the Oslo stage (time factor).

Following Oslo, both mainstream and opposition political activity increased considerably: meetings, discussions and lobbying took place

everywhere in order to create public opinion that was either for, or against, the agreement. The focus of both camps was on mobilizing people. With Oslo, military actions were also launched, initially on the part of the Islamic opposition rather than the PFLP or DFLP. Oslo can be seen as the climax in terms of decisive action, mutual accusations and lobbying. At this stage, the position of the opposition could be best described as 'rejectionism'. As things developed and the PA established its offices and departments, however, opposition activity declined.

A major role in this context was played by the PA, which adopted a policy of detaining members of the opposition groups, marking the beginning of the opposition's surrender. Apart from occasional demonstrations and statements, no other action was taken, or expected to be taken, by the opposition.

The DFLP and PFLP were always attached to the PLO system and expressions, and they are still opting for the old quota system. I believe that this is one of the reasons why they have opted for 'contained confrontation', that is confrontation, but with clearly defined limits. Further evidence of their rather hesitant position is that the leadership of the PFLP and DFLP were very reluctant with regard to increased military activities. They did not want their relation with the PA to reach a point of no return. In contrast, Hamas and Islamic Jihad were not used to the existing style and codes of the PLO and its leadership (Arafat) nor bound by traditional ties, and thus went beyond certain limits, launching numerous military attacks on Israeli targets.

4. The Opposition's Relationship to the PA and the Effects of the Opposition on the Peace Process

The secular opposition have no clear program, and they do not appear to have formulated a clear stand on certain issues regarding the peace process. They haven't been able to choose their way at this juncture. On the other hand, they do acknowledge that the situation is not to their advantage and that they are unable to present an alternative agenda. Instead, they have stuck to their traditional programs. We are witnessing a very deep organizational crisis within these factions as far as their ways of functioning, decision-making and implementation are concerned. Hegemony remains and prevails. No 'perestroika' has taken place. Inside, the issue of self-criticism has reached the factions, but the outside wants to preserve the centralization of power in their hands. The dilemma is, that, at the same time, they want to show some sort of

democratic commitment in order to satisfy their members. But when the DFLP and PFLP decided to transfer the decision-making process to inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the leadership of both the inside and the outside were reluctant, fearing a loss in power and prestige.

Following the Israeli-PLO Agreements, people from outside could return to the inside and a new opportunity was given to balance the inside and the outside. Since, however, the power remained in the outside's hands, a serious crisis developed within the factions. The leaders - even inside - love their positions but the members began to demand changes and a new phenomenon within the DFLP and PFLP emerged: *mustanqif* (freezing of leadership and membership activities) as a new form of protest. Today, 90% of PFLP members and supporters are *mustanqif*, while only the remaining 10% are still active. Thus, the majority have a problem with their leadership and its policies, but this doesn't mean that they have shifted to Fatah or any other faction. I believe that if the leadership was to change, most of these 90% could be re-activated/mobilized. The clear distinction between leadership and members, whereby the latter are currently totally paralyzed, is the main cause of the present crisis. The people as well as the factions themselves know that they are still there but only on the basis of their past fame. The old leaders could re-emerge, but only if they first realize that they have to adjust to the new circumstances. It would appear at the moment, however, that they are refusing to accept this fact.

Immediately after Oslo, the opposition began to discuss among themselves and with the PA the new relationship between the two sides. Initially, the opposition decided not to deal with the PA at all, but when pressure started mounting the leadership outside was forced to revise its position. The new directive was that some sort of contact with the PA was allowed if it promised to be of advantage for practical reasons. With the pressure still mounting, the order was changed once again, allowing for meetings with any PA member except Arafat. The next change came when it was decided that, if any problem could not be solved without the involvement of Arafat, it was permitted to contact even Arafat himself.

The economic aspect plays another important role: during the *Intifada*, there was always enough money, which is not the case now

that the leadership have discovered that their investments are not paying off. In addition, Arafat has stopped allocating funds to the opposition, as did other Arab states. Now they have only donations and funds from individuals, which is nowhere near enough to run a fully structured organization. The financial crisis has forced them to release hundreds of thousands of full-time employees and to close various organizations and kindergartens, etc. Naturally, this has contributed to the decline of local support. For the same reasons, there are also no funds available for election campaigns. With such a comprehensive crisis on all levels, it is unreasonable to expect the opposition to deliver effectively.

The only group that meets Arafat on an official level is Hamas; all others see him only as an unofficial member in meetings of a 'private' nature. The relation between the PA and the opposition was basically limited to the Islamic movements, although they have no traditional relation to Arafat.

