

ISRAELI REJECTION OF THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE: POLITICAL CLIMATE  
AND PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Israeli Rejection of the Arab Peace Initiative: Political Climate and Public Perceptions

The Arab Peace Initiative (former Saudi Initiative) was officially proposed by Saudi Arabia and has been (re-)endorsed by all 22 member states of the Arab League since 2002. Israel has not officially responded to the API but rather has generally ignored and by default rejected it. This thesis examines the reasons for the Israeli rejection by analyzing the structure of the Israeli government in relation to the position of the prime minister, both normatively and descriptively, and examining public opinion as a potential enabler or constraint on policymaking. It also explores mechanisms such as threat perceptions and framing to highlight cognitive influences that negatively impacted serious consideration of the API. Qualitative interviews with expert Israelis and Arabs contribute to a deeper understanding of the Israeli perspective of the API's shortcomings. The API is unlikely to be implemented under this current government unless Israeli public opinion significantly changes in its favor.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

At the 13<sup>th</sup> Arab League Summit in Beirut, Lebanon, on March 27, 2002, then Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia introduced the Arab Peace Initiative. All 22 member states affirmed the initiative and later it was affirmed by the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which is comprised of all 57 Islamic nations of the world. The Arab Peace Initiative (initially known as the Saudi Initiative) is a land for peace initiative with the following terms: 1) Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied since 1967 (including the southern Lebanese territories and the Syrian Golan Heights); 2) a just and agreed upon solution to the refugee problem (based on the UN Resolution 194); and 3) the establishment of a sovereign and independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. In return the Arab states would consider the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as ended, would enter into a comprehensive peace, and establish normal relations with Israel. In addition to the Arab states, as mentioned above, the API is also endorsed by all member states of the OIC. From the sound of it, Israeli politicians and public opinion should have greeted this initiative with enthusiasm and comprehensive peace should have been reached within a few years. This was not the case, however. Conceivably, the API was introduced at a bad time. It was launched amid the Second Intifada and within a few days of two horrid terrorist attacks that left 34 Israelis dead and over 100 injured (Podeh, 2007, p. 8). There was no official response from Israel to the API, and none has been given since. Instead of negotiations and a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians (Lebanon and

Syria), the peace process faltered, and Israel remains mainly isolated in the region that is becoming increasingly unstable.

Since the introduction of the API, it has been widely ignored and, in practical terms, rejected by successive Israeli governments.<sup>1</sup> Among the Israeli public it is largely unknown. Ariel Sharon dismissed it during his tenure as prime minister, although he “might have had the capability to persuade Israeli society on the merits of the API had he had the conviction and the desire to do so” (Podeh, 2014, p. 599). Ehud Olmert, although he seriously considered it, ultimately lacked public support and was too weak politically to decisively push for the API (2014, p. 599; Caspit, 2014). Incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu “possessed the necessary legitimacy to pursue the API, but was ideologically and politically averse to promoting it” (Podeh, 2014, p. 599), and recently called it an irrelevant and futile proposal in today’s changing Middle East (Keinon, 2014).

My thesis examines factors within Israel that have contributed to (and continue to contribute to) the rejection of the Arab Peace Initiative, in particular, and the stalling of the peace process, in general. Because the API is the first peace initiative that is supported by all Arab states and endorsed by all Islamic nations, it is of particular significance to analyze the dynamics in Israel that have led to its general erasure. Of course, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is intricate and complicated and cannot be reduced to the internal dynamics in Israel. On both sides, there are multiple layers of differently motivated fractions and opinions for or against a resolution, made up of interest groups ranging from moderate to radical in view. Still, through my own research and internship

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed history and in-depth analysis and assessment of the Arab Peace Initiative (Saudi Initiative) and reactions in Israel see Podeh (2014). His article is in alignment with my assessments, but was published rather late for broader consideration in my thesis.

experiences, it became clear that the focus of my thesis should lie in analyzing Israeli political structures and public opinion, because Israel holds a great deal of power in this conflict and has declined to re-enter negotiations since the introduction of the Arab Peace Initiative at the Arab League summit in Beirut in 2002. In addition, it is necessary to focus on Israel's polity before I assess the Arab Peace Initiative itself and in relation to Israel's government and public opinion, since Israel is in a dominant position in the conflict and because the Palestinian Authority and the Arab League support the API.

My research questions ask 1) how does the Israeli political system influence or obstruct the peace process? 2) To what extent does Israeli public opinion influence policy decisions in the peace process? 3) How does threat perception and issue framing influence Israeli public opinion? 4) What factors might make the API a relevant document for Israelis? I argue that current public opinion favors the status quo, rather than a renewed peace process, and that this is in keeping with the current Israeli government position.

I utilize qualitative interviews I conducted in Israel and Turkey to examine the various reasons why an initiative as powerful as the API gained no traction to restart the peace process. To do this, I analyze the political system in Israel and highlight the vulnerability of the position of prime minister. In three chapters of literature review, I first argue that the office of prime minister in Israel is inherently unstable and that the prime minister has to closely monitor the sentiment of his coalition government as well as that of public opinion. Secondly, I examine public opinion in relation to politics and policy change. Thirdly, I examine how threat perception, issue framing, and framing the conflict in the media influence public opinion and the decision-making process.

In Chapter VI, I utilized the interviews I conducted during my internship abroad. I asked the interviewees, who have previously been involved in the peace process, to assess the API's potential and shortcomings and to provide suggestions for making it a relevant proposal for Israel. I argue that the API is unlikely to succeed with this current Israeli government and suggest that a renewed effort by the Arab League to promote the API might shift Israeli public opinion toward a renewed push for a peace process.

My research is situated in the context of war-proneness theory, cognitive theory, democratic peace theory, and negotiation theory as well as contemporary scholarship on the Middle East in general and Israel and Palestine, in particular. The Arab Peace Initiative, if implemented, offers the promise of full Arab recognition to Israel, normal relations with all Arab and Islamic nations, and a comprehensive peace for the region. Moreover, a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict offers the chance for reconciliation, safety, and stability to millions of Israelis and Palestinians that have suffered from violence and instability. In addition, an end to this conflict would likely lay the foundation for strong economic and strategic ties between Israel and the Arab states and has the potential for an alliance between Israel and the moderate Arab and Muslim states in the fight against the imminent threats of radical, jihadist movements.

My thesis focuses on mechanisms that contribute to change in policies and/or public opinion and I analyze the shortcomings of the API and its roll-out. I suggest that Arab leaders, if truly serious about the API, could present the initiative to Israel. That could contribute to gaining Israeli trust and possibly change public opinion. This is significant because the consequences of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, particularly the ongoing occupation of the West Bank and the expansion of settlements there continue to

negatively affect millions of lives on both sides, on a daily basis. In addition, the ongoing occupation continues to give Iran an excuse to condemn Israel in hate speeches and it gives Hamas (a falsely perceived) legitimacy for armed struggle against Israeli citizens. It perpetuates violent attacks against Israelis at home and abroad, heightens Israeli fear of attacks, fuels anti-Israeli sentiment world wide, keeps Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank impoverished, and hinders economic growth and stability in the Middle East. Lastly, it is unclear how long the Arab Peace Initiative will remain to be an offer by the Arab League.

### *Methods*

As part of my graduate degree, I did a five month long internship (November 2011 – March 2012) with the Center for Democracy and Community Development (CDCD), which is a Palestinian Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), in East Jerusalem. During this time I worked closely with Palestinian activists and scholars, and also with many Jewish Israeli activists and scholars through the CDCD's partner organizations. The data collection for this thesis comes from personal interviews I conducted in Israel and Turkey. Background information on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict comes from lectures on the subject both at the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Oregon, where I took in-depth classes specific to this conflict.

Background information to the Arab Peace Initiative and negotiation culture arises from my internship experiences at CDCD and through frequent joint Palestinian-Israeli meetings and meetings with Israelis from Israeli partner organizations. Experiences further deepening my understanding and knowledge of the conflict and the

two sides involved stems from living on the Mount of Olives and the Old City, which are both Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, and from recurrently traveling to the West Bank. In addition, I travelled frequently to Tel Aviv, Haifa, and Hadera, Israel. During those five months, I gathered insights and impressions from Jews and Arabs alike. Living and working in Israel and Palestine and working at CDCD on strategies to promote the Arab Peace Initiative gave me deeper knowledge of the situation at hand and helped inform my analysis.

I conducted eight interviews, six with Israeli scholars and activists and two with Arab League representatives. Most of the interviewees have taken part in Track II negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. Their biographies are introduced in Chapter VI. The interviews took place at the interviewees' respective offices in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, on campuses, or in public places. Three of the interviews took place in Istanbul, Turkey at the API conference I helped organize as part of my internship.

My methods of data collection are based in the qualitative research model. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I used participant observation, where I closely monitored the environment and people I interacted with during the five months of work, travel, and living in Israel and the Occupied Territories. The interviews I conducted consist of seven questions (Appendix B) I used as a guideline and the interviewees were invited to speak freely about their assessment and experiences in relation to the conflict and the API.



## *Overview of Chapters*

In Chapter II, I provide a historical background on the history of Jews and Arabs in the region. I point to the fact that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not one that dates back thousands of years, but rather begun in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. After this summary, I examine recent history, through milestones in the peace process.

In Chapter III, I examine the role of leadership in democracies through the war-proneness and democratic peace theories and explain the political system of Israel. I argue that the office of prime minister in Israel's political system is vulnerable in nature, due to the multi-party parliamentary system and political culture in Israel. Addressing the incumbent Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, I utilize his own writings and speeches to demonstrate his steadfast position on the West Bank and Jerusalem in relation to a Palestinian state as described in the API.

In Chapter IV, I explore public opinion in democracies and, in particular, how it applies to Israeli politics. I mainly use two-level game theory to examine the dynamics between public opinion and leadership. I address how public opinion can function as a domestic constraint in politics. I use war-proneness theory to examine the influence of public opinion in the decision-making process and policy change during times of conflict. The goal is to illuminate the structure and dynamics of public opinion and how it could play a potential role in relation to the peace process.

In Chapter V, I analyze the concepts of threat perception and framing through cognitive theory and negotiation theory, as they apply to protracted conflicts, and their potential influence on public opinion and policymaking. Besides threat perceptions and framing, I examine group dynamics, and the influence of zero-sum thinking and reactive

devaluation in relation to the public's support for compromise or concessions. In addition, I examine the influence negativity bias and media reporting have on public opinion and the peace process.

In Chapter VI, I relate and analyze the formal interviews I conducted as well as my informal observations and conversations regarding the API. I assess the strengths and shortcomings of the API and link the information I gathered in Israel and Palestine to the theories I discussed concerning public opinion, Israeli polity, threat perceptions, and framing. I comment on ways in which the API might gain political traction in Israel.

In Chapter VII, I examine the relationships between the theories I laid out in previous chapters to my findings. Lastly, I remark on the conflict generally and specifically on what might be done to move the peace process forward.

## CHAPTER II

### BACKGROUND TO THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

The time has passed when Jews and Arabs could face each other in simple conflict. They live together now in rich variety. There is no single Arab-Jewish relationship: there are many, and they require an elusive tolerance that must somehow run against the forces of war, nationalism, terrorism and religious certainty.

David K. Shipler (2002)

Popular belief has it that the Israeli-Palestinian or Jewish-Arab or Jewish-Palestinian conflict is almost purely a religious conflict; while it is true that “religious identification is a central element in the conflict...much of [it] is secular, involving issues of territory, security, and ethnic and cultural differences” (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 5). Both Arabs and Jews are “ancient Semitic peoples, with centuries-old bonds of solidarity based on religion, culture, and language” (Tessler, 2009, p. 2) and their respective religions have several points of overlap. Moreover, the Palestinians, who are ethnic Arabs, are descendants of two ancient, pagan peoples: the Canaanites, the earliest inhabitants of Palestine, and the Philistines, from who they derived their present name (2009, p. 69). However, the short handed, widely perceived story of the conflict is that it is a religious blood feud between Jews and Arabs and that it has been going on for hundreds or even thousands of years (2009, pp. 73-74). That is, for the most part, incorrect, and the Jewish/Israeli-Palestinian conflict with all its implications as we know it today, started more or less with the new arrival of Jews in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

This chapter serves to provide some historical background of the people involved in the conflict and gives a brief historical account of the region in order to provide the

reader with some necessary information pertaining to the ongoing struggle. It does not do justice, however, to the thousands of years of rich history that shaped the geographical and cultural unfolding.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the brief historical background also recounts several of the major peace negotiations, to highlight three decades of peace talks in order to provide a humble foundation to readers unfamiliar with the conflict and the peace process.

### *Historical Overview*

Arabs and Jews share a long history dating back over 3,000 years of living in the same, general area of what are today's Israel and the Palestinian Territories, in the Land of Canaan, or ancient Palestine. Moses, who gave the Israelites political organization, led the Jews out of Egypt and to the borders of the Promised Land—Eretz Yisrael—that was then Canaan, which the Jews conquered and established a hegemony, after several decades of fighting, in the thirteenth century B.C.E. (Tessler, 2009, p.8). King David and his successor and son, King Solomon established and ruled the first independent Jewish Kingdom, uniting all twelve tribes within Judea and Samaria during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. (2009, pp. 9-10). After Solomon's death in 930 B.C.E., northern tribes in Samaria revolted, split, and created the Kingdom of Israel, but after an intermittent period of warfare with the Davidic dynasty of Judea, the two Hebrew states formed an alliance and the smaller southern kingdom became a vassal of the larger northern kingdom (2009, p. 10). The Jewish kingdoms prospered for several hundred years, until the Kingdom of Israel fell to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., while the kingdom of Judah accepted vassal state

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<sup>2</sup> For more information see: Tessler (2009), *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. This comprehensive, historical summary of Arabs and Jews pre and post-conflict is an excellent guide for further, in-depth understanding of people and the region involved in this struggle.

status, but was ultimately conquered and destroyed by the Babylonians in 582 B.C. (2009, p. 11). Neighboring powers repeatedly destroyed Jerusalem, as did the Persians and, later, the Romans destroyed the kingdom's capital after conquest (2009, pp. 11-12). During many of the invasions, including those of the Babylonians, the Persians, and Alexander the Great, the Jews were recognized more or less as a sovereign people; however, they were also frequently exiled and repeatedly dispersed or killed, especially during Roman rule starting right around the counting of the Common Era (C.E.) (2009, pp. 11-13).

Tensions between Jews and Arabs seemed as normal as one often describes the tensions between different ethnic or culture groups in those times; not overly harmonious, but not overly hostile. During the time when the Israelite kingdoms were overthrown by the Egyptians and the Babylonians, the Jews who were exiled were seemingly treated well. The ones exiled in Babylon had the freedom to establish legal scholarship and Jewish learning centers (Tessler, 2009, p. 11). Later, the Jewish community was also well-perceived and appreciated for economic and commercial contributions to the Egyptian empire (2009, p. 11). The second Jewish kingdom was established in 140 B.C., prospered for about eighty-three years before it was conquered and destroyed by the Romans in 63 B.C. (2009, p. 12). After the destruction of the second Judean kingdom and the wide disbursement of the Jewish people, mainly to Europe, right around the beginning of the Common Era, Palestine and Jerusalem became the primary concern again in classical Zionism (2009, p. 16).<sup>3</sup> However, Judaism and the Jews remaining in Palestine were not under any more scrutiny by Arabs than they were by Christians or

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<sup>3</sup> Classical Zionism holds that God will resurrect the Jewish kingdom and settle the Jews in the Promised Land of *Eretz Yisrael* with the simultaneous coming of the Messiah who will deliver the Jews from their enemies (Tessler, 2009, pp. 16-17).

others. Their plight was undoubtedly different and more difficult in Europe than in parts of the Middle East. In fact, the Jewish Diaspora away from the Holy Land was induced chiefly by the Roman conquest and the destruction of Jerusalem, and by the advent of Christianity's rise to power. Throughout the middle centuries Jews were oppressed, persecuted, forced to convert to Christianity, dispersed, and often murdered by the Catholic Church and "righteous" Christians all over Europe (2009, pp. 21-23). During the times of the Inquisition and the Crusades, tens of thousands of Jews were killed and in 1492 hundreds of thousands of Jews were forced to flee Spain or face execution (2009, p. 23). Contrarily, in Muslim Spain, Jews, for the most part, enjoyed a prosperous life for nearly four hundred years, from the end of the eighth until the beginning of the thirteenth century (2009, pp. 21-22). Arguably, the Jews as a people have been targeted for their religion and culture, perhaps more than any other group throughout history. The vast majority of this aggression toward Jewish communities, however, came from European Christians, not from Arabs or Muslims. These accounts give some insight that history is not dominated by a discourse depicting intrinsic hatred and conflict between Jews and Arabs that dates back thousands of years. It, further, helps to understand that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not between two religions that have fought against, and hated each other's faiths since time immemorial, but rather is one "over a land they have not been able to share" (Reveron & Murer, 2006, p. 4).

*The Rise of Tensions Between Jews and Arabs*

At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when early Jewish settlers from Europe had already arrived, Palestine was still under Ottoman rule.<sup>4</sup> In 1880, 96 percent of the almost 600,000 inhabitants were Arabs and the relationship between them and the early Jewish settlers was marked by cooperation as well as fear of economic competition (Tessler, 2009, p. 124, p. 127). Arab nationalism was on the rise at the turn of the century and many Palestinian Arabs saw a threat in Zionism to their political aspirations (2009, p. 128). The political Zionism movement also started toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after much of the assimilation efforts to European culture had been given up, due to unabated discrimination, oppression, and persecution. Relentless abuse of Jews by the European Christian leadership and populations motivated the primarily secular Zionist movement, spearheaded by Leo Pinsker and Theodor Herzl (Reveron & Murer, 2006, p. 5). Jews were, at that time, primarily focused on finding a safe haven to live in peace, rather than settling in Palestine due to religious motivation (2006, p.5). The Promised Land seemed ideal, since it was long ago the cultural and spiritual center of Judaism; however, early political Zionism used the historic and religious claims primarily in order to gain broad Jewish support (2006, p. 5). After the publication of Herzl's *The Jewish State* in 1896 and the 1<sup>st</sup> Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897, the movement gained even more momentum in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially after the Belfour Declaration in 1917, in which the British endorsed their support for a Jewish state in Palestine (2006, p. 5). Prior to the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 anti Zionist sentiment was very limited, but it reached "serious proportions" by the beginning of World War I

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<sup>4</sup> A small number of Jews never left the broader Middle East region. In Palestine, the number of permanently settled Jews was about 5,000 around the period of the modern age (Tessler, 2009, p. 20)

(Tessler, 2009, p. 133). After the end of World War II, which resulted in the unfathomable atrocity of nearly six million Jews being murdered in the Holocaust, moving out of Europe was only logical; settling in Palestine was the most favored place to do so. Tensions between indigenous Arabs and Jewish settlers started to pick up after several decades of growing unrest.

Soon after the end of World War II and the Holocaust, many freed Jews were not able to return to their homes in Europe for legitimized fears of being assaulted yet again, and in 1946 the United States pressured the British to allow 100,000 displaced Jews to enter Palestine (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, pp. 73-74). By the end of 1946, Jews accounted for about one half of the population in Palestine (2010, p. 81). And, since the British had given the issue over to the United Nations, the UN hastily drafted a partition plan that gave 55 percent of the land to the Jewish minority, 40 percent to the Arab majority, and 5 percent was petitioned to be under international control, including Jerusalem (Reveron & Murer, 2006, p. 6). Hence, between the end of World War II and the proclamation of the Jewish state in 1948 lay three years coined by turmoil and terrorism in Palestine between Arabs, Jews, and the British. Attacks heightened during the UN Partition Resolution period as many groups mobilized to gain strategic land and weaken the other side.<sup>5</sup> While the Jews accepted the partition plan, the Palestinians and Arab countries rejected it. Although several neighboring Arab nations were divided in leadership and were facing internal power struggles in the aftermath of WWII, they

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<sup>5</sup> This period, especially 1947 and 1948, marked a time of heightened tensions, paramilitary warfare, and terrorist attacks between organized Jewish groups, Arabs, and the British due to the chaotic circumstances of the plan to partition the land, started by the British and taken over by the United Nations. During this time, several massacres on both sides occurred that cost the lives of hundreds of men, women, and children and contributed to further feelings of animosity between Arabs and Jews (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 86, p. 99; Reveron & Murer, 2006, p. 7).



unanimously rejected the partition in order to pursue their own individual agendas with the disputed land (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 85). The known outcome is that, despite their division in leadership, five Arab nations united in the cause to attack the Jews in order to oust them from the land.

### *The Two Major Wars After Statehood*

On May 14, 1948, the Jewish leaders proclaimed the state of Israel. What symbolizes Independence for Israel today is al Naqba (the catastrophe) to the Palestinians: an event, which is still remembered annually in Palestine and by many Arabs on May 15. On that day in 1948, the day after Israel declared statehood, armies from Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt, and Lebanon attacked the newly founded state, in the first Arab-Israeli war, or, in the Israeli narrative, the War of Independence (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 97). The Arab armies were not cohesive, lacked unified command—unlike Israel’s forces—and mutually agreed-upon goals (2010, p. 98). By early 1949, Israel had won the war and gained about 20 percent in land mass or roughly 2,500 square miles of territory that had previously been partitioned to the Palestinians by the UN (2010, pp. 97-98). This meant that, in effect, by 1949, Israel controlled around 75 percent of the originally partitioned land, with Jordan taking the West Bank and Egypt taking Gaza. Additionally, close to 750,000 Palestinians were displaced and became refugees, mainly in bordering countries like Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon (2010, pp. 100-102; Tessler, 2009, pp. 279-280). This number of refugees, including their descendants, has now grown to around four million, which makes the displaced Palestinians the largest refugee population on earth (Reveron & Murer, 2006, p. 7).

The following two decades were marked by tensions, anxiety, and a smaller war involving Egypt and Israel. Britain and France lost even more of their credibility and influence among the Arabs, and the United States emerged as a key arbiter in the region, although the Arabs started seeing the US as increasingly biased in favor of Israel (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 127). Tensions, especially on an international scale, remained high because Russia started supporting some of the Arab regimes, especially Syria. Caution was of the essence in order not to open another front for a proxy war in the Middle East, which was mostly avoided by the super powers of the day. Israel, Russia-backed and US-backed Arab countries, however, used the dynamics of the cold war and dynamics of the regional struggles to engage in an arms race, which contributed to the war of 1967 (2010, p. 133). The founding of Fatah and the PLO in 1959 and 1964, respectively, their joint efforts during the early 1960's and related cumulative border attacks from Syria and Jordan into Israel, finally contributed to the outbreak of a full-fledged war between Syria, Jordan, and Egypt, against Israel in June of 1967 (2010, pp. 140-141). The war ended in six days, hence known in Israel as the "Six Day War," in which Israel captured the Golan Heights from Syria, the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including control over the Western Wall, from Jordan, and Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt (Reveron & Murer, 2006, p. 8). At this point Israel was in control of all of Israel and Palestine and an extremely unhappy Palestinian population, which Israel could neither assimilate nor enfranchise (2006, p. 8). This remains to be a sticky point for a one-state solution even today, because if Israel enfranchised its Arab population, it would soon lose its nature as a Jewish state, assuming Israel was to keep her democratic character.

In 1973, the Egyptian army invaded the Israeli occupied Sinai Peninsula and Syrian troops invaded the Golan Heights—previously captured by Israel—in what is known as the Yom Kippur War (Tessler, 2009, p. 475; Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 167). Israel again defeated the attackers in this short but bloody war. Four years after the war ended, Anwar Saddat, then president of Egypt, in an unprecedented gesture went to speak in front of the Knesset in 1977, as the first Arab leader in history to do so, slowly starting a series of peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt (2009, p. 507; 2010, p. 189). Saddat’s act was well perceived by the Israeli leadership and the public, and transpired to the first major round of peace talks in the following year. During the first Camp David Accords a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel was signed in 1979, and Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt under the condition that it be a demilitarized zone (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, pp. 190-191). 1979 was the first year of major peace talks between Israel and any Arab people and symbolizes the beginning of the era of negotiations for peace. The following paragraphs in this chapter will therefore focus on peace processes and negotiations in the more recent history of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

### *An Overview of Relevant Peace Negotiations, Accords, and Initiatives*

#### Camp David I

Camp David I was held in 1978, five years after the Yom Kippur War and with the tailwind of Anwar Sadat’s appearance in the Knesset one year prior, and him having already started talks with Menachem Begin. The Camp David accords were essentially a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel and did not address the plight of the Palestinians (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 193). As a result of Egypt engaging in peace talks with

Israel, the Arab nations expelled Egypt from the Arab League and the Islamic Conference and Egypt subsequently faced sanctions from the Arab countries (2010, p 192).<sup>6</sup> The Arab countries saw the Camp David accords as a way for Israel to neutralize Egypt and to undermine the possibility of a joint Arab effort to defeat Israel (2010, p. 192). On a positive note, a peace treaty between the two nations was signed in 1979; Israel proceeded with a phased withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and civil as well as diplomatic relations improved over the next few years (Tessler, 2009, p. 533.) Furthermore, the agreements “lessened Arab rejectionism and Israeli suspicion” (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 193).

### The Oslo Accords

After several months of secret meetings in Oslo, initiated by Norwegian officials, between PLO and Israeli officials, the Israel-PLO peace accords (Oslo I Accords) were signed in 1993 (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 252). The Clinton Administration readily welcomed the Accords, as did Jordan later on. As a result of the Accords, Prime Minister Rabin was shunned by right wing parliamentarians and Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu was called a traitor by angry Jewish settlers; on the Palestinian side, Hamas called Chairman Arafat a pimp and a traitor (2010, p. 253). The Oslo I Accords, in which Israel recognized the PLO and vice versa, outlined a ten-month-plan that would lead to Palestinian elections for a Palestinian council that was to be in charge of the West Bank and Gaza for a five-year interim period (2010, p. 253). The goal was for the two sides to come to an agreement on a comprehensive peace plan in the dedicated five-year interim

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<sup>6</sup> The Islamic Conference is known today as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and has 57 member states.

period of Palestinian self-rule (2010, p. 255). As significant—and unlikely at the time—as these Accords were, the truth is that they were far from comprehensive, as the main issues, pertaining to Jerusalem, refugees, and borders were adjourned for final-status negotiations, and because both sides did their own interpretation of the matters (2010, p. 255; Tessler, 2009, p. 760, p. 762). In the Palestinian interpretation, after five years there would be a sovereign Palestinian nation-state with East Jerusalem as its capital, but for Israel, Jerusalem would remain the undivided “eternal capital” and Rabin had ruled out the chance for a sovereign Palestinian state (2010, p. 255). However, it was a first step, or at least one step toward some sort of a peace agreement, and, after all, Jericho and Gaza were handed over to PLO control, and the Palestinian Authority (PA) gained more administrative power between 1993 and 1995 (2010, p. 254).

Oslo II, also called the Taba Accords, was the second phase of the peace process in the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement in 1995, in which more control was given to the PA in various parts of the West Bank, and in which Israeli forces slowly withdrew from some towns and villages in Areas A and B (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 272). The PA was to receive administrative control in eight initial areas, which were “labor, trade and industry, gas and petroleum, insurance, statistics, agriculture, postal services, and local government” (2010, p. 272) and over twenty other areas were under negotiation. Both sides agreed that the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) would remain in Hebron to protect the Tomb of David and settlements in close proximity (2010, p. 272). However, suspicions that Israeli forces would never completely leave and that a large military presence in the West Bank would endure to protect settlers remained (2010, p. 273). Palestinian radicals continued to undermine Arafat’s credibility and Jewish

religious radicals called for Rabin's removal, fearing they soon would have to give up biblical Israel, Judea and Samaria (2010, p. 273).

### The Wye River Memorandum

Over the next five years after Oslo I, Israelis and Palestinians witnessed the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist, Palestinian terrorist attacks on Israeli citizens, the collapse of peace talks, and Shimon Peres taking over as acting prime minister in November 1994 and losing, in early elections in May 1995, to Likud's Benjamin Netanyahu, who slowed down the peace process (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 273, p. 276, p. 281, p. 300). In October 1998, the Wye River Conference was held in Maryland about a week after Arafat and Netanyahu broke bread together at a meeting in Gaza and was attended in full by Benjamin Netanyahu, Yasser Arafat, Madeleine Albright, and, director of the CIA, George Tenet (2010, p. 303). Mutual distrust and internal pressure from right wing fractions in Israel and Palestine further slowed the talks down (2010, p. 303). The memorandum, resulting from the conference, contained elements such as the elimination of wording in the Palestinian National Charter calling for Israel's destruction, an Israeli redeployment plan delineating three stages and shifting full control over land from Areas C to B, and B to A to the Palestinian Authority, and a plan concerning security cooperation was signed on October 23, 1998 (2010, p. 303, pp. 327-330). However, in what has become a pattern, the agreements were not fully implemented; the Israeli government voted to be dissolved the following December; and the peace process stalled (2010, p. 306). After the election of Ehud Barak as prime minister in May 1999, an agreement for a permanent peace settlement was signed at

Sharm al-Sheikh in September of that year (2010, p. 309). While Israel transferred 7 percent more land to the PA in September, released 350 prisoners by October, and came to an agreement to connect Gaza to Hebron via a safe passage, the continued expansion of settlements in the West Bank and stark disagreements on a Palestinian state in all of the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital, and the question of the Palestinian refugees brought the final-status talks finally to a hold on November 8, 1999 (2010, pp. 309-311).

### Camp David II

Ehud Barak seemed to be more earnest in relation to peace talks and agreed to meet with Arafat once more on behest of the US' invitation to Camp David II. Immediately before the summit, Israel withdrew from Lebanon, Syria's president Hafez al-Assad died, and Arafat threatened with violence, if the rapidly approaching deadline of September 13, 2000 for a final peace agreement was not kept (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 321). Camp David II posed a high risk for both parties and the peace process at large as Barak swiftly lost coalition partners, a fact, which left him with a minority government, and Arafat risked being ousted if pressured into making too many concessions (2010, p. 321). After 15 days of intensive negotiations, no resolution was found and Camp David II was said to have failed. While there remains a great deal of disagreement about the failure, the biggest hurdles were likely disagreements over complete sovereignty of East Jerusalem by the Arabs and Arafat's insistence on the right of return for all Palestinian refugees from 1948 (2010, p. 322).

## The Clinton Parameters

At the end of 2000, Ariel Sharon stepped foot onto the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif with hundreds of Israeli police and soldiers to protect him. He gave a glaring speech in which he stated that Israel would never give up the Temple Mount (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, P. 323). This act was in large part a political stunt that did not only strengthen his bid for the upcoming election as prime minister, but also starkly provoked Palestinians and the subsequent second Intifada. Incumbent Prime Minister Ehud Barak knew he was on thin ice and most likely not going to be reelected. Bill Clinton, at the end of his second term, was scheduled to leave office in February 2001. Therefore, in a last minute attempt, he summoned Barak and Arafat to Taba, Egypt in January 2001, to negotiate the Clinton Parameters (2010, p. 326). In December 2000, Clinton told Arafat's and Barak's aids that this would be a one-time opportunity, which, if not accepted, would leave with him after his incumbency ended (Tessler, 2009, p. 813). In essence, the parameters dealt "with territory, security, Jerusalem, refugees, and the peaceful end of the conflict" (2009, p. 813; Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 326). On territory, the parameters proposed that Israel entirely withdraw from Gaza, leave 94-96 percent of the West Bank to Palestinians, but annex 4-6 percent of the West Bank to Israel proper (which would encompass 80 percent of the settlements there), with further land swaps for compensation (2009, p. 813; Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 326). On security, they suggested timed Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and a temporary international presence that could only be released early (before the end of a 36 month term), if both sides agreed to it (2009, pp. 813-814). In the West Bank, Palestinians would have sovereignty over the airspace (open to Israeli needs) and Israel was to have three early warning systems in



place (2009, p. 814). As an additional security measure, both sides would essentially come up with a contingency plan for access routes in case of an emergency or a military threat to Israel's national security (2009, p. 814). Lastly, Clinton called for a non-militarized state, with a strong Palestinian security force and an international force for border security (2009, p. 814). In regard to Jerusalem, the parameters suggested that Israeli Jews would have sovereignty over West Jerusalem (i.e. the Jewish Israeli part of town) and Palestinians would have sovereignty over the Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 326). Concerning the Old City and the holy places, several options were proposed for Jewish sovereignty over the Western Wall and Palestinian sovereignty over Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount and its immediate areas (Tessler, 2009, p. 814). As for the refugee issue, the parameters stated that some, but not all, refugees would be able to return, with priority given to those living in camps in Lebanon (2009, p. 815). Clinton further outlined that those refugees who wished to return would be able to do so in full to the Palestinian state, hence, Gaza or the West Bank and other swapped territories (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 326). When it came into international absorption or to the return to Israel, laws of those respective countries would determine the number of refugees under the applicable circumstances (Tessler, 2009, p. 815). He further offered the US to take a lead role in the compensation or resettlement process of the refugees (2009, pp. 814-815). Lastly, the parameters called for the end of the conflict.

While the Clinton Parameters were put together rather hastily, they were significant inasmuch as the parties came very close to an agreement during their negotiations in Taba (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 326). In fact, they came closer to an

agreement regarding security, Jerusalem, and on the issue of Palestinian refugees than ever before, and the parties even stated that a final solution was within sight (Tessler, 2009, pp. 816-817). The Oslo peace process is said to have come to a close with the end of the Clinton Parameters at the Taba Summit, which narrowed down the issues that were subsequently perceived as a good basis for future negotiations (2009, pp. 816-817). They were unsuccessful in ending the conflict, of course, and Ariel Sharon was elected prime minister a few weeks later, and both Israelis and Palestinians perceived the peace efforts as failed and continued to doubt the other side's motives (2009, pp. 817-818).

### The Arab Peace Initiative

Daunted, in part, that the Saudi image as a peace-loving people had suffered by the fact that 15 of the 19 hijackers of September 11<sup>th</sup> in 2001 were citizens of Saudi Arabia, and having had subsequent concerns about future relations with the US, then Crown Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz proposed the Saudi Initiative, now called the Arab Peace Initiative (API) at the Arab League Summit in Beirut in 2002 (Podeh, 2014). The API, essentially an advanced land-for-peace proposal, calls for full Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza to the pre 1967 borders, a two state solution with East Jerusalem as Palestine's capital, and a just and *agreed upon* solution to the refugee problem in accordance with UN Resolution 194 (Tessler, 2009, p. 827). In return the terms of the API promise Israel a comprehensive regional peace, recognition by, and normal and full diplomatic relations with the 22 Arab nations and all Islamic nations (League of Arab States, n.d.). What was significant and unprecedented about this initiative is that all 57-member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation

(OIC), which includes the 22 Arab League nations, unanimously and repeatedly, endorsed the API (DiCarlo, 2013). In essence, if the API was implemented, Israel is guaranteed normal diplomatic and economic relations with all Arab and Islamic countries.

The Arab Peace Initiative has, however, been marginally acknowledged and largely ignored by the Israeli government and the international community, since its launching in 2002. The introduction of the API on March 28, 2002 came at a very unfortunate moment, as one day before, on the Passover Seder, a Hamas suicide bomber killed 29 and wounded more than 100 Israelis in a hotel in Netanya and, two days later, another suicide bomber killed 15 more Israelis in Haifa (Podeh, 2007, p. 8). While no official response could be expected at that time, the general consensus was distrust toward the Saudis, a peace plan proposed by Saudis, and toward the Arab world in general (2007, p. 8). Sharon's response to the peace offer was a massive military campaign against terrorism and the isolation of Arafat (2007, p. 8). Again, the Arab Peace Initiative, which was offered as a basis for negotiations and not as a take it or leave it proposal, deals not only with the three major issues (the 1967 border, East Jerusalem, and the refugee problem), but its authors guarantee the recognition of Israel, and normal relations with her, by all 57 Islamic countries of the OIC, which includes all 22 Arab League affiliated countries in the Middle East. The API appears to be a comprehensive offer that might not be on the table indefinitely, given the precarious changes in the region in regard to political challenges and uncertainties. Additionally, nobody knows what will happen with the API when King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, now in his late 80's, dies.

In 2004, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) was elected president of the Palestinian Authority and Yasser Arafat died in France. Two years later, Israel's prime minister, Ariel Sharon, suffered a stroke and fell into a coma, after he made Israel withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip. That same year, Palestinian parliamentary elections took place. Palestinians were widely disillusioned with Fatah due to widespread allegations of incompetence and corruption, and, consequently, a weakened Palestinian Authority lost a significant number of seats to Hamas who was elected in Gaza (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 372), where it partially remains in power until today.

### The Roadmap to Peace

The Roadmap to Peace was initially drafted by the United States, but ultimately proposed by the “Quartet”—which consists of the United States, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations—and outlined three stages over a three year period, from 2002-2005 (Bickerton & Klausner, 2010, p. 343). The Roadmap was the last big attempt for an internationally drafted and supported peace effort for a two state solution and peace in the region. The first phase of the Roadmap called for Israel to lift movement-restrictions on Palestinians, to withdraw from areas occupied during the second Intifada, and to stop the construction of settlements (2010, p. 343). Palestinians were to stop all violence against Israelis, establish the post of a prime minister, and to draft a constitution (2010, p. 343). The second phase was scheduled for preliminary negotiations on issues such as water, arms control, economic development, and refugees (2010, p. 343). The third phase was set to deal with final-status issues and was to be overseen and endorsed by the Quartet (2010, p. 343). However, as all previous peace endeavors, the Roadmap to

Peace, although promising at various stages during its three year implementation period, did not accomplish what it set out to do. Not only did the continuation of the Intifada and Palestinian terrorist attacks through suicide bombers do their part to sabotage the implementation of the three phases—as did Israeli retaliation strikes—but also, the Palestinian leadership lacked unity and battled internal power-struggles, and both sides continued to deeply distrust the other (2010, pp. 343-350).

While the Roadmap to Peace was the last notable attempt to official peace talks and negotiations, the European Union, the Quartet, and various civil society groups are working diligently on getting the conflicted parties back on the table. Until this year, US secretary of State, John Kerry, was working on restarting the peace talks and intended to use a slightly altered version of the API as a basis for the aspired negotiations. This endeavor was challenged, however, partially because Israel and radical groups in Gaza engaged repeatedly in violent clashes and a permanent truce or peace agreement seem out of reach as it stands today.

### *Summary*

This chapter set out to provide a broad sweep of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and past peace endeavors. It is important to note that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not one that is purely religious or that has been fought for hundreds or even thousands of years. Historical and geographical circumstances played an equal, if not greater, role to put Israelis and Palestinians into this unfortunate situation of partially armed struggle over this small piece of land that both groups call home. As it was important to examine some of the historical context, it is equally important to examine current mechanisms that

contribute to, or could change the conflictual stands. In the next three chapters I examine the political structure and mechanisms in Israel, the mechanism and the influence of public opinion within Israel, and how it relates to the Arab Peace Initiative.