The fact that the PA wanted to meet with Hamas, though maybe due, in part, to pragmatism, was to a great extent due to its desire to put an end to the group's military actions, which were regarded as being counterproductive. Thus, the need for dialogue was mutual. Another reason was the Hamas initiative (of Musa Abu Marzouq, April 1994) offering a dialogue and mentioning the possibility of Hamas attacking Palestinian targets. All this put pressure on the PA to start a dialogue with Hamas while there was still no need to do so with the traditional opposition.

5. The Opposition and the Final Status Negotiations

Many people see that things are changing and the Authority is being established, but they reject the idea *per se*. For them, the *barnamaj watani* is still meaningful and they hold on it, e.g., by maintaining the same behavior (such as being in the underground, implementing without thinking, leaving no room for democracy). According to their way of thinking, their refusal to change things now is excusable.

Anything that can be said on this topic now is prediction more than anything else. The opposition are still very busy and preoccupied with more pressing issues such as Oslo I and II or the coming elections, so

that they have not yet had time to discuss the permanent status negotiations and their respective role.

Consequently, it can be assumed that the opposition's role will be very limited, even if they decide to be incorporated into the negotiation process. There are several reasons for this assumption:

- (1) The burden of the negotiations will be on the shoulders of the legislative and executive bodies.
- (2) Due to the existing sense of continuity as far as the negotiators are concerned there is no place for the opposition.
- (3) Fatah wants to and will dominate the negotiations; the opposition therefore, will self-limit its role to different forms of protest.
- (4) Due to Israeli disapproval of any assigned role to the opposition, the latter's role is interpreted as slowing down, rather than speeding up, the negotiation process.

Should it transpire that the opposition will not be incorporated in this process, especially if they decide not to participate in the elections, their role will be even more marginal. The opposition themselves see their future role more in relation to representation in local councils (i.e., village or municipal councils). They believe that they will have a better opportunity to articulate on such a basis, from where they will be able to disrupt/slow down the negotiation process.

In this context, the options for the opposition can be summarized as follows:

- (1) The opposition will use its influence from the municipal and village level; if successful, this could enable them to create civil disobedience with regard to the negotiations.
- (2) If the opposition believe that the civil disobedience strategy will not work, a minority from within the opposition might opt for violence.
- (3) The majority of the opposition will try to focus on certain issues such as elections and push for referenda.

6. Conclusion

Firstly, the opposition see peace as a risk, which they do not want to take. Moreover, they also see that there is a price for peace, which they are not ready to pay.

Secondly, despite the fact that the traditional opposition (DFLP, PFLP) tried to be among the leading parties within the PLO, they do not want to accept responsibility for making decisions: thus Fatah decides, takes the risk and pays the price while the opposition feel more comfortable with seeing what happens and then deciding if they agree with or oppose a decision.

Finally, regardless of whether or not the current peace process continues or even accelerates, the weight of the opposition will be minimal. In brief: the opposition will not play any role with regard to the outcome of future negotiations.



The Opposition and Its Role in the Peace Process - A Jordanian View

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The process of political development and participation in Jordan has unique characteristics deriving from the origins of the state in the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following World War I. Jordan is a state that has developed from without, while other states are usually built from within. At the end of the Mandate in 1946, due to the scarcity of resources in Jordan, the regime was able to become interventionist, authoritarian and centralized due to its monopoly on these resources.

After 1950, there was a short period of liberalization due to the unity between the West and the East Banks, with the participation of the Palestinian elite and more accountability and reforms. The era from 1953-57, following King Abdallah's death and King Hussein's succession, was characterized by openness. Politics was linked to the Palestine Question and party platforms were set up accordingly. The interplay of internal and external factors put an end to this era.

Another new and crucial process began with the elections of 1989, accompanied by an unprecedented democratization campaign, calling for accountability and denouncing corruption as well as the existing regime. In April 1989, it became clear, however, that the Palestinian community was out of the game, as Palestinian groups rejected participation in the elections, which they saw as an internal Jordanian matter. Today, we see the phenomenon of increased potential support by Palestinian voters for Islamist groups. Already in 1989, the Palestinians felt politically discriminated against, which led many Palestinians to adopt an Islamic identity versus a Jordanian one. The Gulf War was viewed by many as an important test according to which they were forced to re-consider their political stand.

By 1993, the King was hoping to formally end the Arab-Israeli conflict. He was not only concerned about the social-demographic agenda, but also about the Islamists who gradually increased their

interference in secular life (e.g., regarding alcohol, co-education, swimming-pools and the like). Against this background came the move to change the election law. This marked the first step back from the democratization process and the beginning of the 'erosion' of the King's popularity. Additionally, Jordan's economic opening to the West, which was followed by a political opening, might have strengthened the government but was not necessarily approved by the people.

With the increased support for the Islamic camp, the King badly wanted to put an end to the old election system, which favored big parties. The new election law strengthened all forms of tribalism and alliances and *a priori* undermined the parliament as a representative body. The Islamic parties' representation was reduced to half. When the parliament approved and passed the King's peace initiative, they did so only upon the King's insistence.

All this left a sense of uneasiness in the country. Those opposed to the peace process were initially on the defensive; they stated their understanding of Jordan's need for peace as well as the need to be realistic, but stressed that they could not agree due to their own points of view.

The government became increasingly authoritarian, banning the opposition almost entirely from the printed media, TV, radio and from holding meetings under the pretext of wishing to secure the peace treaty.

A poll conducted in August 1994 showed that 66% of the population supported the Washington Declaration [of July 1994, ending the state of war between Israel and Jordan]. Although the people were very doubtful about Israel's seriousness, the sense of realism and hope was stronger.

Again in Jordan, the opposition could not be mobilized to stop or influence the peace process. The Islamists effectively have a pact with the King, accepting that the King was bound to sign a treaty, but insisting on articulating opposition to the treaty. The secular opposition - Nasserists, Ba'athists and Jordanian nationalists - cannot mobilize their constituencies.

Meanwhile, mobilizing Palestinians in Jordan in regard to Palestinian or Pan-Arab issues is a difficult undertaking since most Palestinian groups have collapsed. Surveys also indicate clearly that support for the traditional political parties is constantly declining. The main reason for this is that the tradition of tribalism is being preserved and, due to Jordan's social structure, people vote not according to political positions and interests but to family ties. One of the unique experiences of Jordan is that political topics, including democratization, are introduced by tribes: sometimes entire villages vote together.

The Palestinians are not divided along these lines; vis-a-vis Jordanians, they rather represent a single community and act as such. With regard to tribalism, I am basically speaking about non-Palestinian Jordanians.

Jordan suffers from political underdevelopment: in Jordanian elections, it is almost impossible to campaign on issues. The two main influences on voting behavior today are services - patronage - and tribalism.

It is easy to see that such a situation does affect the opposition considerably. Another factor that plays a role in this regard is the Palestinian-Jordanian relationship. Jordanization has failed, and there are two communities. Even those Palestinians who feel quite comfortable to be Jordanians are, after all, Palestinians. This self-defense mechanism is attributable to the exclusion of Palestinians from the entire Jordanian bureaucracy and public sector apparatus. In the past, this discrimination policy forced many Palestinians to emigrate to the Gulf countries.

A recent study carried out by the Center for Strategic Studies has confirmed that 83-84% of Jordanian private sector capital is Palestinian-owned. According to the economic pattern that emerges from this background, the public sector is almost entirely Jordanian occupied, while the private sector is to a large extent in Palestinian hands. The government capital has a share of 5-10%. The researcher for our study went through all registration files at the Ministry of Economy in order to check capital and ownership. The result was that some 83% is Palestinian property! One reason for this is that when Palestinians were widely excluded from the public sector, they had to get involved in business. Now they are blamed for their large share in the private sector.

In the past, the remittances from the Palestinians in the Gulf made up one quarter of Jordan's GDP, but this fact was never appreciated. I think, in the future, the business community and private sector will become more influential and will have a bigger say in domestic matters in two ways: firstly, the public sector has to be reduced sooner or later and this will basically affect the Jordanians; secondly, the private sector will become more powerful and thus, will have a stronger voice. How this will affect the democratization process remains to see. Reforms will be necessary anyway: we need to become more innovative, to develop more forms of property rights, etc. That would also have a positive effect on the redistribution of the domestic income. The current problem is, however, that such reforms need state intervention, that is, to be initiated by the government, which, in turn, doesn't show any movement in this direction.

Jordan is a typical Third World country with resources being pumped in with money from outside. The state must open to Palestinian participation; we cannot exclude them forever. Today, there is not one Palestinian of refugee camp origin in any high position in the state bureaucracy. Historically, the first Jordanian government not based on status was formed only in 1985, and it subsequently embarked on a process of dismantling the public sector. The government was made up of people with different social backgrounds, who were willing to give a chance to the private sector.