## CHAPTER III

### LEADERSHIP AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN ISRAEL

In this chapter I examine leadership and the political structure of the multi-party parliamentary system, as it exists in Israel. Additionally, I assess the position of prime minister in Israel with a focus on the political instability within the parliamentary system. I then specifically examine the political vulnerability of this position as well as the personal beliefs of incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict. In chapters that follow, I correlate the evaluation of leadership to the impacts of public opinion on the polity in Israel, and to the impacts of threat perception and issue framing as instigators of public opinion. I do this, in order to assess how the interrelationship among these three factors are crucial in determining the possibility of success for peace initiatives in the current Israeli political system and climate.

#### *Leadership*

Adequate and strong leadership is a key factor in any circumstance or setting where a goal needs to be achieved, a danger deflected, or a conflict resolved, as is the case in any group setting. That is true in business, organizations, the military, and in politics and governments. Leadership is partially determined and legitimized by the representation and the promotion of a social- and group identity and its ideals (Haslam, Reicher, & Platow, 2011, p. 146). What determines good leadership is, of course, difficult

to attribute to one single component and, furthermore, depends on many variables such as context, the role of the followers, transformation and power, to name a few (2011, p.21).

In democratic political systems, the leadership pays closer attention to how the public perceives political decisions and policies, because the leadership or lead-government appears to be more vulnerable to public opinion than in non-democracies. The people elect governments and leaders every few years, which means that leadership in democratic societies tends to be more sensitive to public opinion—or to majority opinion—concerning policies and other significant decisions, as the leadership aims to secure the majority of the public vote for reelection. That seems to be the case especially in conflict-related situations where national security is at risk.

Government is not a single entity but is rather a multifaceted organ that has a dynamic structure and functions in dynamic settings of domestic and international political contexts. Literature states that the public in democracies is genuinely averse to war, no matter if a war is directed against a non-democratic or democratic opponent (Mor, 1997, p. 200; Maoz & Russett, 1993). This will always put the leadership, at least in a democracy, in a tough position, in which the leadership has to decide whether to follow its own course of preferences, and how much that course might affect, resemble, or upset public opinion and, hence, its own constituency.

During situations when national security is at stake and decisions of war and peace have to be made, leadership is one of the most crucial elements. Although democratic states are not any less war-prone than non-democratic ones, they tend not to go to war against one another (Mor, 1997, p. 200). But if a democratic state faces an imminent war, the leader has to strongly consider resolving the crisis peacefully, or else



risk high human, economical, and ecological casualties, which, besides imminent catastrophe, would legitimately threaten his/her reputation and chances for reelection. How a leader acts in a larger conflict depends largely on the context of the political system he or she is part of. Also, as I discuss later, the conflict-related beliefs of the leader and, as I address in Chapter IV, the leadership's sensitivity to public opinion are part of several crucial deciding factors for whether peace talks or the launching of a peace initiative have a realistic chance (1997, p. 197). In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is therefore necessary to first look at the political system of Israel, in relation to leadership.

#### *Israeli Government: Leadership in a Multi-Party Parliamentary System*

In this section I describe the structure of Israel's political and electoral system with a focus on the office of the prime minister, which holds the most power in Israel. This structure is relevant in relation to the Israeli leadership model in general. Particularly, however, the role of the prime minister and the relationship of the executive branch (office of the prime minister) to the legislature (the Knesset) in Israel today are worth looking at, since it shows a rather limited ability of the prime minister to act independently as I will demonstrate in the next section.

Israel's parliamentary political system is straightforward in its structure and constitution, given that it operates through the executive, legislative, and judiciary branch.<sup>7</sup> The prime minister (PM) and the president make up the executive power, in

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<sup>7</sup> Israel does not have a written constitution. At the time of the creation of the State of Israel, Ben Gurion argued that due to heavy influx in population, concerns about the role of religious groups in the polity, and a generally unforeseeable future with the risk of more attacks from Arab nations a written constitution was not yet conducive and should be placed on hold. In 1950 it was decided to indefinitely postpone the

which the role of the president is more symbolic and ceremonial. Within the structure of this parliamentary system the prime minister and his cabinet administrate the “real” powers of the government (Mahler, 2004, p. 133); however, as I point out, this same system fosters a rather unstable environment for the PM, due to a seemingly ever-looming “vote of no confidence” by the Knesset.<sup>8</sup> The PM and most of the cabinet are part of the legislature. Only the PM, however, has to be a Member of Knesset, whereas the members of cabinet are not required to be (2004, p. 133). That the PM and the cabinet are responsible to the legislature (the Knesset) and can be removed by it at any time, in part, accounts for the vulnerability of the PM (2004, p.133). Israel’s electoral system is one of nation-wide proportional representation. The number of seats dedicated to each party is proportional to the votes it receives. A party gains representation through one or more of the 120 available Knesset seats if it surpasses the threshold of a minimum of 2 percent of the votes (“Electoral System in Israel,” n.d.). The people vote for the parties, which elect the candidate(s) to become Member(s) of the Knesset (MK). The president then appoints the leader of the largest party as prime minister and asks him or her to form a coalition government (Mahler, 2004, p. 142).

The formation of a coalition government usually is accomplished within the dedicated 45 days and results in the prime minister presenting it to the Knesset in order to get the mandatory “vote of confidence” to validate the majority support of the Knesset for the elected government (Mahler, 2004, p. 142). Knesset elections are scheduled every

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implementation of a formal written constitution and opted for its gradual creation (Mahler, 2004, pp. 120-121). For more information on the Israeli constitution see Mahler (2004) and Dieckhoff (2013).

<sup>8</sup> For simplicity reasons as well as for the fact that the current prime minister is male, I will use the male pronoun for the duration of this thesis when I am writing about the office of the prime minister. I acknowledge, however, that there often still exists a gender bias in academic writing, when it comes to leadership positions, despite the fact that many political leaders are female today. In the case of Israel, Golda Meir was the first and only female prime minister from 1969 – 1974.

four years and the prime minister is expected to serve the full premiership; however, at times a government can serve for more than four years, and the prime minister or the Knesset can call for early elections as well (“Electoral System in Israel,” n.d.). Once a government is formed neither the president nor the prime minister can call for new elections, nor can they dissolve the Knesset (Mahler, 2004, p. 134). The legislative branch, however, can vote a ruling government out of office, and it can do so at any time (2004, p. 133). Additionally, only the Knesset can suspend itself and call for new elections at any time during the four-year tenure (2004, p. 134). By constitution, the Knesset is the “supreme political authority” in Israel (2004, p. 133). Therefore, the Knesset does not have to fear a veto from the executive branch, and the judiciary, within parameters, does not limit legislative actions by deeming them unconstitutional (2004, p. 133). This is in stark contrast to the US system of judicial review. Another difference is the absence of an electoral college, and as opposed to a two party system, Israel fosters a large multitude of parties represented in the parliament. This is in part due to the influence of the British model, but mainly can be ascribed to the circumstances resulting from Jewish immigration prior to the founding of the State of Israel.

Examining the current multi-party system in Israel helps to understand the origin of the coalition-based and compromise-laden model of Israeli government. Looking at the history and events leading up to Jewish immigration to Palestine over the last century will help to explain Israel’s current political system, which in return will aid to understand the challenges of a peace initiative in contemporary Israel. After centuries of marginalization and persecution of the Jewish people, especially in “enlightened” Europe and Russia during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the desire for a Jewish Sate arose and was solidified

and promoted through political Zionism.<sup>9</sup> The denial of assimilation and full integration of Jewry into European and Russian societies, combined with numerous pogroms against them, facilitated the first waves of Jewish immigration to Palestine in the late 1800's, as a measure of self-protection and self-actualization. By 1918 the Jewish population in Palestine numbered 56,000 and made up about 8.5 percent of the population of Palestine (Mahler, 2004, p. 41).

The large waves of Jewish immigration from Europe, Russia, and Arab countries during British rule resulted in a broad range of diverse political interests and perspectives within the organized Jewish community (yishuv). Having to deal with that wide range of ideological and cultural diversity led to the creation of a multitude of political parties. This very structure of Israel's political system was further motivated by three decades of party activities under the British occupation, during which time this electoral system was started (Mahler, 2004, p. 133; Dieckhoff, 2013, p. 20). Israel's political system became one that is very close to, but not identical with, the British Westminster Model: "a rigid system of proportional representation" bequeathed from that of the yishuv, during the time of British rule ("Electoral System in Israel," n.d.). During the Mandatory Time, the population grew rapidly in diversity and size due to immigration as did a plurality of strong and diverging ideologies among the Jewish populous, in "their *Weltanschauung*"

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<sup>9</sup> The majority of the landmass of Russia belongs to Asia but the majority of the population lives in geographical European territory. Geopolitically, Russia is seen more as European; however, Russia is not part of the European Union. I differentiate between Europe and Russia, due to Russia's sheer geographical size, its political autonomy from Europe, and simply because there seems to be no real consensus among experts on whether or not Russia counts as "European" per se. Moreover, I differentiate Europe and Russia in order to not confuse the reader by simply writing Western and Eastern Europe, because to many readers Eastern Europe might or might not include Russia. By stating them as separate it is easy for the reader to understand the geographical region I refer to.

as well as in “the idea of the future state they dreamed of” (Mendilow, 2003, p. 3).<sup>10</sup> The large number of political parties served as a way to ensure the most possible representation for the diverse groups and opinions (“Electoral System in Israel,” n.d.). Because personalities and ideology played such a keen role in the newly emerging political system of the yishuv, it was laden with a certain vigor of the different political parties, who were grappling to establish, maintain, and accentuate their independence and differing values (“Electoral System in Israel, n.d.). The large number of refugees, vastly differentiating in ideology, personality, and world-view, welded a political system that gave a voice to the many. And while this system promises the inclusion of a wide range of interests, it simultaneously stifles the administrative abilities of the executive branch.

Three years after World War II and the holocaust, the number of Jews had climbed to 650,000 (Mahler, 2004, p. 41).<sup>11</sup> This vastly diverse group of refugees from all over Europe and Russia, combined with regional Sephardic Jews, needed good governance during the Mandatory Times, but especially in their newly founded sovereign state. Given the historically vast variety of ideological, intra-religious, and national views, and the low threshold of 2 percent (previously 1 and 1.5 percent) that is required to become elected to the Knesset, the Israeli parliamentary system frequently faces a struggle to govern in a unified and constructive way. As Mendilow (2003) points out, due

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<sup>10</sup> After Israel’s declaration of statehood on May 14, 1948 the term “Jewish populous” can be exchanged with “Israeli populous,” with the exception of Muslim and Christian Arab-Israeli citizens.

<sup>11</sup> The difficult integration, the marginalization, and the occasional persecution of Jews in Europe and Russia throughout the middle ages and until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century brought about Zionism and the desire for a place where the Jewish people could enjoy a peaceful life, free of oppression, marginalization, and persecution. Due to historical and spiritual significance, mandatory Palestine (now Israel) was chosen as the place where a Jewish State was supposed to be created. Slow but steady immigration of Jews into Palestine started around the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century After World War II and the near annihilation of European Jewry during the Holocaust. Consequently, the number of surviving European Jews immigrating to Mandatory Palestine increased and the desire for a sovereign Jewish state grew, and was perhaps accelerated, due of the aftermath of the Holocaust.

to the multiplication of diverse parties, strong ideological tensions had to be appeased in order to form government coalitions. This in return “created a system where none ever enjoyed the ability to govern alone” (2003, p. 3). Samuels and Shugart (2010) go even further, criticizing the substantial party-system fragmentation, which is due to “this huge district magnitude together with a low threshold of exclusion,” and consequently bears vexatious governability difficulties (p. 179). The governing ability of the prime minister, hence, is impaired and Israel’s political system demands, today as it did then, more compromise in parliament. Furthermore, it compels coalitions among different parties that often differ vastly in their values and ideology, as seen in the most recent elections of January 2013. In the 2006 elections, Kadima, Likud, and Labor—the three largest parties at that time—together only reached 60 seats in the Knesset, one seat short of an absolute majority (Dieckhoff, 2013, p. 21). This Israeli multi-party system and the need to create an often spread-out coalition government does not foster extended stability for the government as a whole, but especially not for the post of the prime minister and the cabinet. These two offices seem to be in a particularly vulnerable position as I point out in the following section.

### *The Vulnerability of the Prime Minister in Israel’s Political System*

In this section, I highlight how the position of the prime minister, as it is defined in Israel’s parliamentary political system, is rather vulnerable in nature in general, and specifically in terms of making controversial decisions. This is particularly so for issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I argue that due to the multi-party parliamentary system, the power of the prime minister is weakened and ultimately gives him less

freedom to spearhead the pursuit of a peace initiative, at least under the current circumstances in Israel. It is important, thus, to note, that, in Israel no one party has ever achieved a majority of more than 50 percent of Knesset-seats in an election. Hence, forming coalitions with other parties is essential for the victor party, in order to receive a majority in the House of Representatives (Mahler, 2004, p. 159). Only after successfully forming a coalition government can the appointed prime minister expect ratification through the Knesset. As indicated earlier, the prime minister derives his legitimization through the legislature by receiving a vote of confidence. By the same token, the chief executive can just as easily be voted out of office by a vote of no confidence, at any time (2004, p. 142). This leaves the prime minister in a vulnerable position during his four-year term, especially if the coalition government consists of numerous, differently motivated parties. The more parties are in the coalition, the greater the risk for the coalition to fail and for the prime minister to get dropped (2004, p. 161).

Forming a coalition government that merges several parties, which differ in ideology, inevitably diminishes opportunities for unilateral legislative and party conduct (Mahler, 2004, p. 158). In other words, the largest parliamentary party, and above all the prime minister, have to negotiate formal agreements with coalition parties and must accept compromises (2004, p. 158). Consequently, governments that have to seek a majority through coalition tend to be less stable than governments that adhere to a single-party majority system (2004, p. 161). This is due, in part, to the fact that the chief executive does not only have to keep his own party disciplined, but he has to also rely on the other parties' leaders to do the same (2004, p. 161). As stated above, the prime minister also has to make compromises and concessions that are likely to weaken his and

the party's own ideological stands, potentially to a large extent. In the case of launching a peace initiative, if the prime minister faces stark opposition from the majority of his coalition government in the Knesset, he will most likely abstain from any unilateral move contra his coalition. As I examine in the following chapters, an exception in favor of a single-handed move by the executive might be made, if the prime minister has strong public support. If that is not the case, any controversial, unilateral move by the prime minister threatens his office due to the fact that he can quickly fall "out of favor" with one (or more) of his coalition partners. This circumstance, Mahler (2004) points out, leaves the executive vulnerable to 'blackmail' and to be ousted at any time by a vote of no confidence (pp. 161-163).

Israel's political system is both stable in its democratic nature, and unstable as a political system, due, in part, to frequent early elections. In the ten year period between 1989 and 1999, Israelis voted five times, instead of the designated two times (Kenig, 2008, para. 2 & 4). Early elections get called more often in Israel than in most other democratic states. The climate of big coalition government in Israel evidently proves to be rather unstable for its prime minister specifically, and for the government, in general. Given this fragility, the leading party, the coalition members, and the opposition continuously monitor public opinion regarding the sentiments toward the leader and his policies. The prime minister and the ruling party therefore have to be especially careful of any controversial decisions they make. I speculate that this is particularly true in relation to a decision pertaining to conflict if it appears to threaten Israel's national security.



*Benjamin Netanyahu, the Incumbent Prime Minister*

Leadership as a concept and within a government is, of course, a dynamic composition and the leaders' own opinions, that of the public, and the behavior of rivals are a dynamic, non-stagnant process (Mor, 1997, p. 198). In other words, leadership decisions and actions are influenced by a combination of party ideology, perceived public sentiment, and carefully analyzed estimates of the opposition fraction. Yet, whatever the party's ideals, the opinion of the public, or the grievances of the opposition may be, a political leader will always also be driven by his or her own convictions and beliefs.

In the case of current Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, it appears that his personal beliefs line up quite well with the constraints placed upon him by the political system.<sup>12</sup> By standing firm in the current peace process, Mr. Netanyahu for the most part only risks upsetting the international community, rather than his political base or coalition government. The peace movement does not have the same momentum in Israel as it had in the past and, therefore, Mr. Netanyahu does not have to fear much internal pressure. If he, however, strongly favored a swift and comprehensive peace agreement, it would upset the current status quo, in which case the vulnerability of the prime minister could come into play. As I show below, Mr. Netanyahu is personally

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<sup>12</sup> Feldman and Valenty (2001) offer a psychological evaluation of Israel's Prime Minister. This might be interesting and helpful for the reader who has not done extensive reading on Mr. Netanyahu and helps, perhaps, to understand his humanity and tendencies as a leader. They write: "Benjamin Netanyahu's behavior reveals many of the characteristics of a narcissistic personality, including a tendency to megalomania (linking his personal fate to the national one); powerful ambition, total devotion to his goal (success at any price); failure to admit weakness and refusal to take the blame; manipulative relationships; using other people to attain his goals; taking from people; dishonesty in politics; a lack of personal and political ethics; great sensitivity to criticism; keen awareness of his appearance" as it is referred to in the American Psychological Association (2001, pp. 161-162). Additionally, they point out he operates on the belief "that it is his heroic task to rescue his homeland" (2001, p. 153). They conclude that he is suspicious, borderline paranoid and that sees conspiracy a lot. He does not see weaknesses in himself and blames others for his failures. He is an aggressive leader who adores power, with an emphasis on nationalism in the political realm. He pampers his public supporters and rallies up his followers to revolt against opposing social views opposing his own (2001, 162).

strongly opposed to a Palestinian state in the West Bank, which would be based largely on the 1967 borders, as well as to the notion that East Jerusalem were to become the capital of that state. Those two issues, as well as the right of return for Palestinian refugees, have been part of every proposed peace plan so far and are three of the core and most vital elements of the Arab Peace Initiative. In other words, Mr. Netanyahu's personal beliefs prove to be a vast obstacle to the current peace plan, yet it is highly unlikely that he has to fear public pressure or a vote of no confidence regarding his views on the issue.

It is evident that Benjamin Netanyahu is neither willing to give up Judea and Samaria, nor to give up sovereignty of any part of Jerusalem to Arab rule.<sup>13</sup> His reasoning is based on security concerns, which he thoroughly outlines in his book *A Durable Peace*, in which he states that it is impossible for Israel to alter its current "defense boundaries" (Netanyahu, 2000, p. 337). Mr. Netanyahu, who is in his third term as of January 2013, gives the example that Israel would have ceased to exist in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, if Palestinian land were still marked by the pre-1967 borders (2000, p. 282). If that had been the case, he argues, the Arabs would have been able to penetrate deeper into Israel faster, and, definitely would have caused the end of Israel's existence (2000, p. 282).

Therefore, giving up land in the West Bank to the Palestinians is a threat to Israel's

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<sup>13</sup> The land mass described as Palestinian land or territory entailing the pre-1967 borders are commonly known to international media, diplomats and is referred to by the United Nations as the Occupied Territories of the West Bank, or simply the West Bank. It is the area west to the banks of the Dead Sea. In Biblical/historical Israel, however, this same area of land is referred to as Judea and Samaria, which were essentially the first Jewish Kingdoms. It is referred to as Judea and Samaria predominantly by conservative Israeli Jews, settlers, and (ultra-) orthodox religious people. Benjamin Netanyahu calls it by that traditional name also in his writings. I hence use it as Judea and Samaria when I am writing about Benjamin Netanyahu's view and will refer to it as the West Bank otherwise. Most Palestinians and many Arabs, in my personal experience, call it simply Palestine and only refer to it as the West Bank if a distinction of Gaza needs to be made.

national security and Israel's very survival, something that Mr. Netanyahu seemingly will avoid at all costs during his tenure.