We see class formation taking place based on economic prosperity in front of our eyes. While Abdallah created a state of Bedouins, Hussein patronizes the state. Within this context, the concept of 'middle class' is problematic as it is very wide-ranging in Jordan: from agriculture to lower bureaucracy and academics. It depends very much on economic conditions, influence, etc. A recent problem is that since many professionals are against peace with Israel, in order to push the peace process forward, the King wants to destroy the professional unions.

The peace process has had many different impacts on Jordan, socially, economically and politically. The King couldn't convince the domestic scene and didn't really want to (*harwale*). Since the Jordanian opposition doesn't move, the Palestinians could be a potential source of disturbances - if they organize themselves quickly. But there is also a lack of movement on the Palestinian track.

First, Israeli tourists coming to Jordan was a shock and the government feared that attacks might happen; now, they are seen everywhere in the country and nothing happens. The people try to make money out of them and that's it. Slowly felt economic benefits and a booming tourist sector makes the opposition literally shut up.

There is also a scenario that sees a fertile ground for socio-political explosions in the fact that Palestinians are gaining power economically but are still excluded from the public sector - this is why I have repeatedly said we need changes; reforms need to be implemented and we need innovations, new forms of participation and the like. Strangely, there is more anger about the current de-democratization process outside than inside. *Harwale* is not very popular. For example, when anti-Palestinian statements occurred, the King went to the troops himself speaking very much in favor of the Palestinians. Of course, the Palestinians liked his statements. The King knows very well how to deal with people.

Now, the King is playing solo: he is not playing to the domestic scene at all. That makes him more arrogant and patriarchal in dealing with others: 'I know what is good for you, so I do it - and you shut up'. A good example was his attending and crying at Rabin's funeral. Meanwhile, the opposition are handcuffed, unable to mobilize any anti-forces.

Regarding the issue of modernization and democratization, the King cannot use the same governing tools used during the 1930's, 40's and 50's. He loses popularity simply because the population is much more mature today than it was before. The King, however, fails to consider this.

The bases for the Jordanian state were laid by Abdallah in 1921, and the roots of Jordanian identity lie in these early days of the creation of a Jordanian society in the state of Jordan. The roots of the anti-Jordanian ideology of the Palestinians can be traced back to anti-*Hashemite* feelings, which derived from Abdallah who was perceived as disloyal and a traitor. The events of 1948 were the turning point, when Jordanian troops were accused of being pro-Israeli because they were equated with the Hashemites who were seen as pro-Zionists. Between 1950-65, the Jordanization of Palestinians worked because at that time the Palestinians followed the Pan-Arabist track and felt that Jordan

was first and foremost an Arab country. This fact partially laid the groundwork for the period after 1968-69.

We have to distinguish between early and later Jordanization attempts. In the beginning, there was no support for the idea of excluding Palestinians from certain positions. Domestic stability was the most important issue for the King. The process of excluding Palestinians began in 1969 with a tribal meeting. The tension was already there. With the outbreak of fighting, the King decided to break the backbone of the PLO for the sake of his political survival. The process of cleansing Jordan of Palestinians began, marking also the beginning of the Palestinian identity as a separate identity in Jordan. The King mobilized the Jordanians domestically, knowing that, for the time being, he couldn't expand his political alliances to the West Bank. As for the Palestinians, they reconsidered Hashemite policy for the first time in the mid-1970s.

A recent problem was that, while the Palestinians displayed reluctance with regard to Oslo, the King simply went ahead and went to Washington to make his own deal. Domestically, people initially wanted to wait and give Oslo a chance. But among those who are not totally against Oslo are many who reject the Washington Declaration.

As for the Islamic opposition in Jordan, their influence has declined. They don't play a crucial role. The support for Islamic fundamentalism comes mainly from the middle class, and the Palestinian component is dominating. During the past two years, the government has practiced intimidation and I was very surprised that it worked.

I think the level of Palestinian integration in Jordan is quite higher than generally believed and perceived. It is the King's nightmare that the Palestinians will leave and take all their businesses and infrastructure with them. The King has in no way given up his dream to incorporate the West Bank.

The King has to clean his own house on the East Bank. He is obsessed with security, and he would never take a risk. He follows his instinct as he always did, which invariably proved the correct thing to do. In short, he plays a one-man show.

Israel's Political Parties and the Peace Process

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Historical Perspective

Political parties have traditionally played a major role in the formation and functioning of Israeli society and politics. This tradition is rooted in the decades preceding the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, when the institutional foundations of the nascent Jewish community in Palestine were laid and took shape. Even though the British Mandate was the legal political authority during most of the pre-state period, the Jewish population engaged intensively in the process of nation-building and developed its own collective identity and infrastructures, albeit under obvious constraints.

Politically, this process involved the creation of various institutions that derived their legitimacy from normative rather than formal legal authority. The normative framework was provided by the Zionist ideology that was shared, with few exceptions, by the entire Jewish population of Palestine. Indeed, most Jews who lived in Palestine during the pre-state era were immigrants who had settled in Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel, Palestine) under the influence of and in identification with the Zionist movement.

Ever since its inception in Europe about a century ago (the first Zionist Congress was convened in 1897), the Zionist movement has invoked the principle of proportionate representation as one of the foundations of its commitment to a democratic political system. From a practical viewpoint, this principle facilitates maximum representation of political actors in policy-making institutions, thus enhancing their legitimacy in the eyes of ordinary 'citizens'. It is important to note in this context that Zionism had been but one of several competing ideologies that emerged among the Jewish communities of Europe at that time, each offering its own solution to the 'Jewish problem'. By adopting the

principle of proportionate representation, the Zionist movement hoped to gain wider support and participation within those communities.

Accordingly, it conducted biennial general elections in which the main competitors were party 'lists' that had been formed among movement members in Palestine and the Diaspora. These parties were typically created on the basis of ideological orientations, the main features of which are set forth below. However, it is important to note that during the British Mandate period these parties immersed themselves in a variety of activities that transcended the ordinary functioning of political parties in democratic systems. Specifically, they helped their members obtain entrance visas ('certificates') to Palestine and arranged work, housing, health care, and the like. Even schools and various cultural activities were organized and provided along party lines. In other words, the party played a central role in the spiritual and material lives of its members and their families.

At the collective level, the importance of the parties derived from two main sources. On the one hand, given the strong ideological commitment of the Jewish community, they represented a highly involved electorate. It is precisely because of this commitment and involvement that the pre-state period has been characterized as the 'pioneering era' in Israeli history. On the other hand, by participating in the elected national institutions, the parties were the prime movers in the community's political action and social and economic policies. The influence of the parties in these spheres was facilitated by the centrality of the Zionist national institutions in the raising and allocation of funds for the attainment of collective goals. For example, decisions in the purchase of land and its settlement by Jewish immigrants were made by the leadership of the dominant political parties.

The pre-eminent role of the parties declined when Israel declared its independence, because the political institutions and bureaucracy of the state took over many of the parties' erstwhile functions. Nevertheless, Israel may still be characterized as a *Parteien Staat*, a term used by Professor B. Akzin in his classical 1955 essay. The import of this concept is that political parties play a more significant role and have greater influence in Israel than in other Western democracies. In particular, the ideological orientations of Israel's main parties and their constituencies are still perceptible. This characteristic probably

accounts for the parties' continuity since the pre-state era as well as for the changes they have undergone in the intervening years.

In view of this background, we may discuss the main ideological differences among the Jewish parties in the pre-state era and their relevance to party politics at the present time. To identify the ideological orientation underlying the formation of parties in the Zionist movement, it is necessary to conceive of them in terms of three analytically different dimensions:

- (1) their socioeconomic vision of society;
- (2) their strategy in achieving the national goals of Zionism;
- (3) the secular-religious schism.

The first dimension categorizes the parties according to their identification with socialist or capitalist ideology. To understand the importance of this dimension, it should be noted that for its founding fathers, Zionism had goals other than the principal aim, the creation of a Jewish homeland in Eretz Israel. In particular, it emphasized the idea that in the course of fulfilling national aspirations, the Jewish socioeconomic fabric must be transformed so that the new Jewish community would resemble other modern nation-states. However, the concept of 'normalization', invoked to capture this idea, was invested with different significance depending on the social ideologies of its users. Because Zionism was born in Europe, its leaders were influenced by the spectrum of social ideas that had prevailed there since the middle of the 19th century. Thus, some ideologists advocated the capitalist model of free enterprise and a market economy, while others embraced various versions of socialism, including Marxism. These differences affected the policies and organizational structure of the parties throughout the pre-state era and thereafter.

The socialist parties, for example, displayed greater cohesion than non-socialist parties and were more effective in using their power jointly in order to develop a network of institutions under the umbrella of the Histadrut, the General Federation of Jewish Labor. The Histadrut had considerable influence on the community's social and economic development before and after the establishment of the state.

For the reader's convenience, the parties of the 1940s are grouped below in terms of the socialist-versus-capitalist distinction. Importantly, nearly all of these parties have undergone many transformations in subsequent years due to numerous splits and mergers. For example, Mapai, the largest party during most of this period, was the predecessor of today's Labor Party, and the Revisionists and General Zionists parties metamorphosed in several cycles to become the core of today's Likud.