In Mr. Netanyahu's opinion, the lack of truly democratic regimes in the Middle East requires Israel to be militarily strong and tactically wise at all times. The Middle East is still far away from the much-desired *peace of democracies*. This model of peace is based on the fact that the democracies of modern Europe and North America do not go to war with each other, due to their strong economic ties and the citizenry's internalized reluctance to war (Netanyahu, 2000, p. 262; see also Mor, 1997; Fearon, 1994; Maoz & Russett, 1993). The only model he sees for an enduring peace between the Arab states and Israel, currently, is *the peace of deterrence*; "one that can be credibly defended by a strong Israel" (2000, p. xiii). By the same token, the Cold War era was a perfect example for a peace of deterrence, according to Netanyahu. One of the main reasons why the USSR did not attack the Western regimes was due to the USSR's fear of the combined retaliation through NATO (2000, pp. 267-275). In the Israeli case, this type of peace can only be guaranteed by maintaining large, Israeli-controlled buffer zones in the West Bank and around East Jerusalem, and to keep Jerusalem undivided.<sup>14</sup> To be more precise, Mr. Netanyahu maps out exactly where he believes those lines should be drawn and what he believes is necessary for Israel's continued and safe existence:

First and foremost, it requires a land buffer that includes the Jordan Valley and the hills directly overlooking it and that would extend southward to the ridges above the Dead Sea. At its deepest point, this buffer will be about 12 miles wide, a minimal depth given the fact that Israel faces a threat from a potential eastern front, which might include thousands of Iraqi, Syrian, and Iranian tanks. [...] Second, Israel must have a zone of separation between the Palestinian areas and the crowded coastline where

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<sup>14</sup> Most, if not all, peace initiatives that have been negotiated or that have been even marginally considered had at its core roughly or precisely a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital.

most of its population lives. This zone, [...] is important in any future arrangement for minimizing terrorist infiltration from the Palestinian areas to Israel's major cities (2000, p. 342).

Besides the necessity of keeping the mountain range in the eastern parts of the West Bank to fight off a possible eastern front, he argues that buffer zones around Jerusalem, wide corridors in the West Bank to protect Israeli settlers and for military movement in case of an attack, and protection of the main aquifer that delivers 40 percent of Israel's water supply are paramount (2000, p. 342). A failure of Israel to maintain the above mentioned measures, if it let down its defenses or showed sufficient weakness, could reverse the progress toward peace and "the conditioned reflex of seeking [Israel's] destruction would resurface" (2000, p. 276, 322) among the Arab states.

Prime Minister Netanyahu highlights another point against a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders in *A Durable Peace* (2000): the fallacy often made by proponents of Israeli territorial concessions, namely that a Palestinian state with demilitarized zones, within and around it, is sufficient for Israel's security needs (p. 306). His concern here is manifold. For one, it is not possible to demilitarize an entire sovereign state, simply because it is not entirely possible in its execution and is not a sustainable endeavor (2000, p. 306). He argues that a Palestinian state would eventually ask for a standing army to protect itself against terrorist groups, potentially pouring in from neighboring or hostile Arab countries, or that it might simply ignore the demilitarization promise, like so many other states have previously done (2000, p. 306). Additionally, Arab militant groups could easily smuggle small high-tech missiles and other arms into the West Bank as Israel could not search and disassemble every truck or civilian plane (2000, p. 306). And if Israel found a violation of a demilitarization treaty, it

would then not be able to enter the West Bank because that would signify the crossing of an international frontier; an act, which could trigger a full-fledged Arab-Israeli war and would surely result in international sanctions (2000, p. 306).

Mr. Netanyahu, hence, is entirely against a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders, mainly for security reasons. As pointed out above, he is especially concerned about neighboring or hostile Arab states that could use the territorial gain to launch deadly attacks onto Israel, due to closer proximity to its major cities. In addition, a larger standing army would be needed in order to defend the new borders, even though it is not clear whether Israel's army could spread out efficiently in the case of an attack. Additionally, this scenario would weaken Israel's economy. He sums his sentiment up in one sentence: "A PLO state in the West Bank would be like a hand poised to strangle Israel's vital artery along the sea" (Netanyahu, 2000, p. 307). Mr. Netanyahu also dismantles any hopes of East Jerusalem becoming the capital of a hypothetical Palestinian state with his unambiguous contra-statement about the matter. He writes: "[East Jerusalem] was the capital of ancient Israel for twelve centuries, the very heart and soul of all Jewish aspirations to return and rebuild the land of Israel. Israel could not under any circumstances negotiate over any aspect of Jerusalem..." (2000, p. 338). Moreover, in a speech at the Likud Central Committee gathering in May 2002, Mr. Netanyahu left no doubt at his firm stand against a Palestinian State west of the Jordan. He said: "Not under Arafat or under any other leadership. Not today, not tomorrow, not ever" and "self-rule – yes! A state – no!" (Netanyahu, 2002). These are unmistakable words by the incumbent Prime Minister that lead to the safe assumption that there will, in fact, not be serious negotiations regarding a possible Palestinian state in the West Bank.

Hence, the chances for a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital and borders roughly drawn by the pre-1967 lines are nonexistent, or slim at best, with Mr. Netanyahu at the helm.

### *Summary*

Due to Israel's complicated history and its multifaceted and incredible diversity in culture, ideologies, and levels of religiousness, the only way to govern is through a broad coalition government. Although technically the office of the prime minister holds the most power, the fact that he can be voted out of office by vote of no confidence through the Knesset at any time signifies the instability and vulnerability of the position. The importance here lies in the difficulty for the prime minister to push for a controversial decision—such as a peace initiative—that entails the fate of sensitive points such as the West Bank, East Jerusalem, or the refugee issue. He would have to make sure that his often-broad coalition government supports him, otherwise they might threaten to pull out and the prime minister faces the imminent threat of being prematurely voted out of office. Israel's current prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is strongly opposed to a Palestinian State west of the Jordan River and with Jerusalem as a shared capital of such a state. Both always have been capital points in previous peace initiatives and are, in fact, chief points in the currently discussed Arab Peace Initiative. In terms of Mr. Netanyahu's own perception it seems to be congruent with the current status quo, and he does not have to fear upsetting his coalition base (neither the opposition at this point). Since he does not want to move forward on this issue, as we know from his personal account, the likelihood of a peace initiative such as the API to be taken seriously or even be implemented are

very slim, at best. The only exception that could potentially change this current paradigm is extraordinary external pressure by the international community placed on the Israeli leadership, or pressure caused by a major shift of public opinion within Israel.

## CHAPTER IV

### PUBLIC OPINION IN ISRAEL

#### *Public Opinion in Democracies*

Leaders, especially in democracies, rely on public approval, public opinion, and ultimately on the vote of the populous. Usually, the leadership's main incentive, in addition to governing, is to get reelected or to keep their own party in power, if another term is constitutionally not possible. Public opinion provides an incentive, operating in the background, for leaders to keep "an eye on their approval ratings as they look forward to the next election" (Trumbore, 1998, p. 548). In democracies, the people are voting for representatives who most closely represent their core values and political sentiments. For the leaders in power, it is crucial to know what the general public thinks and how strongly it cares about a policy (-reversal), a controversial issue, or potential shifts in a sustained conflict. It is of the essence for the incumbent leadership, and also for the opposition, to know the sentiment of the public in order to factor into the equation *how* to proceed or *when* to counter. Ignoring public dissatisfaction, especially on critical issues pertaining to foreign policy and national security, makes leaders vulnerable and poses the risk of losing office in the next election, or perhaps worse, a vote of no confidence. Fearon (1994) offers an adequate description about the role of public opinion and foreign policy: "In democracies, foreign policy is made by an agent on behalf of principals (voters), who have the power to sanction the agent electorally or through the workings of public opinion" (p. 581). Long-term rivalries, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, bring with them several psychological sets that add to an already difficult and often tense



dynamic on the domestic front as well as on international levels. On the one hand, the influence of public opinion on the considerations of the leadership is more prominent in enduring rivalries than in incidental conflicts (Mor, 1997, p. 198). On the other hand, enduring rivalries bring with them a set of obstacles that make a related policy shift more difficult than, say, an economical one; namely, the enemy has grown to hold an important socio-psychological and political function and it is particularly difficult to shift from that internalized image through a change of policy (1997, p. 199). Often times such shifts require strategic campaigns of political marketing of new attitudes to the public (1997, p. 199). Issue framing is another strategy used by governments to influence the issue-related perception of the public and can be used in a positive or negative way, as I will discuss in the following chapter, but most certainly is used to work in favor of the leadership's preferred course of action. Before it can come to a decision regarding a potential peace initiative, domestic public support is needed, especially in enduring rivalries. Hence, in a democracy, the populous holds a certain power by means of voting and the leadership, therefore, inevitably monitors the sentiment of the populous, or public opinion.

### *Public Opinion in Israel*

Public opinion has a particularly high standing in Israeli society and it currently does not pose a threat to the government's preferred course of action in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. High sensitivity to public opinion in Israel is mainly due to potential instability of the government, the vulnerable position of the office of the prime minister, and the resulting, more imminent danger of frequently called early elections or premature dissolution of governments. Therefore, the polling of public opinion is an essential tool

that is widely used by ruling governments and opposition parties. Politicians on all sides pay close attention to the majority opinion of the Israeli public, especially on controversial or big-impact issues, including those ranging from religious or economic to foreign policy matters. One concern in Israeli politics is the ongoing conflict with the Palestinian people and their claim to a sovereign state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This conflict has had a grip on Israeli politics since the day of the state's creation and there are likely few days when it is not on peoples' minds or in the media, even in current day Israel, more than sixty years after her birth.

The peace process has been stalling, but Benjamin Netanyahu does not need to fear consequences, at least on this issue, because the majority of the public appears to accept the current status quo. Arguably, Mr. Netanyahu has been doing what is necessary to appease the international community as well as the Israeli "peace camp" by engaging sporadically in preliminary talks with John Kerry and Mahmoud Abbas over the past few years. This, technically, poses a "win-win" position for Mr. Netanyahu and Likud, and only is possible because the majority of the public is seemingly not interested sufficiently in a change of policy, or is in agreement enough with his preferred course of action. The current course of action, arguably, is one of deterrence: a strategy that mostly prevents war, but also one that does not actively pursue an ultimate solution with true peace and reconciliation. When the preferences of the leadership and the public converge along the conflictual status quo, no shift in policy toward a peace initiative or a negotiated settlement can be expected. Preferences would have to diverge in order to create even a possibility for change. In the following paragraphs, I analyze the mechanisms of public opinion in democracies and in Israel, particularly.

### *Normative and Structural Models*

In order to take a deeper look at the importance of public opinion in a democracy like Israel, I examine peace and conflict behavior of democracies in general through the lenses of the democratic peace theory, the two-level game theory and the war-proneness theory.<sup>15</sup> The concept of the democratic peace phenomenon gives insight into the behavior of democratic states when in conflict with each other or with nondemocratic states. Maoz and Russett (1993) suggest that democratic states are equally as conflict- or war prone as are nondemocratic states; however, for the last two centuries, democratic states have virtually not had full-blown violent disputes or engaged in war with each other (p. 624; Mor, 1997, p. 200). Maoz and Russett (1993) justify the democratic peace phenomenon with two assumptions: the “normative model” and the “structural model” (p. 625). The normative model states that (a) nation states will, to a large extent, externalize their domestic values, norms of behavior, and political processes in a dispute with another and (b) in case of a conflictual confrontation with a non-democracy, the latter’s norms will dominate within the international anarchic system (1993, p. 625). In democracies, compromise, rather than the elimination of the rival, is the default method

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<sup>15</sup> In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the parameters are not as clear-cut as those described in the theory above—i. e. a democratic state against another democratic or a nondemocratic state. Palestinians do not have a state of their own, and while the P.A. in the West Bank as well as Hamas in Gaza were elected democratically, some people might argue that without a state there cannot be a true democracy. However, it is also evident that the situation is unique and challenging and that the conflict has shown several stages of violent escalation over the past decades. And as for Israel, the leadership has to mobilize public opinion for drastic war or peace decisions (short of a national emergency, of course) just like any other democracy has when dealing with a potentially violent conflict. And even though the vast majority of Palestinians deal with the conflict democratically and peacefully, a minority has in the past—and continues to—seek violent means (in the form of acts of terrorism) to engage with Israel in this conflict. Therefore, similar to assumption number 2 in the normative model, the norms of the “nondemocratic” player (i.e. the Palestinians) often set the tone of the conflict, which sometimes aides Israel to call for an emergency situation, much to the despair to a majority of Palestinians. The Israeli government or public might, hence, perceive some aspects of the Palestinian “polity” and people as an entity that fits those with nondemocratic norms, and perceive or engage the Palestinians fitting the description as if they were a nondemocratic opponent.

to solve the conflict, whereas in nondemocracies it is more the case of a winner takes all, zero-sum scenario (1993, p. 625). The structural model describes (a) the necessity of leaders to mobilize the support of the masses for policies of international concerns and (b) the notion that the only way to circumvent the necessary acquisition of domestic support is in a state of emergency (1993, p. 626). Comparing these two concepts, it becomes clear that public opinion plays a significant role only in the latter. The normative model alludes only to the situation where two democracies are in dispute with each other, uphold identical norms of conflict resolution, and in which the leadership and the public largely agree to resolve the dispute by nonviolent means (Mor, 1997, p. 200).

Public opinion becomes an important factor in the structural model, as Dixon describes: “it follows the Kantian premise that democratic consent of the governed serves as a powerful restraint on decisions for war, because it is the citizens who inevitably end up paying the costs, fighting the battles, and repairing the damage” (as cited in Mor, 1997, p. 200). The restraint of a democratic society to engage in war does not make democracies any less war prone; however, if tempted into war, the leadership has to meticulously weigh the consequences for him- or herself, not only in regard to damage and security of the country and people, but also to incumbency and reelection (1997, p. 200). It is important to note that, short of an emergency, public opinion plays a crucial role in international politics and policies, especially when a nation’s national security is at risk. This chapter focuses centrally on the scenario outlined in the first part of the structural model; namely, the necessity of the leadership to mobilize domestic support for policies, actions or agreements in regard to a conflict with a foreign entity that does not fit the description of a democratic sovereign state. Because international politics,

especially when related to interstate-conflict, also entail the domestic realm due to real consequences to country and people, taking a closer look at the two-level game theory helps to illuminate the ensuing dynamics that make public opinion relevant as a potential constraint to the decision makers in a democracy.

### *Two-Level Game Theory*

While leadership in a democracy might have a clear preference on how to proceed in an international dispute, the power of the public—the voters—demands a complex balancing act of the leadership between its own interests, that of national security and advancement, and the perceived strong sentiments of the public. Putnam describes this relationship between international diplomacy and domestic politics as an intricate task for the leadership in a “two-level game” where the “central decision makers strive to reconcile the domestic and international imperatives simultaneously” (as cited in Shamir & Shikaki, 2005, p. 311). In other words, the leadership constantly has to balance the interests of foreign policy and security measures of the country—as seen through their lens and value system—with those interests of the voting majority. Thus, an internationally successful move might prove disastrous on the domestic level (Trumbore, 1998, p. 546). In this two-level game framework, Level I represents the international level, where governments seek to minimize the impact of international-political developments while simultaneously satisfying domestic pressures to maximize their own level of political freedom (Shamir & Shikaki, 2005, p. 312; Trumbore, 1998, p. 546; Trumbore & Boyer, 2000, p. 680). The domestic level (Level II) is where public opinion becomes a noticeable imperative not only for or against a peace initiative, but also for any

substantial policy, by giving leverage to political groups, in addition to the public's inherent power of voting, to pressure the government (Shamir & Shikaki, 2005, p. 311; Mor, 1997, p. 202). Putnam (1988) terms all those Level I agreements that would obtain domestic (Level II) majority support as "win-sets" (pp. 437-438; Shamir & Shikaki, 2005, p. 312; Trumbore, 1998, p. 546). However, if a tentative Level I agreement is in sight, it will only be a true win-set if it is "ratified" by the Level II constituency (Trumbore, 1998, p. 546). Ratification here is not used in a formal sense; rather, it signifies that the domestic constituents will make their pro or contra sentiment known to the decision makers (1998, p. 546) and simultaneously, the decision makers study the public's preferences through opinion polls. A final negotiated agreement is only then possible when the Level II win-sets overlap with the desired Level I agreements (1998, p. 546), but even if negotiations succeeded, ratification would likely fail.

One example for the disharmony of win-sets and the subsequent failure of negotiations is found in the Iran Hostage Crisis. Both the United States and Iran preferred an arms-for-hostages deal during their secret Level I negotiations. However, the negotiation effort collapsed once the US public found out about it, at which point "ratification" of the Level I target-deal by the domestic constituency became inevitable, but was not administered (Putnam, 1988, p. 436). Trumbore (1998) asserts that, despite criticism of it being more of a metaphor than a fully developed theory, the two-level game approach offers an observable and measurable framework to the bearing of public preferences on international politics, it illuminates the dynamics involved in international negotiations, and simultaneously challenges the realist model that states are homogenous, rational entities (p. 545; Trumbore & Boyer, 2000, p. 680). Additionally, Trumbore and

Boyer (2000) point out that the two-level game approach is not limited to negotiations, but “also serves as an allegory for understanding the impact of domestic influences on the broad spectrum of foreign policy decisions” (p. 680).

### *Public Opinion as Domestic Constraint*

Taking a deeper look into the two-level game approach, Trumbore (1998) offers several factors that aid in providing measurements for the effectiveness of public opinion in regard to foreign policy issues and international negotiations. Those, he argues, determine whether or not public opinion can function as a domestic constraint (p. 561). The three paramount factors are (1) public preferences versus the preferences of the leadership; (2) the intensity of the matters at hand; and (3) whether or not the public has the capability to ratify a prospective deal (1998, p. 548). What is clear about public preferences (1) is that if they do not diverge from the preferences of the leadership, no constraint is present. The greatest impact of constraint, in case of a preference divergence is before any agreements, even tentative, are reached. During the pre- and early negotiation stage, public preferences can preemptively disqualify certain options and it may “serve to establish the outer boundaries of the Level I win-set by defining the range of agreements likely to win Level II ratification” (1998, p. 549). In terms of issue intensity (2) it is established that the higher the intensity of the issue the more is at stake, and the more weight will public preferences carry. Governments can use their power to either limit information to the public or frame the issue differently in an attempt to make it work in their favor (1998, p. 549; Shamir & Shikaki, 2005, p. 314). Lastly (3), the power of the public to ratify an agreement (or a decision to even negotiate) is established

either directly by a necessary referendum or indirectly by means of the ballot, if the leadership has reason to fear the public's dissent at the next election. Here, again, the issue of intensity plays a key role. The issue in question must have an intensity that is high enough for the broad public to care on a deep level. When that is the case, electoral concerns will have the decision makers consider it out of fear of being punished later at the ballot box (Trumbore, 1998, p. 550). In other words, public opinion can only act as a real constraint when the above three points are in place. If the majority of the public is in unison with the leadership's goals, the latter two factors become irrelevant. By the same token, if the issue is not relevant enough for the broader public to be deeply concerned with, then decision makers will likely interpret it as a *carte-blanche* and will act freely for a lack of fear of electoral consequences (1998, p. 550).