Socialist

Mapai
 Achdut Ha'avoda
 Hashomer Hatzair
 Hapoel Hamizrachi

Capitalist

General Zionists
 Revisionists
 Hamizrachi
 Agudath Israel

The second ideological dimension differentiates among the parties in terms of their strategies in attaining the political goals of Zionism. At the risk of oversimplification, we may rank the parties in this regard by their degree of national militancy. In the pre-state era, the main issues underlying this dimension were twofold: policies toward the British government and policies toward the Arabs. With respect to the first issue, the dilemma the Zionist movement faced was how to respond to the government's anti-Zionist policies, especially after Jewish immigration was severely restricted in the 1930's and 1940's. While the majority of the Zionist parties generally adopted a strategy of active but mostly nonviolent resistance vis-a-vis the British, those on the far right, namely the Revisionists and its military wing, the Irgun Tseva'i Le'ummi ('Etsel' in its Hebrew acronym), engaged in violent activities. In fact, a few radical members of Etsel, regarding this faction's policies as too moderate, broke away in the late 1930's and formed the 'Stern Group', the most militant Jewish organization in the British Mandate period.

The national militancy criterion also applies to policies regarding the Jewish-Arab conflict. Most of the Zionist parties sought solutions based on compromise and mutual accommodation, including the partitioning of Palestine between Arabs and Jews. The Revisionists, in contrast, demanded an independent Jewish state in Palestine as a whole, which they construed as including Transjordan (the 'East Bank'), historically part of Eretz Israel and, during the early years of the British Mandate, part of Palestine. The nationalist policy of the Revisionists was also ex-

pressed in military actions against Arab targets, carried out by Etzel and the Stern Group, especially in the form of reprisals during the Arab revolt of the 1930's. However, most of the military efforts of these underground organizations were aimed at British targets, particularly in the aftermath of World War II. Historically, it should be noted that with the exception of the Revisionists and their affiliates, all the Zionist parties, including the General Zionists, have followed the moderate policies of Mapai, the dominant party during the 1930's and 1940's, rather than the aggressive Revisionist stance.

The third criterion that differentiates among the pre-state parties is the religious-secular schism. To begin with, it should be realized that the Zionist ideology is essentially secular, having drawn its ideas from European and American visions of modernism, secularism, and democracy. Therefore, a majority of Orthodox Jews rejected the political goals of Zionism for two related reasons. First, they objected to the secular political mechanism invoked by Zionism to attain the goal of gathering Jewry in the promised land; the return to Eretz Israel, they said, should be the result of a Divine act manifested by the coming of the Messiah. Second, Orthodox Jews envision Jewish society as being a religious one, dominated by the prescriptions of halacha, religious law. Hence most of the Orthodox community spurned the Zionist ideological vision of a secular, modern democratic Jewish society in Eretz Israel.

However, some moderate religious leaders came to terms with the Zionist movement, arguing that its activities should be interpreted as a sign of the first efflorescence of full (i.e., Messianic) Jewish national redemption. Under the influence of these leaders, the Zionist movement was able to attract quite a few Orthodox Jews, who subsequently formed two religious parties, Hamizrachi and Hapoel Hamizrachi, which eventually merged to form the National Religious Party. Orthodox Jews who refused to join the Zionist movement created an anti-Zionist party, Agudath Israel.

In anticipation of further discussion, it is worth emphasizing that in their national policies, the religious parties adopted the moderate attitudes of Mapai during the pre-state era and the first two decades of Israeli independence. Only after the Six-Day War in 1967 did Orthodox Jewry (The National-Religious Party) thoroughly revise its

attitudes towards the resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict, gradually becoming the spearhead of militant nationalism.

Contemporary Party Politics and the Peace Process

At first glance, the three ideological dimensions that anchor the Israeli political-party spectrum seem to have retained their pre-state relevance to the present time. In the last three decades, however, Israeli society has experienced several substantive events and developments that must be considered in order to understand the politics of Israel's parties in recent years.

First, the socialist-capitalist axis has become practically irrelevant as an ideological barometer. Its decline began in the early statehood years, when Mapai, the ruling (Labor-Socialist) party at the time, explicitly abandoned its ideological rhetoric of commitment to 'class struggle' in favor of a capitalism-oriented policy of national economic development. The abandonment of socialism as the basis of socioeconomic policy was connected with the adoption of a pro-Western foreign policy under the leadership of the US. Moreover, even Mapam, a pro-Marxist party in the 1940's and 1950's, has gradually softened its adherence to socialist doctrines and in recent years has become practically indistinguishable from the Labor Party, (the successor to Mapai). This ideological realignment, however, has not stanchd the decline of Mapam in the eyes of the Israeli electorate: from 14.7% of total votes to the Knesset in 1949 to a mere 2.5% in 1988, the last time that it ran as an independent list. Before the 1992 elections, Mapam formed an alignment with two non-socialist parties in order to run jointly under the name of Meretz.