Trumbore (1998) uses the Anglo-Irish peace process as an example where a divergence of preferences between Levels I and II was present, yet because of the lack of issue intensity for the British public, public opinion did not function as a constraint for the British government. Whatever the decisions were that came out of Westminster, they were ratified, even if indirectly, by the broad British public, bearing no consequences for British government. And even though only one third of the British population favored the status quo for Northern Ireland to remain a part of the UK, the level of intensity and importance was too low for the British population, and hence, negotiators and policy-makers enjoyed inconsequential freedom to not alter the constitutional standing of Northern Ireland (1998, p. 557).<sup>16</sup> This was different in Ireland, as the electorate had direct ratification powers by means of a referendum. Trumbore (1998) concludes that “an

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<sup>16</sup> Opinion polls on this issue were taken from 1974-1996, as can be seen in Trumbore (1998).



uninterested, uninvolved public is unlikely to exert any meaningful pressure on its leaders” (p. 561).

Arguably, this seems to be the case currently in Israeli society. The absence of large-scale violent attacks on Israeli citizens in Israel, the perceived Iranian threat, relative economic stability, and a tolerable status quo seemingly have the public currently less interested, or at least less involved, in pressuring for the achievement of an ultimate solution to this long-term conflict. Consequently, there is presently no critical mass to be a catalyst for a peace initiative nor does the public act as a constraint for the decision makers in regard to the government’s stalling of the peace process. If the public is uninterested and/or comfortable with the status quo, then, based on the *statist* approach within the war-proneness theory, there is a convergence of preferences between the public and the elites (Mor, 1997, p. 201). In order to further understand the domestic dynamics between the leadership and the public, as they relate to peace-making efforts or the lack thereof, it is useful to examine various elements of the war-proneness theory.

### *War-Proneness Theory*

Here, I introduce three additional factors that are likely to influence the decision-making process on the domestic level concerning a peace initiative or policy change in sustained rivalries, as defined by Mor (1997). Similar to Trumbore’s (1998) above-mentioned parameters in the two-level game approach, Mor (1997) offers three parameters he deems crucial in the domestic context and by which the process of policy choice is influenced: (1) the domestic structure of public opinion, which is measured by how far apart the preferences of opponents and proponents are regarding a settlement; (2)

the leadership's preferential course of action regarding a settlement; and (3) the sensitivity of the leadership to public opinion (Mor, 1997, p. 204). Within the structure of public opinion (1), if the gap between supporters and opponents of accommodation is small, public opinion will pose less of a constraint to the leadership in the case of a preference divergence. By the same token, it will, however, also signify only marginal support when preferences converge. If the gap between supporters and opponents is substantial, so will be the support or the constraint for the government. The structure of public opinion is, hence, in direct relationship with (2) the leadership's preferred course of action. Both Mor (1997) and Trumbore (1998) see the leadership's preferences as a decisive characteristic in the decision-making process, as they both listed it as one of three parameters in their respective models. This is in keeping with my findings in the previous chapter that personal beliefs of a leader are one of several crucial aspects in the decision-making process. It additionally highlights, once more, one major challenge leaders face in the international arena, as pointed out by the two-level game approach, in which the leadership constantly has to gauge between its own desired course of action and that of the public majority. The third parameter—sensitivity—is pivotal for the force and extent to which the leadership will be able to pursue its own agenda in lieu of public opinion, especially in the case of a divergence of preferences between the leadership and the public (Mor, 1997, p. 204). The higher the sensitivity to public opinion, the smaller the size of public opposition is necessary to be an obstacle to the leadership (1997, p. 204).

Mor (1997) asserts that in a democracy “sensitivity to public opinion is generally high” and that elected leaders tend to hold moderate positions, for or against a settled

solution with a rivalrous entity (p. 204). If Mor's assumptions apply, then public opinion influences government policy particularly strongly (1997, p. 204). The best possible scenario for the leadership is when its desired course of action is congruent with the visions of the public majority. A convergence of preferences between the elites and the public majority is needed in order to both uphold an enduring rivalry, as much as it is ultimately required in order to successfully shift the old rivalrous status quo to a stable peaceful one (1997, p. 201). In the case of a convergence of preferences between the leadership and the public, where both favor the conflictual status quo, the only way to change or reverse a policy is by creating, and ultimately reaching, a substantial divergence of preferences. If public opinion changes to disfavor the status quo it would then, by default, put pressure on the leadership. One way such a change in opinion toward a pro-conciliatory preference could be triggered, as I argue in Chapter VI in the case of Israel, might be through an unambiguous, strong, and official political gesture by the Arab states that would send a clear, progressive message to the Israeli public. But whatever the trigger may be that elicits a shift in the sentiment of the public, a divergence of preferences must occur in order to move toward a pro-conciliatory settlement, or shift in policy. Diverging preferences will always create an uncomfortable situation for decision makers in a democratic system, because, once again, the leadership is left with the intricate task of balancing its own preferences with those of the public, risking at times the scorn of the populous, of the opposition, or its own party. A divergence of preferences is far more challenging for the leadership than is convergence, and it poses a dilemma in usually one of two ways: either a reconciliatory-oriented leadership has to confront a public majority that is against a policy shift to end a conflict, or a pro-

conflictual status quo government faces the pressure of a public that favors a pro-conciliatory policy (1997, p. 201-202). Both examples are congruent with the structural model and pose a true dilemma for the leadership, as it now has to “weigh the benefits of pursuing its preferred course of action against the prospects of losing office as a result of public dissatisfaction” (1997, p. 202).

### *Convergence Versus Divergence of Preferences in Israel*

The current government of Israel appears to be stalling the peace process and a convergence of preferences pro the status quo seems to be at hand. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s strong beliefs contra a Palestinian state in the West Bank are well known, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, and Mr. Netanyahu is adamantly opposed to the right of return for millions of Arab refugees from the 1948 and 1967 wars, as it is a threat to the Jewish nature of the State of Israel. Therefore, Benjamin Netanyahu and the right-wing Likud are not actively pursuing policy change or the implementation of a peace initiative—at least not one such as the API, due to the aforementioned West Bank related security issues, the refugee issue, and Jerusalem. And since there is not a majority in the public pushing against the government’s stalling-tactics in the peace process, it is fair to assume that there is more of a convergence of preferences than a divergence of preferences; both the public and the leadership seem content or content enough with the status quo, as terrorist attacks are at a minimal and the economy is relatively steady. Occasional rocket attacks from Gaza and the rule of Hamas seem to keep the Israeli public alert to the imminent threat of Palestinian attacks and keep alive the Israeli sentiment that there is no partner to negotiate with on the Palestinian side. However, this

threat seems insufficient to spark a majority movement that would demand a permanent solution to the conflict. As a result, the majority of the Israeli public accepts or tolerates the current status quo. Although voices for a change of the course of action and the desire for an end to the conflict exist in the public sphere and in the media, they are not substantial enough in force and numbers to evoke a major shift in public opinion that would result in a substantial divergence of preferences.

Following Mor's (1997) theory, a divergence of preferences would, hence, need to develop for the possibility of a policy change. Since Benjamin Netanyahu articulates an unambiguously negative sentiment about "land for peace" plans as they have been discussed for the last several decades, I speculate that the pressure for change needs to come from the public to shift to a divergence of preferences. Once that divergence occurs, Mor (1997) offers two best case scenarios in which peace initiatives are most likely to succeed: (a) the government strongly favors a negotiated resolution, the opposition is small or only slightly bigger than the number of proponents, and there is a weak sensitivity to public opinion; (b) a peace initiative is most likely if the leadership only slightly favors the status quo, the gap between the majority of proponents and a minority of opponents is wide, and the leadership has significant sensitivity to public opinion (p. 204).<sup>17</sup> If, however, the level of sensitivity to public opinion was a static variable, then a much stronger majority opposition would be needed to become an obstruction to the government, when the leadership's own preferences are strong (1997, p. 204). Israel currently fits none of the above best-case or static variable examples: Israeli leadership has strong preferences that are pro status quo; traditionally shows strong sensitivity to public opinion; and the size of proponents of a peace initiative or a

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<sup>17</sup> These scenarios exclude variables such as external conditions.

negotiated settlement is insufficient, indicating that the gap to opponents of such an outcome is rather large. In addition to Mor's (1997) and Trumbore's (1998) parameters, in the case of Israel, I suggest political vulnerability, as pointed out in Chapter III, to be yet another factor that influences the policy choice equation.

#### *Direct and Indirect Ratification Power in Israel*

In Israel the public enjoys both direct and indirect ratification power. As with any democracy, and in alignment with Trumbore's (1998) three-parameter model and the theories discussed in this chapter, if intensity is high enough and the majority of the public is strongly for or against an issue, it enjoys indirect ratification power, and hence can prove to be a constraint on the leadership, in the case of a divergence of preferences. This is the case for the public in Israel. However, as is the case in Ireland or Switzerland, there are some few instances where the issue at hand has to be submitted to a referendum, after its ratification in the Knesset (Shamir & Shikaki, 2005, p. 314). By law, all decisions pertaining to ceding post-1967 annexed territories, such as parts of Jerusalem or the Golan Heights, the public has direct ratification powers when the issue is brought to a public referendum, if it gets ratified in the Knesset first (2005, p. 314). What this indicates about Israeli public opinion is that it potentially plays two crucial roles in the resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict. The public majority can serve as an enabler or a constraint on the leadership and it has indirect ratification powers leading up to, and during negotiations. Secondly, should an agreement (which is likely to entail post-1967 annexed territories) be reached and ratified by the Knesset, the populous of Israel would

then have the opportunity to exercise its voting rights and powers in order to directly ratify or disapprove the negotiated settlement in a mandatory referendum.

## CHAPTER V

# THREAT PERCEPTION AND FRAMING AS INSTIGATORS FOR PUBLIC OPINION

### *Perception*

Public opinion in democracies, as I have pointed out in the previous chapter, can be an enabler or a restraint in the peace process, has the potential to foster political agendas, but often functions as “a significant factor constraining policy choices” (Maoz & McCauley, 2009, p. 525). This chapter introduces various factors that guide public opinion, and mechanisms that seemingly influence it in regard to the willingness to compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. First, I assess in what ways threat perceptions and personal feelings function as predictors of Jewish-Israeli support toward a compromise deal in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Specifically, I use the cognitive behavioral and negotiation literatures, and studies that illuminate personal and group dynamics to look for predictors of public support for compromise. The factors I examine are those that seem to have a great effect on both public opinion toward the peace process and compromise, as well as on people involved in negotiations.

I examine threat perceptions, group threat perceptions, a zero-sum mindset, and reactive devaluation, as well as intergroup emotions, personal fear, and sympathy in relation to the public’s support for compromise or concessions. Secondly, I point out the effects the framing of an issue have on public opinion and the peace process. I analyze two issues of framing: 1) how an inclusive or exclusive way of framing a decision influences support for concessions; and 2) the various degrees of influence media has on



public opinion by actively framing news coverage in a positive or negative way to elicit certain attitudes and expectations toward peace and settlement. The framing of the conflict and the peace process in the Israeli media elicits predictable responses in the public that are a potential spoiling-factor to the peace process by itself, but especially when compared with tendencies of Israeli threat perception and feelings. All of the examined factors arguably aid in the prediction of if and when a peace initiative, negotiations, and ultimately policy changes are feasible.

### *Zero-Sum Perception*

Public opinion is an enabler or acts as a restraint to policies aimed at compromise. In the case of Israel it has largely been a restraint for negotiators and policy-makers to make significant concessions that could have lead to a peace agreement with the Palestinians (Maoz & McCauley, 2009, p. 525). Over the past two decades, numerous studies have explored factors that influence the public's sentiment and readiness to support compromise policies or treaties in conflict. One such factor that lowers the willingness and ability for compromise of the public and negotiators in a conflict is a zero-sum perception. Whoever perceives a conflict or negotiations in a zero-sum way believes that any gain by the opposing group is automatically a loss for one's own. The ability to perceive or imagine mutual gain in a compromise is, thus, absent. If that is the case, public or negotiator perception of a compromise or concession in a conflict is then based on options that are drawn from a chart depicting a single "pie." Therefore, if one piece is taken from group A and given to group B as a concession, it will be interpreted by group A that B's gain is to A's detriment. Hence, the common conception is that either

side can only benefit when, and to the degree that the other side loses (Maoz & McCauley, 2009, p. 526). This is a common and often erroneous psychological construct, which disallows either group to see mutually advantageous gains, and works against genuine efforts to achieve compromise. Ultimately, the consequence is that “the very idea of a mutually advantageous trade of concessions becomes a psychological, if not logical, impossibility” (Ross, 1995, p.28). This common conception influences public opinion as much as it can have an influence on negotiators and is often so ingrained in people’s minds that it seems impossible, or at least very difficult, to change.

Thompson (1995) found that many people perceive the opposing side as inevitably having opposing interests, to the extent that even if it becomes evident that many of their issues are compatible, the belief that their interests are completely contrasting is likely to prevail (p. 839). Thompson further found that partisanship carries a considerable weight even for professional negotiators. He argues that the information traded during negotiations is influenced by, and interpreted through the negotiator’s partisan perception, and hence, is likely to perpetuate the belief of incompatibility (1995, p. 840). When people showed partisanship combined with high involvement in the cause, he found that they were “significantly less accurate in their judgments about the other party’s interests in the negotiation” (1995, p. 851), suggesting a strong likelihood to maintain an outlook of issue non-compatibility. In a polling study regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Maoz and McCauley (2005) found that zero-sum thinking negatively influenced support for compromise among Israelis (p. 802), a fact that is in congruence with the cognitive and decision making based literature as it relates to negotiations (see Ross, 1995; Thompson, 1995; Maoz & McCauley, 2009). The authors were able to relate

Israeli zero-sum perception, and the negative implication for compromise, in this conflict, to two specific beliefs about Palestinians: that “most Palestinians hate Jews; [and] most of the Palestinians would destroy Israel if they could” (Maoz & McCauley, 2005, p. 802). Overall, Maoz and McCauley (2005) found that both the ability to perceive of a mutually improved future and sympathy for the outgroup influence the ingroup’s willingness to compromise (p. 804).

Maoz and McCauley (2005) further suggest that, in addition to the common peace-building practice of cultivating positive feelings toward the outgroup, it might help to counter zero-sum ideology, by focusing on changing the ingroups’ threat perception allegedly posed by the outgroup (pp. 804-805). Arguably, a zero-sum perception has existed in the past thirty plus years of the peace process and negotiations, both in the perception of the public and Israeli negotiators. Incompatibility issues have been present from Israeli reluctance to “negotiate with terrorists” throughout the 1970’s and 1980’s and are still evident today when officials say that Israel does not have a “partner” to negotiate with. Furthermore, the unwillingness to concede East Jerusalem to the Palestinians seems to stem from a zero-sum predicament. Issues such as the West Bank and the question of the right of return for Palestinian refugees, as outlined in the Arab Peace Initiative, have different implications that run deeper than just a zero-sum perception. Giving up the West Bank ostensibly poses a security issue, and allowing all refugees back into Israel proper has geopolitical implications that directly threaten Israel’s foundations as a Jewish state.

### *Reactive Devaluation*

A similar obstacle to compromise in conflict is the common occurrence of reactive devaluation. Reactive devaluation is the phenomenon in which proposals are devaluated based on authorship, or based on false perception that “the better offer” was withheld. Similar to zero-sum perception, it works against compromise on all levels, whether public opinion influences negotiators or policy-makers, or whether negotiators are directly influenced by it. In the first example of reactive devaluation, Ross (1995) points out that the value of an offer, concession, or proposal is likely to diminish if it comes from an adversary (p. 28). A study by the Stanford Center on Conflict and Negotiation demonstrated the mechanisms of reactive devaluation when they looked at how proposals were judged based on authorship (Stillinger, Epelbaum, Keltner, & Ross, 1988, pp. 6-11). Stillinger et al. (1988) tested this theory in a sidewalk survey they conducted in Palo Alto, where residents were asked about their opinion regarding a US – USSR nuclear disarmament plan. When the plan was presented as coming from President Reagan, 90 percent thought of it as favorable. When it was presented as coming from a neutral third party, 80 percent of the subjects thought of it as favorable, whereas only 44 percent thought of it as positive when the proposal was presented as coming from the Soviet leader Gorbachev (1988, p. 3; also described in Ross, 1995; and Maoz, Ward, Katz, & Ross, 2002). The study demonstrated that an offer was embraced and greeted with feelings of trust if it came from a friendly source, and that it was diminished in value when it came from an adversarial source, in which case it was perceived with suspicion and mistrust (Ross, 1995, pp. 29-30). The second example of reactive devaluation showed that it was present in scenarios where more than one concession was offered. If a

proposal or concession was offered in a “one or the other” scenario, and subsequently only one was given, the results were that the granted concession was always devalued over the one withheld (1995, pp. 30-38). To be more precise, Stillinger et al. (1988) undertook three more studies, separately. Stanford University had investments in companies that did business with the South African Apartheid regime, a true moral dilemma Stanford University faced in the 1980’s as campus wide opposition to investments in companies supporting the Apartheid regime grew. In the three studies, Stanford students were assigned to different groups and given roles to participate in this real predicament. They were promised various concessions in the form of proposals by the university to divest in various ways and time-frames, from such companies (1988, pp. 7-12). The outcome in all studies was that the various offers (each group was given a different offer) made to the participants were always devaluated over the offers that were withheld (1988, pp. 7-12).

In a similar role-play study by Lepper, Ross, Tsai, & Ward (1994, described in Ross, 1995), participants were given a scenario, in which various concessions were offered to them as compensation for work they did for a professor that led to publishing (1995, pp. 35-37). The original role-play study as well as a slightly altered follow-up study both produced unambiguous results in that the students who were given offer A devalued it over B, and students who were given offer B thought offer A to be superior. Both studies by Stillinger et al. (1988) and Lepper et al. (1994) show that reactive devaluation works counter conciliation and, when at play, impairs an often already complicated predicament. When these findings of reactive devaluation are applied to real ethno-political conflicts, it becomes clear that they pose a true dilemma for the peace

process, whether the public sees through the lens of reactive devaluation, or whether politicians, policy-makers, or negotiators are directly influenced by it.

In a study conducted by Maoz, Ward, Katz, and Ross (2002), the authors tested the concept of reactive devaluation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and found identical results in that political adversaries showed a tendency to vitiate the opponent's compromise proposals (p. 515). In one study they found that Israeli Jews devaluated a peace proposal that in actuality was of Israeli origin, when it was presented as a Palestinian proposal, and in another study, they found that both Israeli Jews as well as Israeli Arabs equally devalued a plan, this time of Palestinian origin, when it was presented as authored by the other side (2002, p. 515). In sum, the authors concluded that:

Israeli Jews and pro-Israeli Americans saw a proposal as worse for Israel (both in absolute terms and relative to the advantages of the proposal for Palestinians) when it was purported to be of Palestinian rather than Israeli authorship. Moreover, Israeli Arabs were similarly shown to devalue a proposal from the 'other-side'—in their case, the Israeli government. (2002, p. 541)

Reactive devaluation seems to be a cognitive phenomenon that is guided by mistrust and an instinctive sense of self-preservation. Perhaps it is no surprise the Arab Peace Initiative was widely ignored and devalued in Israel, after its adoption by the 14<sup>th</sup> Arab Summit in March of 2002. Putting in account the findings of the numerous studies on reactive devaluation, it appears logical that politicians and the public alike devaluated, even dismissed the API, given the fact that it was proposed by the Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and that the title explicitly states that it is an *Arab* peace initiative. As I point out in the following chapter, a lack of trust toward Arab nations is

another issue that needs attention before an Arab-proposed initiative could expect genuine consideration by Israeli officials or the public.