Second, in regard to developments in national policies, the most critical event in Israel's post-1948 history was the Six-Day War and its aftermath. Since that war, the internal political scene has been dominated by an intense debate over the resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict. The heart of the debate has been the policy toward the occupied territories and the Palestinians' claim to statehood. More recently, the cleavage underlying this ongoing debate has been aggravated by controversy over the future of the Golan Heights and the implications of this dispute for the prospects of making peace between Israel and Syria.

To understand the political parties' attitudes toward the Israeli-Arab conflict, it should be realized that the conquest of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) ignited a new spirit of nationalism among most Israelis, a trend fueled by secular as well as religious sentiments. Consequently, for the first time in Israel's history, the nationalist camp, which proclaims Israel's right to retain all of the occupied territories indefinitely, has been composed of secular and religious parties alike. The secular parties, led by the Likud, base this policy chiefly on national-security considerations. For the Orthodox, especially the religious Zionists, this justification is secondary only to the religious duty of Jews to settle in all parts of Eretz Israel, the land promised them by God. In fact, some rabbis have deemed withdrawal from any part of the territories to be a breach of a religious commandment under halacha. Consequently, they consider it is morally correct to resist withdrawal and evacuation of Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria even if such resistance clashes with a decision made by the legally competent authorities of the state. Therefore, in their construct, religious laws take precedence to legislation enacted by the secular government of Israel.

Although these views are not shared by all the Orthodox leadership, they have been widely accepted by most members of the religious community, including those who traditionally had been anti-Zionist. The consequence of these developments is that this community has evolved since the Six-Day War into the spearhead of militant nationalism. At the same time, it must be noted that several secular parties match the Orthodox in their ultra-nationalist views. One of the most extreme is Moledet ('Fatherland'), known mainly for its advocacy of 'transfer' of all Palestinians from the occupied territories to other, Arab, countries. Another extremist secular party is Tsomet, headed by a former Chief of General Staff, Rafael Eitan ('Raful'). The Tsomet agenda, which concerns itself almost exclusively with issues of national security and the Israeli-Arab conflict, depicts the occupied territories and the Golan Heights as vital strategic assets. Accordingly, it opposes territorial compromise and espouses annexation of the West Bank to Israel.

Note that the Likud, the central player in the nationalist camp, vehemently opposes transfer and annexation. Its own policy consistently prescribes some form of Palestinian autonomy in a West

Bank and Gaza Strip, which remain under Israeli political and military control. Faithful to this policy, the Likud refrained from formally annexing the occupied territories when in power between 1977 and 1988. On the left side of the political spectrum, we may distinguish among three main groupings of parties in terms of willingness to compromise. The far left includes two parties - the New Communist List (Rakah) and the Democratic Arab Party (Mada) - that draw almost all of their support from Arab citizens of Israel. Despite important differences between them they both whole-heartedly accept the PLO demand for independent Palestinian statehood in the entire area of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Predictably, they have ardently supported the Oslo agreements and the ensuing peace process. Similarly, they advocate an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement based on a total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

The next grouping on the left comprises three Jewish parties - Mapam, the Citizens Rights Movement (Ratz), and Shinui - which, as noted above, formed a joint list (Meretz) that first ran in the 1992 Knesset elections. The creation of this alignment, despite some noticeable ideological differences among its founders in socioeconomic affairs, was stimulated by the leaders' common view that Israel should compromise more extensively in order to resolve the conflict with the Arabs. Before the 1992 elections, these parties envisioned Meretz as a natural partner in a Labor-led coalition government, on the assumption that Labor would emerge with a plurality. The joint list earned 12 of the 120 Knesset seats in 1992, as against ten in the 1988 elections when the three parties ran separately. In the wake of this significant success, the expectations and strategies of the Meretz leadership were fully realized, and Meretz has indeed played a major role in the peace process initiated by the incumbent government headed by the Labor Party.

The third and most important grouping on the political left is composed of one party only: Labor. In the 1992 election campaign, Labor phrased its policies on the Israeli-Arab conflict much more cautiously than those of Meretz. Labor's strategy was to win as many votes as possible from the political center. Consequently, while being explicit about its intentions to make a serious effort to conclude peace agreements with the Arabs, it avoided public commitments that might appear excessively lenient. In fact, the replacement of Peres by Rabin as the new leader of Labor, in party primaries held before the 1992 elec-

tions, was motivated by the desire to convince the Israeli voter that a Labor-led government would not sacrifice national-security interests in any peace agreement that it negotiated. As is well known by now, this strategy was evidently quite effective, as Labor trounced its main rival on the right, the Likud, and - more importantly - has moved swiftly and meticulously in its efforts to implement its commitment to the conclusion of peace accords with the Arabs. An indication of the success of these efforts is the steady advancement of the peace process with the Palestinians, facilitated by the Oslo breakthrough; the signing of a comprehensive peace treaty with Jordan; and continued dialogue with the Syrians.

These achievements notwithstanding, it should be emphasized that the parliamentary opposition to the incumbent government's peace policies embraces nearly half of the Knesset. To illustrate this fact, the table below distributes the parties according to their attitudes towards the peace process and the number of Knesset seats earned in the 1992 elections.

<u>For the peace process</u>		<u>Against the peace process</u>	
<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Seats</u>
Labor	44	Likud	32
Meretz	12	Religious	16
Arabs	5	Tsomet	8
		Moledet	3
Total	61	Total	59

As the table shows, the government's slim majority depends on the support of the Arab parties. Indeed, the opposition has exploited this situation to argue that the government's policies are not supported by the majority of Jewish parties in the Knesset. Following this rationale, several members of the opposition parties have gone so far as to challenge the legitimacy of national-security decisions that rest on Arab votes. However, this claim has been rejected by the Likud leadership and has had little impact on the parliamentary and public political discourse. It is perhaps a testimony to the strength of Israel's democratic system that despite the fierce opposition to the government's peace policies from the parties on the rights, all of them have consistently adhered to the rules of the political game. This as-

essment is not invalidated by the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995. On the contrary: this tragedy united almost all parties in a vote of confidence for the new government that, under the Israeli law, was formed by Rabin's second in command, Shimon Peres (The vote was unanimous for the choice of Peres to form the new government.)

Public Attitudes

In view of the impact of ideologies in Israel's political culture and the centrality of the Israeli-Arab conflict on its political agenda, it is hardly surprising to find a strong correlation between the attitudes of the parties' leaders and followers. In other words, the disagreements among the political elite with respect to the peace process are clearly reflected at the grassroots level. Thus, the Israeli public is divided into two roughly equal camps in its support or rejection of the peace process. Of no lesser relevance is the observation that the dichotomy of doves and hawks has been relatively stable over time. Thus we find that the public's attitudes hardly changed after dramatic events such as the ceremonial gathering in Washington where the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip ('Oslo II') was signed, or after tragedies such as the massacre by Islamic terrorists of civilian bus passengers in Tel Aviv.

However, the nearly even distribution of doves and hawks in attitudes toward the peace process may be misleading insofar as the final resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned. For example, in a countrywide poll conducted shortly after the signing of the 'Oslo II' agreement, respondents were asked if they would support the evacuation of Jewish settlements from the occupied territories in order to conclude a comprehensive treaty with the Palestinians. The answers were distributed as follows :

Strongly support	7.9%
Tend to support	22.4%
Undecided	17.9%
Tend to oppose	20.1%
Strongly oppose	31.8%
Total	100.0%

Thus, there is a clear majority against evacuation of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. This observation correlates with the finding that only 37.3% of Israelis believe it impossible to conclude a peace treaty without the evacuation of most Jewish settlements. The rest are either unsure (14.9%) or of the belief that such an agreement may be possible even without evacuation (47.8%). Moreover, there seems to be considerable internal disagreement among supporters of the peace process, stemming from distrust of Palestinian behavior and intentions in the short and long terms. Thus, a large majority of Israeli Jews - over 70% - are disappointed with the Palestinians' implementation of the Oslo agreements; a majority of similar magnitude believe that the Palestinians would annihilate Israel if given the opportunity.

Notwithstanding these trends, polls taken shortly after the assassination of Rabin showed a significant upturn in public support for the peace process. However, it is quite possible that this change reflects an emotional response to the atmosphere of national trauma caused by the assassination. On the other hand, the same polls pointed to a perceptible increase in the popularity of the Labor Party at the expense of the Likud. This transformation may suggest that Rabin's assassination created a genuine change in public attitudes, so that the current majority in favor of the peace efforts is here to stay. It remains to be seen which of these interpretations will prove valid.