### *Threat Perceptions and Feelings*

Yet another set of factors that influence public opinion and serve as predictors toward willingness to compromise are collective and individual threat perceptions and feelings. Looking at intergroup dynamics of threat perception is of special relevance, not only because of the implication it has on forming public opinion, but also because collective emotions, those of many individuals belonging to one group, can change the dynamics of perception toward compromise. Extensive research by Kinder (1998) demonstrates that an individual's political opinions are more about the group he or she belongs to, than they are about the individual (described in Maoz & McCauley, 2009, p. 535). Individuals in a society respond to political or policy implications as to how those affect their own group over how they affect them on an individual level (2009, p. 535). In a representative study, Maoz and McCauley (2009) analyzed threat perceptions and intergroup emotions among Jewish-Israelis and the related effects on their attitudes toward support for compromise with the Palestinians (p.526). Specifically, they focused on Israeli group-threat perceptions of Palestinians, Israeli perception of Israeli-Palestinian relations in a zero-sum predicament, and feelings of personal fear, hostility, and sympathy toward Palestinians as independent predictors for or against support for compromise (2009, p. 525). Overall, the results showed that "both threat perception and intergroup feelings made significant and independent contributions to explaining variation in support for compromise" (2009, p. 533). The authors were able to distinguish

three aspects of threat—perception of collective threat, perception of zero-sum, and feelings of personal fear—and found that all three, as well as sympathy toward Palestinians, made a significant and independent contribution in predicting support for compromise; however, feelings of hostility toward Palestinians did not (2009, p. 533). Personal fear proved to be a surprising contributor, as the authors found that the higher personal fear, the more positive was the attitude toward compromise (2009, p. 535).<sup>18</sup> Personal fear is strongly related to reducing risky personal behavior and might also slightly increase a personal desire to compromise to end terrorism; however, threats to one’s own group correlate strongly with objection to compromise (2009, p. 535). This last point seems rather controversial, but essentially suggests that while personal fear ignites support for compromise, the assumption is that the threat emanating from radical Palestinians is perceived collectively—a threat toward the own ingroup—and therefore, should count stronger and broader toward rejection of compromise.

While some members of a given group or society might feel more personal fear about a given threat or an act of terrorism, those individual members, as well as the majority of the group or society, will perceive the act or the threat collectively as one toward their own group. Hence, they will perceive that threat as a collective or group-based emotion. Collective or group-based emotions, as Bar-Tal, Halperin, and de Rivera (2007) point out, are emotions that individuals feel “not necessarily as a response to their personal life events, but also in reaction to collective or societal experiences in which only a part of the group members have taken part” (p. 442). In other words, even if only some members of a group or society were directly affected by, or experienced an act of

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<sup>18</sup> The authors caution to treat this result of personal fear as an independent contributor tentatively until it is replicated (Maoz & McCauley, 2009, p. 535)



terror, other individuals of that group or society will feel these emotions based on that societal or collective experience of threat toward their own group. Lastly, Maoz and McCauley (2009) found religiosity to be a significant predictor of support for a settlement deal with Palestinians. The more religious the subjects identified as the more negative attitudes toward the outgroup they displayed, with less support for compromise (p. 536).

Given the fact that no peace agreement between Israel and Palestinians has been reached yet, and that Arabs and the majority of Arab nations are perceived to pose a threat to Israel, it is likely that Israeli public opinion remains skeptical toward a peace plan with Arab authorship. While an individual might avoid crowded places and support compromise to end the conflict, the overall collective memory of the Holocaust, the three major wars, and the suicide bombings are likely to translate into perceptions of threat toward the ingroup as a whole, and hence, inform the individual of the danger and away from willingness to compromise. In other words, as long as there is a perceived threat to the group, and as long as the conflict is seen in zero-sum terms, any peace initiative will face severe challenges, but especially one that is proposed by the enemy.

### *Framing*

Issue framing is an additional contributor that influences public opinion in relation to a conflict, policy, or support for compromise. This may happen through decision framing, where support for compromise declines or grows, based on the way the issue is presented. This bears similarity to the earlier example of reactive devaluation, where peace proposals were devalued when they came from the opponent and favored

when they came from a member of the ingroup. Or, as the next paragraph argues, the framing of a conflict by the media influences the public's attitudes and expectations toward the peace process, often in a negative way. Maoz, Yaniv, and Ivri (2007) conducted a study with Jewish-Israelis on decision framing and found that support for territorial compromise changed depending on how the matter was framed. The concession options were either framed in an "inclusion" or an "exclusion" condition. In the inclusion condition, participants were asked to choose settlements they suggest Israel concede to the Palestinians (Maoz et al., 2007, p. 85). In the exclusion condition, participants were asked to suggest settlements for which Israeli sovereignty should not concede to the Palestinians (2007, p. 85). The authors found that Israeli Jews supported much larger concessions to the Palestinians if they were presented (framed) in the form of the exclusion condition. Specifically, Israeli Jews were willing to concede a significantly larger number of settlements in the exclusion condition, when they were asked to indicate which settlements they *would not* concede, over fewer concessions in the inclusion condition, where they were asked to signify which settlements they *would* concede (2007, p. 87). The results were in congruence with other studies that addressed the inclusion-exclusion discrepancy (see: Yaniv & Schul, 1997; Yaniv & Schul, 2000; Huber, Neale, & Northcraft, 1987).

Interestingly, a study by Maoz (2012), in which he used the Arab Peace Initiative as a basis, showed that the API generated marginal significant Israeli Jewish support for compromise and significant trustworthiness, when the initiative was simulated in Israeli print media and accompanied by a threat against Israel upon its rejection (p. 2288, p. 2292). Maoz (2012) tested the hypothesis twice, using distinctive modes of threat versus

promise framing modalities, and replicated the initial results (p. 2293). In both instances, when the API was framed in a threat condition, declaring that several Arab nations were likely to conspire with Iran against Israel if Israel failed to accept it, trustworthiness and support for compromise increased, especially among the dovish-identified subjects (2012, p. 2288, p. 2292). Comparatively, trustworthiness and support declined when the API was framed in a promising condition, assuring Israel a peaceful existence with the Arab nations, if Israel accepted (2012, p. 2288, p. 2292). This is particularly interesting, because the API is de facto a promise-framed initiative, guaranteeing Israel normal and peaceful relations with all Arab and Islamic countries. These findings, as well as those above in this chapter, once more, point to the importance of wording and perception, and allude to the fact that cognitive dynamics are an integral part in conflict analysis and should be considered strongly when approaching resolution strategies to a conflict. Moreover, by understanding the cognitive impacts the framing of an issue or a proposal can have, especially when it comes to shaping attitudes and ultimately decision making, it convenes to look at a medium that is instrumental in communicating issues to the broad public, on a daily basis: the media.

Seeing that there is a correlation between framing, perception, and decision making, it is important to look at the impact the media has on public opinion, by framing issues related to conflict, as the media is “the primary link between leaders and the public, [and] a central actor in the foreign policy marketplace” (Baum & Potter, 2007, p. 50). Entman (2004) describes media framing as “selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution” (quoted in: Sheaffer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010,

p. 206). Baum and Potter (2007) assign the media “the crucial role of collecting, framing, and distributing information,” the key commodity in the foreign policy realm (2007, p. 49.). At the same time, there seems to exist an information asymmetry, which creates an interesting dynamic between the leadership, the media, and the public. The media chiefly relies on political leaders for information, which mostly comes in a prepackaged frame (2007, p. 50). Informationally, the public is least informed, and consequently, at a disadvantage, a fact that plays into the hands of the leadership by having more leeway to maintain their favored frames in communication through the media (2007, p. 49). The literature shows that the media indeed often broadcasts the framed messages of the elite, with the public too uninformed and, hence, unenthusiastic to object (2007, p. 50). Therefore, the balance in the information apparatus is tilted in favor of the leaders, who in return attach great importance on controlling this commodity (2007, pp. 49-50). The media generally pays more attention to the preferences of the leadership than to those of the public, unless in the rare occurrence that the market equilibrium shifts and dictates a different course (2007, p.50). Another inherent equilibrium-issue the media causes is its economic need for market shares and survival, a fact that has the media “devote almost all of their attention to confrontation and violence and mostly ignore areas of cooperation and reconciliation” when covering a peace process (Wolfsfeld, 2004, quoted in: Sheaffer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010, p. 207).

Moreover, media coverage during peace processes is typically destructive, because of the incompatibility between the support needed during such a process and the journalistic norms, many of which aim for drama, conflict, immediacy, ethnocentrism, and sensation (Sheaffer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010, p. 207). In a comprehensive study,

Sheafer and Dvir-Gvirsman (2010) analyzed the impact of media framing on Israeli attitudes and expectations toward peace. The authors collected extensive information in an eight-year period, from 1995-2003, and looked comprehensively at Israeli attitudes and expectations toward the Oslo peace process (2010, p. 205). The authors found that media framing of peace and security had a significant influence on public opinion related to the peace process and that the media, in fact, acted as a spoiler toward the peace process in the investigative period (2010, p. 212). Sheafer and Dvir-Gvirsman (2010) studied the causality of the media's (augmented) negative presentation of a worsening peace process and security situation in relation to (increased) declining public support for the peace process; framing effects on future expectations; and the impacts of negative framing versus positive framing (pp. 207-208). The authors found that the public gathers most of its information about the peace process and the state of security through the media and use it to form their expectations about the future (2010, p. 210). The effects of negative media framing, such as coverage of deteriorating peace and security conditions, did indeed have a significant negative impact on the public's expectations, while positive coverage about improving conditions had an insignificant effect (2010, p. 211).

This greater impact of negative frames is in alignment with the concept of "negativity bias," a phenomenon amply documented across a variety of disciplines, (see: Althaus & Kim, 2006; Arian, 1995; Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Klein, 1991; Lau, 1985; Maoz, 2006; Marcus, Neuman & MacKuen, 2000; Quattrone & Tversky, 1988; Schul & Schiff, 1993; Sheafer, 2007) which shows that people are far more captured and influenced by negative information and developments than they are by positive ones (Sheafer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010, p. 208). Moreover, the support for the peace process

dropped by 1 percent for every four Israeli casualties in the peace process (2010, p. 209). Most telling were Sheaffer and Dvir-Gvirsman's (2010) findings delineating to what degree negative coverage influenced public opinion on future expectations. They found that "the average monthly negative effect of negative media framing on expectations is 25 times greater than the average positive effect of positive media framing" (2010, p. 211). Leaving out the coefficients, the monthly averages of negative items covered were 35.85 percent over 2.26 percent of positive items (2010, p. 211). In order to balance the extensive negative coverage, 55 percent of the coverage on a monthly average would have to be positive (instead of 2.26 percent), if the negative remained at its average value (2010, p. 211). The authors conclude that the media, though likely not intentionally, or politically motivated, has acted as peace spoilers (2010, p. 212). In none of the months studied during the eight-year period did positive media framing outweigh the negative (2010, p. 212). Interestingly, the authors also found that eight of the ten most positive months of media coverage happened during the time when the left-wing Labor Party was in power as opposed to all of the remaining highly negative months that occurred during the right-wing rule of Likud (2010, p. 212). This is interesting to note, precisely because many studies have found that individuals are likely to elevate their support for hawkish foreign policy when presented with threatening information and images (2010, p. 207; see also: Astorino-Courtois, 1996; Berrebi & Klor, 2006; Huddy et al., 2003; Peffley & Hurwitz, 1992). In their analysis of public opinion during the first Intifada, Shamir and Shamir (2000) found that hawkish media coverage at the time fostered "a hawkish climate of opinion" (quoted in Sheaffer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010, p. 207). In sum, negative media framing drastically outweighs positive media framing, and has a significant

negative impact on public support toward the peace process and future expectations. Moreover, a correlation exists between right-wing government rule and heightened negative media coverage. From this perspective, it is unlikely to see a significant incline in public support for the peace process during right-wing rule. Although positive media framing increased during left-wing government rule, it was not significant and did not change public opinion.

Further studies on decision framing should be undertaken, specifically in relation to whichever peace proposal is on the table. While the decision-framing study by Maoz et al. (2007) cannot directly be applied to the Arab Peace Initiative, it does hint to potential cognitive barriers concerning Israeli willingness to compromise on the three main terms of the peace plan. In Maoz' (2012) study, the results showed that the peace initiative gained more trustworthiness and support in the threat news-framing condition over the promise news-framing condition. Given the numerous cognitive factors that influence public opinion, of which I only explored a few, it seems inconclusive that the API would fair better on a threat-frame basis in order to elevate public support for compromise. Further and more comprehensive, empirical studies are needed to give this hypothesis the necessary traction in this prolonged, regional conflict. Sheafer and Dvir-Gvirsman's (2010) study gave invaluable insight into the mechanisms and influences negative media coverage and issue framing have on public opinion. It raises the question if a peace initiative such as the API, which arguably faces a major cognitive challenge with regards to authorship and reactive devaluation, can stand a chance during a hawkish government, especially in the digital age that is, more so than ever, dictated by omnipresent and multilateral news media coverage. Perhaps, for the API to be realistically considered, it

would need a serious image makeover through extensive, repetitious, positively framed news coverage and multilateral media exposure.



## CHAPTER VI

### FINDINGS

“In political life, the subjective perceptions of people become a political objective in reality.”

Dan Jacobson (personal communication, March 21, 2012)

This chapter incorporates eight personal interviews I conducted in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv during my internship at the Center for Democracy and Community Development (CDCD), as well as during the API conference I was instrumental in organizing in Istanbul, Turkey. I link the experiences and interviews I gathered during my five-month internship in East Jerusalem to the themes of the previous three chapters: namely, as they relate to the current Israeli government, public opinion in Israel, and threat perception and framing, and specifically, how it all relates to the Arab Peace Initiative. I interviewed six Jewish-Israeli scholars, several of who were involved in Track II negotiations with Palestinians, and two Arab League representatives. The interviews I conducted were about the Arab Peace Initiative, its advantages and shortcomings, its relation to public opinion, and its chances in the current Israeli political climate.

#### *Introduction of the Interviewees*

R. Pundak: Ron Pundak was one of the initiating figures and designers of the Oslo Peace Process. He was also one of its negotiators. He was, furthermore, part of a core group that

started the Geneva Initiative. He was also the general director of the Peres Center for Peace from 2001-2012 and the co-chair of the Israeli Peace NGO Forum.

D. Jacobson: Dan Jacobson is an associate professor in the department for labor studies at Tel Aviv University. He was involved in Track II negotiations during the Geneva Accords and is the chair of the political committee of the Israeli Peace NGO Forum.

O. Zalberg: Ofer Zalberg is a Senior Analyst for Middle East and North Africa at the International Crisis Group in Jerusalem. He has been working as a researcher, policy consultant and group facilitator and is a co-designer of the Kumi Method for group facilitation in conflict situations.

Y. Tzoreff (Lt. Col. Reserve): Yohanan Tzoreff is a former Advisor on Arab Affairs at the Israeli Civil Administration in the Gaza Strip and worked in the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, as an expert of Palestinian Arab affairs. He worked and published for the Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information and the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, and was part of many Track II meetings between Israelis and Palestinians. Mr. Tzoreff headed a project at Ben Gurion University called the “Circle of Knowledge” where he facilitated meetings between Jewish and Palestinian religious educators. Mr. Tzoreff spoke to me as a civilian and a researcher of Arab-Israeli affairs.

E. Podeh: Elie Podeh is a professor at the Department of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He also is a Senior Research Fellow at the

Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace and has published and edited numerous books.

H. Schenker: Hillel Schenker is co-editor of the Palestine-Israel Journal and the co-founder of the Peace Now movement. He served for many years as spokesperson for the Israeli branch of International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War and is an International Advisory Board member of the Global Majority Center for Non-Violent Conflict Resolution.

H. Youssef: Hesham Youssef is a Senior Advisor for the Secretary-General of the Arab League. He is also the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs for the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. He was a career diplomat in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt.

M. Naciri: H. E. Ambassador Mohamed El Fatah Naciri is a Moroccan born diplomat and currently serves as Head of the Mission of the League of Arab States in Turkey. He previously served as Head of the Mission of the League of Arab States in Spain.

#### *Reactions to the Arab Peace Initiative in Israel: An Overview*

During my time in Israel, from November 2011 until March 2012, I had the chance to talk to many Israelis informally, and formally through my internship at the Center for Democracy and Community Development (CDCD), at the API conference in Istanbul, Turkey, and in the interviews I conducted. In this section I summarize general

reactions I gathered from Israelis about the Arab Peace Initiative but mainly use information from the interviews. Many Israelis I spoke to informally were not aware of the Arab Peace Initiative at all, or were only marginally informed about it. The impression I gathered from those who had at least heard about the API was that their opinion of it was largely negative. Often times, the only knowledge about it was that Arabs proposed it, which was accompanied by the conclusion that it, therefore, could not be trusted or should be dismissed. In my work environment, of course, all Israelis I spoke with knew of the API and overall saw it as a hopeful, yet, not perfect peace initiative. The same was true of the interviewees. All six Israeli interviewees viewed the API as a positive milestone in the peace process and most stated that it embodied, at least in principle, what Israel and her founding fathers have always aimed for—to be recognized by and live in agreement with the Arab people. O. Zalzburg stated that there is no alternative to the API, since it is the only peace initiative existing that is endorsed by all 22 Arab nations and the 57 countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and he saw the possibility that Israel might support it at some point because it gives people hope that there could be normal relations with the Arab nations, a true belonging to the region, and that the conflict with Syria and Lebanon could be resolved (personal communication, March 16, 2012). Y. Tzoref called it one of the biggest achievements for the Zionist Movement, because one of the most important issues for the Zionists was and is to be recognized and reach an agreement with the Arab people (personal communication, March 23, 2012). Similarly, D. Jacobson described the advantage of the API as a major breakthrough, because Israel would be recognized by the Arab states and welcomed into the Middle East community, for the first time in the history of the conflict

(personal communication, March 21, 2012). R. Pundak highlighted that we live in a time of growing hostilities and vanishing legitimacy for Israel in the Arab world, and in a time when Israel is perceived by the West as working toward peace, while the Arabs are viewed as non-accepting of, and hostile toward, Israel (personal communication, March 21, 2012). He went on to say that:

whether or not those perceptions are true, the API of 2002 is actually a huge leap from this long period of over 100 years of fights, of zero-sum game equations, of not accepting, of trying to undermine, not legitimizing, of fighting normalization etc., into a new era where the 22 Arab countries are actually changing the equilibrium and are putting themselves into the position where they are saying: 'we are ready for peace, we are ready to accept Israel, we are ready to normalize relations' (personal communication, March 21, 2012).

This is indeed a vast change in Arab leaders' attitudes toward Israel. Moreover, if official negotiations resumed, the API could also signify the necessary support for Palestinian negotiators by the Arab states, for the issues at hand, and especially, perhaps, when it comes to Jerusalem, one of the main reasons no agreement was reached at Camp David II (H. Schenker, personal communication, March 19, 2012). Because, as Schenker further noted, when Arafat negotiated at Camp David II in 2000, before the existence of the API, broader Arab support was missing and Arafat did not feel at liberty to move on with the negotiations (personal communication, March 19, 2012).

But, of course, all the interviewees saw shortcomings and had doubts about the initiative as well. Several of the main doubts and shortcomings of the API, as identified by the interviewees, were that it is commonly perceived as a take it or leave it proposal, that it contains vague wording, especially regarding, but not limited to, the issue of the refugees, and that it lacks true support from the Arab League and countries, other than it

is written on paper. As I address the shortcomings and doubts about the API, it will be clear that a good deal of concern on the part of the Israelis stems from the cultural differences of the two people, specifically regarding their different styles of negotiation. There are those differences that are purely cultural, in terms of how a meeting is run, for example, and there are those that pertain to content and perception. One example of a cultural difference is the story as was recounted in a lecture about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at the University of Oregon. The story goes as follows: during a meeting between Palestinians and Israelis that was to be held in Gaza (the first meeting between Palestinians and Israelis to be held there) under tedious circumstances, a team of Israelis was smuggled into Gaza in an ambulance. The hosts, a combination of Palestinian political figures and academics, were dressed in suits and ties, while the Israeli group was dressed in weather-appropriate, casual and cool shorts and sandals. To the Palestinians, the “failure” to adhere to the “proper” dress code was seen as an act of disrespect and a lack of seriousness about the meeting. However, for the Israelis, it meant no such thing. By the same token, it is appropriate in Palestinian culture to serve beverages and snacks and to make small talk before the start of an important meeting. This, in return, was seen by the Israeli group as a lack of seriousness about the meeting by the Palestinians, as the Israelis came there to “talk business,” not about family, sports, and other non-issue oriented topics (D. Baxter, personal communication, April 7, 2011). Thus, both groups believed from the beginning that the other side was not serious.

Additionally, what is known about Arab and Israeli negotiation styles is that Arabs tend to like broad, perhaps unspecific proposals with which to start negotiations and leave the details for later. Israelis, on the other hand, strongly prefer or even insist on

specifics, clear wording, and implications that leave no second-guessing on what will be negotiated and what the expected outcomes might be, right from the start. What I noticed during the interviews was that, for Israelis, there exists a genuine need to include details in a peace proposal. The API was widely criticized among the Israeli interviewees for being ambiguous and vague in wording.

For example, the API includes the wording “just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194” as one of its negotiation points. This was problematic for the majority of the interviewees, because they perceived it as a set deal, having to accept the parameters of Resolution 194, and because the API does not even clarify who the parties are that should mutually agree upon that solution. Another perceived ambiguity in the API is the issue of Jerusalem, because it only mentions that East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem should be split, but fails to mention any detail on how that might be done (E. Podeh, personal communication, March 30, 2012).

Clearly, the level of detail needed for Israelis to accept an initiative as a basis for negotiations differs vastly from the level required by Arabs. E. Podeh stated that some Israelis see the API as a guideline of sorts or perhaps a “sketch map” (personal communication, March 30, 2012). Y. Tzoreff criticized the authors of the API for not investing enough effort in the people of Israel. He argued that Israelis desire to hear a clear statement from the Arab leaders that speaks to the future and the kind of relationship they see for the Arab nations and Israel (personal communication, March 23, 2012).

Moreover, Tzoreff pointed once more to the lack of Israeli cultural understanding by the Arabs and the missing of important details. A particular criticism of the process of the API is that it did not invite Israel to negotiate about its proposals, but, instead, the API asked for Israel to accept its terms, only after which would the Arabs be willing to negotiate with Israel about normal relations (personal communication, March 23, 2012). The Arab scholars and activists I have talked with did not in the slightest perceive the API as such a “take it or leave it” proposal. Their understanding of it was that the API promised normal relations with Israel once Israel agreed to negotiations, and that all its terms would be negotiated by Israelis and Palestinians, until they mutually agreed on solutions.<sup>19</sup>

Mr. Tzoreff, like many others, however, thought that the API was vague and missing detailed descriptions on other issues as well. During Oslo, he said, it was clear that the negotiators talked about two states for two people, the Jewish people and the Palestinian people. This is not the case in the API, and, therefore, he warned that because Israelis (and other Jews) feel vulnerable about the future of Israel, the fact that the API only mentions a two state solution without mentioning the two people by name, leads Israelis to fear that the Arabs still do not genuinely accept Israel in the region (personal communication, March 23, 2012). O. Zalzburg also criticized the API for not explicitly mentioning the Jewish nation or the Jewish people. To be recognized as a nation or a people is very important for Israeli Jews and, according to Zalzburg, the explicit mentioning of Jews in the API could even motivate Israel to perhaps compromise on other issues (personal communication, March 16, 2012).

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<sup>19</sup> Since the API calls for a regional peace that includes a solution to the Syrian Golan Heights and parts of Southern Lebanon, the point made in the sentence also pertains to agreements of Israel with Syria and Lebanon.



According to Y. Tzoreff, the API mentions only the 1967 borders as borders for a future Palestinian state, which is another error of neglect for upfront details and, therefore, a hindrance for Israelis to accept the API. In the past, there was an understanding between Palestinians and Israelis that a settlement would be based mostly on the 1967 borders, with territory swaps; it would not strictly be the 1967 borders (personal communication, March 23, 2012). O. Zalzberg summed it up this way: “The tension here is between two sides that have different negotiating cultures. The Arab states would like to first get a yes to the API and only then negotiate. For Israelis, there is concern that if they say yes first they will be without [land] swaps” (personal communication, March 16, 2012).

O. Zalzberg alluded to a seemingly common believe among Israelis that accepting the API as a basis for negotiations would be synonymous with accepting its terms, and hence, they would automatically have agreed on the 1967 borders and Palestinian refugees’ right of return to Israel in accordance with UN Resolution 194. In Israeli negotiation culture, it is paramount “to get the details right and only then to commit to them” (O. Zalzberg, personal communication, March 16, 2012).

These cultural differences and differing strategy preferences between Palestinians and Arabs generally and Israelis should be strongly considered by those working on the peace process. Mr. Zalzberg remained hopeful, however, that Israel might still be able to accept the positions of the API if it was clarified that the terms are “guiding principles” and that more guiding principles could be added. In other words, the API stands a chance only if it is made clear that the terms are not set in stone, but that they can be altered and/or expanded upon (personal communication, March 16, 2012). In sum, many Israelis

perceive the API as a take it or leave it proposal, a peace initiative whose terms are set in stone and cannot be negotiated. Whether this is actually true or not, the fact remains that many Israelis view it as such. The apparent lack of sensitivity to differences in negotiation styles has proven to be one of the API's shortcomings. But it is not the only ones.

In addition to vagueness, another shortcoming of the API was the timing of its implementation and, as I point out below, by Israeli perception that the API lacked true Arab support. As pointed out in a previous chapter, the API was launched in March 2002, almost two years after the failure of Camp David II, one and a half years after the outbreak of the second Intifada, and within days of two horrific terrorist attacks on Israeli Jews, carried out by Palestinian suicide bombers. Hence, "the level of trust was close to zero, even minus, perhaps" (D. Jacobson, personal communication, March 21, 2012). The response of the Israeli government to the API over the years has been minimal, even close to non-existent. What is more, as several of the interviewees pointed out, the API is mostly unknown in existence and content to the Israeli public. E. Podeh speculated that one major problem in Israel is that there is a lack of information. He told me that he asked several of his students at the Hebrew University, who had basic knowledge of the conflict, about the Arab Peace Initiative. None of them had heard of it (personal communication, March 30, 2012).

Additionally, for the Israelis who knew about it, the Arab League and Arab nations have simply done too little to promote it and to show their genuine support for it. From an Israeli perspective, according to H. Schenker, "It is not enough to have a piece of paper that is resolved and reaffirmed at the Arab League Summit" (personal

communication, March 19, 2012). O. Zalzburg stated that the API was most essentially a gesture by the Arab states of what the possibilities are, but it lacked appropriate political actions and genuine signals (personal communication, March 16, 2012). Several interviewees pointed to the fact that the peace initiative lacked credibility because it was merely a piece of paper, and when it was presented to Israel, Egypt and Jordan sent their foreign ministers rather than the heads of state, perhaps a nice gesture, but not to be taken seriously. To Israelis it was meaningless, because Israel has peaceful relations with these states.

Furthermore, the fact that the entire Arab League did not mobilize in an effort to generate credibility and that the King of Saudi Arabia did not personally deliver the API to Israel sent the message that it was not an offer in earnest. D. Jacobson and other Israeli peace activists and scholars saw the potential of the API, but also recognized the lack of perception and support in Israel. Therefore, they attempted to reach out to the Saudi court to convey the message that the Arabs need to convince the Israeli public that the peace initiative ratified by the Arab League is genuine, but failed in their effort. “The indirectly informed response we got [from Saudi Arabia] was ‘look, we did our part. We came out with the Initiative, coming to Jerusalem can only be as a response to an acceptance by the Israelis.’ That’s where we got stuck” (personal communication, March 21, 2012).

Attributing all the challenges and pitfalls to cultural differences is inadequate, of course, especially during and after the time of the revolts of the Arab streets. In addition, Saudi Arabia is a very conservative country and is looking to preserve its conservative nature. Hence, the Saudi government is not in a hurry for the progressive API, even if its leader was critical in its formation (Y. Tzoref, personal communication, March 23, 2012). If,

however, Saudi Arabia, or other prominent member states of the Arab League had decided to send their monarchs or heads of state to Israel, it would have been a gesture so powerful, it might have turned Israeli public opinion towards a serious consideration of the API.

### *Public Opinion*

In Chapter IV, I pointed out various ways in which public opinion in a democracy works both as an enabler for policy shift or as a domestic constraint on leadership. In this section, I link my own experiences and information from the interviews I conducted to address public opinion in Israel in relation to the peace process and, particularly to the Arab Peace Initiative. I became aware of two reoccurring themes in relation to public opinion. Firstly, Israelis, whether in favor of the peace process or against it, generally do not trust promises made by Arabs regarding a peace deal. If Arabs propose a peace plan, Israelis need to see details and gestures that reassure the authenticity of a proposal. A strong gesture by the Arab League or key Arab leaders could shift public opinion toward trust and toward a renewed effort to engage in a peace process. This was, by and large, the strongest belief on how to effectively shift public opinion within Israel. Secondly, the current status quo and destabilizing developments in the region seemingly weigh negatively on public opinion. These aspects apply to the Arab Peace Initiative and both, if addressed, could shift public opinion from the currently favored status quo to a pro-conciliatory stands, and, hence, create a divergence in preferences.

Even though all 22 Arab nations have repeatedly endorsed the API during Arab League Summits, for Israelis, it is commonly difficult to believe in the earnestness of a

peace deal with Arab authorship. The vast majority of Israelis I talked with who knew about the API said that if the Arab states were serious about it, they would have sent an official delegation from Saudi Arabia to Israel to present it to the Knesset and the Israeli people. Since they did not, it is only words on paper. Mistrust of the Arab states is still a hindering factor for both the Israeli leadership and the public to react positively to an initiative that has been endorsed even by all Arab nations. E. Podeh lamented the lack of information about the existence and the content of the API, and also that those Israelis who knew about it, largely, had a negative view of it (personal communication, March 30, 2012). R. Pundak stated that it is still very common for average Israeli citizens to believe that a real peace with the Arab nations is impossible, that Arabs do not want Israel in the Middle East, and that the Arab leaders are speaking about peace only, but are not following their words with actions (personal communication, March 21, 2012). Moreover, Y. Tzoreff explained to me that there are many political groups in Israel, and many of these groups do not believe that it is possible to reach peace with the Arab world or that the Arab world is ready to recognize Israel's existence. Therefore, these political groups work hard to prevent negotiations and progress in the peace process (personal communication, March 23, 2012).

In addition to the disbelief in a possible true peace with the Arabs, currently the status quo seems to be strongly favored by the majority of the Israeli public. Reasons that Israelis, overall, favor the status quo include the assumptions that “there is economic growth (versus most of the world), people live quite comfortably on the whole, [and] there are hardly any terror activities, so the government is seen as successful in that regard” (D. Jacobson, personal communication, March 21, 2012). Most importantly,

according to Jacobson, is the fact that Israel's separation barrier keeps most Palestinians and [illegal] Palestinian workers out of Israel. Israelis, basically, are largely free from interaction with Palestinians (personal communication, March 21, 2012). Since Israeli trust in a sincere Arab peace offer is commonly low, and the public appears to favor the status quo, it may be that something dramatic would need to happen in order to shift public opinion away from favoring the status quo and toward an immediate desire for a resolution to the conflict.

Almost all Israeli scholars and activists I interviewed agreed that the Arab Peace Initiative was essentially groundbreaking, but that the Arab states failed to sell it to Israeli society with a strong gesture that could shift public opinion decisively in favor of reactivating the peace process. Essentially, the Arab nations failed to properly market the API to Israeli politicians and Israeli society generally and, consequently, it did not earn political consideration (H. Schenker, personal communication, March 19, 2012). D. Jacobson, who is a self ascribed member of the Israeli peace camp, recalled that one of the great challenges after the API was launched was to convey to the Saudis that, despite it being a groundbreaking initiative, this initiative alone would not be enough and required marketing to win Israeli public opinion. He regretted that the Arabs did not understand the structure of the Israeli psyche and of Israeli public opinion and that the Israeli peace camp was not able to convey to them that public opinion functions differently in Israel than the rest of the Middle East (personal communication, March 21, 2012).

In other words, the API might only be known and, hence, stand a chance in Israel if the Arab states invest in Israeli public opinion (Y. Tsoreff, personal communication,

March 23, 2012). Putting an ad in Hebrew in a major Israeli newspaper, as was previously done by the PLO, had no effect on the Israeli public, because “gimmicks don’t work. You really need a forceful presentation by the leaderships, saying: ‘here, we are coming and offering something to you’” (H. Schenker, personal communication, March 19, 2012). D. Jacobson spoke of the need for unexpected, positive drama in order to reach the Israeli public (personal communication, March 21, 2012). And, for R. Pundak, the best way to change Israeli perception is a “big gesture by the Arabs;” one that would allow for new hope for the average Israeli that peace with the Arab states is, in fact, possible (personal communication, March 21, 2012). Five of the six Israeli interviewees specifically alluded to the need for the Arab countries to act in a way that would send such a substantial and clear message to the Israeli public.

Many other Israelis I spoke to agreed that an act similar to that of Anwar Sadat, when he visited the Knesset, would instantly boost public opinion to a pro-conciliatory attitude, as it did in 1977. With his coming to Israel and offering something directly, his address to the Knesset, and his meeting with several political parties, “Sadat dramatically changed the psychology and readiness of the Israeli people” (H. Schenker, personal communication, March 19, 2012). Essentially, Israeli public opinion shifted from one extreme to another within a day, from being against a peace treaty with Egypt to being highly in favor of it (D. Jacobson, personal communication, March 21, 2012). This is what most of the Jewish-Israeli interviewees and Jewish-Israeli scholars and peace activists I interacted with agreed on: in order to successfully market the API in Israel, to shift public opinion away from supporting the status quo, many saw the need for King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, ideally accompanied by the King of Jordan and the President

of Egypt, to come to Israel and address the parliament and Israeli people. Only an act of this magnitude would convey the sincerity of the Arab League's and OIC member states' promise to accept Israel and have normal relations with her. It could even override the concern for lack of details and vague wording used in the API many Israelis shared as described earlier in this chapter. A powerful gesture might convey the sincerity of the Arab states and would leave few arguments, even for a right-wing government, against entering the peace process in earnest. Y. Tzoreff speculated that, "any government in Israel will accept such a gesture, if it came from the Saudis" (personal communication, March 23, 2012). R. Pundak's hope was that, beyond an envoy of this importance, the Arab League will continue to reaffirm the Initiative and that a future diplomatic campaign would entail not only highlighting mutual benefits of a peace deal, but also emphasize those factors that would be specifically beneficial for the Arab countries in the region (personal communication, March 21, 2012).

Concluding, while it is important for Israeli civil society to up its effort to inform the Israeli public about the API and to influence public opinion toward the necessity for the government to reenter the peace process, what seems evident is that the only way to effectively impact public opinion is through a renewed and combined effort by some or all Arab League member states. It is highly unlikely that all member states would be able to participate, since Syria is in a full fledged civil war and Libya and Iraq are highly destabilized and are additionally engaged in fighting the Islamic State terrorist group. But some key players in the Arab League, theoretically, and in a carefully orchestrated fashion, could do what would be a bold, but promising move toward peace and normal



relations. Of course, this is a rather unfavorable time for a renewed peace offensive, because of regional changes and instabilities that continue to keep the region in turmoil.

### *Leadership and the Current Israeli Government*

I pointed out that the current Israeli government, with Benjamin Netanyahu as the prime minister, has been stalling the peace process and clearly does not want to see a sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank with East Jerusalem as its capital. This is also the unanimous estimate of Israelis (and Palestinians) I spoke with during my five-month internship. Mr. Netanyahu left no doubt about his opinion as outlined in his book, *A Durable Peace* (2000), nor do his policies and political actions show anything different. While Mr. Netanyahu has officially stated that he is, in principle, for Palestinian self-rule, he excludes the possibility of a sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank because it would pose too big a threat to Israel's national security. Specifically, Mr. Netanyahu sees a dire need for a buffer zone to Israel's eastern border to prevent possible future military attacks by several Arab regimes, and if a sovereign Palestinian state was established in the West Bank, he fears that Israel would be vulnerable to orchestrated terror attacks by militant regional extremist groups, operating within the West Bank (Netanyahu, 2000, p. 306, p. 342). Moreover, if terrorist groups were operating from within the West Bank, Israel could no longer enter the West Bank to raid or arrest terrorist suspects, as it does now, because it would be against international law, and, besides, could trigger an Arab-Israeli war (2000, p. 306).

Mr. Netanyahu, unequivocally, also rules out that East Jerusalem could be even considered for negotiations, let alone become the capital of a Palestinian state (2000, p. 338). And, since Mr. Netanyahu's tenure, the demand to recognize Israel as a "Jewish

State” has emerged, according to D. Jacobson. Such a recognition stands in opposition to the right of return, and to preemptively exclude any compromise thereof (personal communication, March 21, 2012). Because of Mr. Netanyahu’s explicit views, it is unmistakably clear not only to scholars, but to the broad public that his stands are incompatible with the negotiation points of the Arab Peace Initiative. R. Pundak concurred that the current Israeli government has no connection to the API: “Neither ideologically nor from a security point of view, the government doesn’t want to reach a solution that entails a full fledged Palestinian sovereign state controlling 100 percent of the West Bank and Gaza” (personal communication, March 21, 2012). R. Pundak further stated that the main reasons for the government’s rejection of a Palestinian state are the need to maintain its strategic complexity, its legitimate fear of rocket attacks from Gaza, and the reluctance to give up many of the established settlements in the West Bank (personal communication, March 21, 2012). O. Zalberg offered that it was never easy for any peace initiative to gain support, but agreed that it is very unlikely that the current government will consider the API for negotiations (personal communication, March 16, 2012). D. Jacobson also agreed that the current government of Israel is “certainly not favorable to the spirit of the Arab league” and that Mr. Netanyahu’s statements of accepting the concept of a two state solution are widely perceived as insincere (personal communication, March 21, 2012).

Moreover, Israel’s left has developed a leadership problem while Israeli trust in the peace process has deteriorated over the years. Meanwhile, from a center-right perspective, albeit shortsighted perhaps, Netanyahu can show success with a comfortable status quo and by shifting the world’s attention and Israeli public opinion from the

Palestinian issue to the Iranian threat (D. Jacobson, personal communication, March 21, 2012). Short sighted, perhaps, because by ignoring the peace process and, with that, the plight of millions of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, Israel is risking a third Intifada. E. Podeh also shared the sentiment that continuing the deadlock of the peace process by keeping the status quo, which entails the occupation of the West Bank and the continuation of settlement building, Israel is risking a potential third Intifada (personal communication, March 30, 2012). In that regard, M. Naciri cautioned Israel to actively seek comprehensive peace, because, despite the fact that Israel has many allies, she cannot protect herself forever with a barrier and expect a far away power such as the United States to come to her rescue (personal communication, March 30, 2012). It appears that the current government, under the last two consecutive terms with Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister, has effectively prevented the peace process from gaining traction in Israel. The comfortable status quo, reinforced by the separation barrier, seems to outweigh possible future peace promises, in a time of regional instability and political uncertainty. And as long as the API is not reinforced by credible and powerful actions by the Arab League to put pressure on the Israeli government and public, it is unlikely that Mr. Netanyahu has to fear for his office, in this Israeli political system.

### *Threat Perceptions and Framing*

The Arab Peace Initiative is a promise-based, land-for-peace offer from the Arab states to Israel. Besides general shortcomings and disadvantages as mentioned above, there are several issues that are in direct relation to threat perception and framing, which I discussed in Chapter V, that can impact a peace initiative such as the API. Within the

framework of perceptions, reactive devaluation is one hindering factor in the acceptance of the Arab Peace Initiative in Israel, because it was authored by the Saudis and is represented through the Arab League. As I demonstrated in Chapter V, numerous studies found that people devalued proposals, such as peace initiatives or political solutions, and saw them as unfavorable when they were authored and proposed by the perceived enemy. As I have pointed out in this chapter, Israelis do not see the Arabs as a trustworthy partner in the peace process as is. And, in addition, that the authors are Arabs only adds to the conviction that the peace proposal cannot be trusted, and thus has been largely rejected by the Israeli public and the government.

To counter this cognitive suspicion among Israelis and to positively influence the Arab masses, E. Podeh and many scholars, peace activists, and members of Israeli civil society suggested that Israel launch a major peace initiative of her own, to complement the API (personal communication, March 30, 2012). Although it would be desirable if the Israeli government officially introduced such an initiative, at this point, it is highly unlikely and, therefore, Podeh suggested it emerge from others in Israeli society and as a long-term goal (personal communication, March 30, 2012). Since the launch of the API, Israel has rejected the terms of the API, but has not presented its own position, other than keeping the status quo. It has not engaged in a peace process, but rather expanded settlement construction in the West Bank. H. Youssef also suggested an Israeli initiative to compliment the API in order to establish a tangible Israeli position (personal communication, March 31, 2012), which would appease Israeli suspicion and, simultaneously, renew trust in the peace process, due to an initiative of Israeli authorship.

As also mentioned in Chapter V, individuals in a society observe threat perceptions and feelings as they affect and relate to their own group over their personal, individual lives. This, once again, makes perfect sense in relation to a peace initiative and how people perceive its terms and implications as they relate to and impact their own group as a whole. If we stay with common Israeli perception that the API is a nonnegotiable, take it or leave it proposal, we can better understand the notion that it is difficult for Israelis to accept these terms. The most poignant issue relating to perception and threat perception seems to be the right of return. In particular, the wording of the issue in the API is perceived as vague and the perception of it, since it was based on UN Assembly Resolution 194, is that it is a threat to the Jewish nature of the State of Israel. Most of the interviewees and Israelis I spoke with saw this issue as the stickiest and most complicated of the issues listed in the API, particularly that the right of return would be based on a solution in accordance with Resolution 194. The overall Israeli concern with the wording of the API in this regard is that it is based on UN Resolution 194, which essentially calls for the unrestricted return of Palestinian refugees to their original homes. Although the API suggests that the refugee issue will be agreed upon by the parties, there remains the perception that the wording is a threat to implied demographic changes and by extension, to the non-acceptance of Israel as a Jewish state. D. Jacobson saw the need for a change of language in the API because the mention of Resolution 194 was suspicious for Israelis and caused reluctance even with the Geneva Accords (personal communication, March 21, 2012). That it would be an agreed upon solution is not enough in his estimation because Israelis perceive it as a threat to the demographics, and in order

for them to accept it, the proposal in the API would have to be much more specific (personal communication, March 21, 2012).

D. Jacobson also saw the relatively new demand by Netanyahu to insist on the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state in direct relation to the right of return issue, because it implies that the Jews would have to remain the majority in Israel to be Jewish in character, culturally, and politically (personal communication, March 21, 2012). E. Podeh recounted that the controversy on the refugee clause is where the perceptions and discourse seem to have gotten stuck (personal communication, March 30, 2012). He did not see the issues of the right of return, nor the mentioning of an agreed upon solution as the main culprit, but rather that it would be based on Resolution 194 (personal communication, March 30, 2012). He explained it is rather evident that the Israelis and the Palestinians are the two parties who would agree upon a [refugee] solution in the API, but that it is not that clear-cut in every Israeli's perception (personal communication, March 30, 2012). The right of return in the Arab-Israeli conflict is one of those issues that go "deep into the psyche of the society" (personal communication, March 30, 2012). For Israeli society, the belief that the Arabs are insisting on the return of the refugees to Israel is much easier to accept than any other interpretation, and, hence, became reality (personal communication, March 30, 2012). In other words, Podeh explained, people "adapt what they think of the other party to the text [API] when in reality this is not the case" (personal communication, March 30, 2012).

Another issue of threat perception as it relates to potential consequence of the API is the implied, full abandonment of any relationship to the West Bank in the case of a Palestinian state. For many Israelis, O. Zalzberg pointed out, one fear is that they would

lose any rights over land east of the Green Line, such as rights to visit or worship at holy places in Nablus or Hebron, as well as losing residency rights in those and other areas (personal communication, March 16, 2012). In contrast, R. Pundak attested that the overwhelming majority of Israelis is not in the slightest concerned with an Israeli presence in the West Bank, and he predicted that any serious peace offer that promised normal relations at zero risk in exchange for the West Bank and swaps, would have a majority of Israelis in favor of it (personal communication, March 21, 2012).

Framing in the media, as I pointed out in Chapter V, tends to work against peace initiatives, as the negativity bias sets the tone, negative media framing outweighs positive media framing, and the media focuses on drama and conflict in order to gain in the market share, rather than focusing on reconciliation or positive steps. Despite the negativity bias in the media, and a desire by many Israelis for a genuine gesture by the Arabs, which would entail an official envoy to Israel, O. Zalzberg would like to see the Arab League countries actively engage the Israeli public through television, newspapers, and radio shows, in an effort to explain what the API stands for and why the Arabs want it (personal communication, March 16, 2012).

Concluding, it is hard to assess how Israel and the Israeli public, in effect, perceive the API. I estimate that it is still widely unknown and misconceived by those who have heard of it. And it is equally challenging to estimate what exactly needs to happen for the Arab Peace Initiative to be perceived more broadly and as an authentic offer. A push by the Arab League to address the Israeli parliament and public could be a promising move. The attempt to win over and change Israeli public opinion through a bold move by the Saudis, and/or other Arab countries, to bring the API personally to

Israel to underline the genuine Arab desire for peace might be the only way to overcome the bias of reactive devaluation, which the API faces due to its Arab authorship. But as long as a gesture of this magnitude does not happen, threat perception and framing, the mechanisms that are influencing the human mind, will do their part to prevent a shift in the perception of the public, and the status quo would, hence, be likely to prevail.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Chapter II of my thesis provided a brief historical background to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I focused on the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the conflict gained traction and highlighted the more recent history through milestones in the peace process over the last forty years. In Chapters III-V, I reviewed various literatures to examine and assess leadership, the Israeli political system, public opinion in Israel, and how public opinion and politics are influenced through threat perception and issue framing. In Chapter VI, I discussed the data I collected through the semi-structured interviews and participant observation during my internship in East Jerusalem. In this concluding chapter I examine if and in what ways the theories I discussed in earlier chapters relate to the findings of Chapter VI.

#### *Literature Review and Findings*

In Chapter III, I discussed leadership and argued that the office of prime minister in Israel is vulnerable, due to the structure of the multi-party parliamentary system. This vulnerability is heightened, as I point out in Chapter IV, if there exists a divergence of preferences between the government and public opinion. Since the current government's preferred course of action—to uphold the status quo and not enter peace talks—seems to converge with the preferences of the public, the incumbent prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, does not have to fear for his position, at least not due to pressure from Israeli public opinion on this particular issue.

My analysis of Mr. Netanyahu's negative views on a Palestinian state, the sharing of Jerusalem, and Palestinian refugees in general, and in relation to the proposals of the Arab Peace Initiative in particular, is in alignment with my findings. As I pointed out in Chapter VI, the majority of the interviewees assessed that the current government including Mr. Netanyahu has no connection to the API. Moreover, the interviewees concurred that the prime minister is against a sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank, albeit mainly for strategic and security concerns. In addition, most of the interviewees did not believe that there would be a serious, if any, attempt to reenter the peace process during Netanyahu's current term.

Although I demonstrated that the office of prime minister in Israel can generally be viewed as vulnerable, in the current political climate it is unlikely that Mr. Netanyahu will have to fear a vote of no confidence from his center-right leaning coalition government. This is, in part, due to the fact that he does not engage in active peace talks with the Palestinians, and therefore, he is not risking a political backlash against him from his mainly conservative coalition government. Secondly, there is, currently no pressure from the Israeli public that would force Mr. Netanyahu to reconsider his course of action in relation to the peace process.

In Chapter IV, I discussed the role and effects of public opinion on political decision making in democracies through two-level game theory, war-proneness theory, and democratic peace theory. I assessed various factors that enable public opinion, in democracies, to act as a domestic political enabler or constraint in a peace process or in policy-making. Like in all democracies, Israel's leadership has to balance international and domestic exigencies at all times, weighing foreign policy needs with their own

preferred course of action and the level of approval or disapproval from the public. I discussed Trumbore (1998) (two-level game theory) and Mor (1997) (war-proneness theory). Each listed three parameters that, if met, suggest public opinion would pose a domestic constraint for the leadership on policy decisions. I assessed that not all points of the three parameters, of either model, are currently present in Israel and argued that, currently in Israel, the preferences of the leadership are—to a large extent—in alignment with that of Israeli public opinion. Hence, public opinion in Israel does not currently challenge the leadership regarding its policy in relation to the API or the peace process. This is in congruence with my findings from Chapter VI. Most interviewees expressed that the Israeli public favors the current political course of action, which strengthens the conclusion that public opinion does not pose a threat to the current government, at least not in regards to the issue of the API or a renewed peace effort.

In essence, my analysis of the various literatures in relation to public opinion highlighted the different mechanisms as to how and when public opinion can act as an enabler or constraint for particular policies. What I found through the interviews and observations is that there exists a convergence of preferences, which I discussed in Chapter IV, between the Israeli government and the public on the issue of the peace process. A divergence of preferences, a strong push by the Israeli public, would be necessary to exert the required pressure on the current government. Through my interviews and observations, I was able to conclude that Israeli public opinion regarding renewed peace talks is in alignment with that of the government, in part due to skepticism toward Arab promises. As I discussed in Chapter VI, a strong Arab gesture to the Israeli public should be pursued in an attempt to diminish mistrust and create momentum in

favor of the API. I speculate that a potent gesture by Arab governments could evoke the divergence of preference, and resulting pressure, that is needed to counter the government's preferred course of action. I suggest that the strongest positive impact on Israeli public opinion in relation to the API would be a visit to Israel by an Arab monarch or president, which could instill trust in the Israeli public and give a "faceless" initiative a positive image and credibility (Podeh, 2014, pp. 601-602).

In Chapter V, I analyzed how individuals and public opinion are influenced positively or negatively through threat perceptions and issue framing. I examined cognitive behavioral and negotiation theories to highlight key contributing factors, such as zero-sum perception and reactive devaluation, and also framing in the media and (intergroup) emotions. In chapter VI, I alluded to the fact that many Israelis did not trust the Arab Peace Initiative because it was proposed by Saudi Arabia and ratified by all Arab nations. Given the recent history of Israel with the Arab nations, since the 1940's, the fact that the API is of Arab authorship and can therefore not be trusted is consistent with the concept of reactive devaluation I discussed in Chapter V.

Most of the Israeli interviewees concurred that those Israelis that know about the API do not trust it, mainly because of its Arab origin. Maoz (2012) found that the API received more support by Israelis when it was framed in a threat (of war) condition, rather than when it was framed in its actual promise (of peace) condition. In my qualitative interviews and through my observation, I was not able to find evidence for Maoz' findings. I can also not imagine, however, that Israel would react positively to the API if it came with the threat of an attack by the Arab nations, should Israel not accept its negotiation terms. Zero-sum thinking seemed evident in my observations during informal

conversations with Israelis who opposed a two state solution. By extension, the claim can be made that Mr. Netanyahu's rejection of a Palestinian state in the West Bank with East Jerusalem as its capital is fueled by the zero-sum predicament. While security and geographic strategy play a major role, if the West Bank and East Jerusalem became Arab, they would take away from a Greater Israel in definite terms.

My observation of the English language print media in Israel is in congruence with Sheaffer and Dvir-Gvirsman's (2010) comprehensive study of negativity bias and the media's generally negative presentation of the peace process, as I discussed in Chapter V. I read various Israeli newspapers available in English on a daily basis and found that the overwhelming majority wrote negatively about a prospective peace process, rarely mentioned the API, but rather focused on violent acts committed by Palestinians, or events that negatively portrayed the Palestinian leadership. Negative print was less frequent in center-left leaning newspapers. But even in those, I perceived an overall negative tendency. I do not rule out the possibility of a negativity bias in myself, where the negative news weighs heavier in my memory than the positive. But even that would suggest negativity bias overall.

The Israeli interviewees did not comment on the media per se, and only two of them alluded to the possibility of a positive outcome if key leaders of the Arab League addressed the Israeli public on television. With the given negativity bias in the media, especially, but not exclusively, during periods with right-wing governments or heightened violence, it is evident that negative media framing dwarfs positive media coverage. Therefore, it seems conclusive that a positive media campaign alone, to

promote the API in the name of the Arab League, would not sufficiently influence Israeli public opinion.

In summary there are several factors that seem to strongly impact public opinion, especially as they relate to a peace proposal or shift in policy. Those factors that negatively affect public opinion toward the API or the peace process are: reactive devaluation, zero-sum thinking, and negative framing in the media. If addressed in a concerted effort by researchers, scholars, and those involved in the peace process, it might help overcome cognitive barriers and negativity biases that challenge the perception of individuals and the public as a whole.

### *Concluding Remarks*

In my thesis I focused primarily on the Israeli side as I mentioned in Chapter I, mostly due to Israel holding greater power in this conflict and because Israel has not responded to the Arab League's peace offer. As it is with most conflicts, the issues at hand are never as clear-cut as we might perceive them to be. Several questions remain unanswered and could not be addressed in this thesis. In these concluding remarks, I would like to address a few additional factors that deserve consideration when thinking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Arab League has re-endorsed the Arab Peace Initiative several times, since it was first proposed in Beirut in 2002. While all 22 Arab countries support the API and its terms, there also seems to be, as I have pointed out, a lack of enthusiasm to promote it to Israel and to the international community. I speculate that many of the Arab leaders might fear domestic consequences by conservative constituencies if they take a lead to

aggressively or progressively promote the API. After the revolutions in the Arab streets in 2010, many governments have feared for their political survival. The status quo for the Arab League countries in relation to Israel is tolerable, and therefore, no one nation has taken the lead (and the risk) in taking the API to the next level in terms of its promotion or concerning the clear concerns Israel has with its wording. Moreover, some Arab leaders might even profit from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict politically and therefore disfavor a move for the API's promotion. This might also explain why it is challenging for any Israeli prime minister to move forward on it. In the case of Benjamin Netanyahu, I argued that his personal convictions are too strong to consider the API as a relevant peace plan. What appears to be the lukewarm effort by Arab and Muslim governments toward the promotion of the API gives Netanyahu added reason to ignore it.

In addition, I believe it is important to consider that the Arab countries have never been real allies of the Palestinian people. They have fought against Israel and denounced her right to exist in the name of the Palestinian people; however, they have, arguably, not actively worked on finding a solution for the Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories, or for the many Palestinian refugees that have lived in refugee camps in neighboring Arab countries for several generations. Although the Arab League has proposed the Arab Peace Initiative and, hence, the ball appears to be in Israel's court, these points are important when considering the conflict and the peace process.

### *Concluding Assessment of the Conflict*

The ongoing deadlock between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership is, arguably, a major factor in the continuance of violence on both sides. Rocket attacks from Gaza on

Israeli cities were answered by two military campaigns against Hamas and the perpetrators, killing many Gazans, including civilians. Palestinians in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza continue to experience structural violence, limited mobility, and discrimination on a daily basis. Israelis in return fear violent attacks against them and continue to face insecurity in their own country. A new wave of violence by Palestinians toward Israelis has erupted in recent weeks and months. In the past few weeks, there have been several fatal incidences of Palestinian drivers deliberately speeding into Israeli crowds, and several deadly knife attacks. Most recently, two Palestinians fatally shot four Jewish worshippers and one police officer at a Synagogue in Jerusalem. Some online Israeli news outlets have already begun to call these unsettling events the outbreak of the third intifada. Newly sparked protests in Jerusalem, the closing of all borders in Gaza, and unrest in the West Bank intensify the situation for Palestinians and Israelis alike. The political deadlock of the peace process is only adding fuel to the fire, as it contributes to a reactionary, radicalized climate.

However, this deadlock could have a positive effect on the launching of talks or a peace initiative, if it created the conditions dire enough that they were to be perceived as “sufficiently” hurtful on both sides. To this effect, Zartman (2001) points out that when conflictual opponents reach a mutually hurting stalemate (MHS), in which they find themselves in a similarly painful deadlock and no realistic hopes of victory, they will seek an alternative way, which is often through means of negotiations instead of violence (p.8). This in return could ultimately lead to a moment of perceived *ripeness* in the conflict, which might provide for a shift in the approach to the conflict and ultimately could lead to substantial talks (2001, p.9). A MHS and the moment of ripeness are crucial



elements, according to Zartman, for a change to occur in a violent conflict, with the caveat that “ripeness is only a condition, necessary but not sufficient, for the initiation of negotiations” (2001, p. 9).

If the stalemate is not mutually hurting, however, then the ripeness necessary for a shift is less likely to occur. Arguably, the stalemate in the peace process, currently, is not as hurtful to Israelis as it is to the Palestinians. If a stalemate in the peace process and the lack of negotiations is hurting both sides to a relatively high degree—the perceived pain does not have to be to the same degree on both sides—then Zartman’s theory of a MHS potentially plays an important role for the possibility of renewed negotiations, or the introduction of a peace initiative. I do not hope for the outbreak of a third intifada. And, I do not hope that a third intifada would bring perceived Israeli suffering to the level “needed” for a MHS, as described by Zartman (2001). Regrettably, with the developments of the current events, it might, however, move in such a direction.

At this current juncture, with the API still on the table, I do not foresee Israel coming to the bargaining table readily, or anytime soon. My assessment of the current situation is that for Israelis, the status quo is comfortable enough and the conflict generally out of sight. The separation barrier has kept the vast majority of Palestinians out of Israel and suicide bombings have, for the most part, stopped since the barrier was built. In addition, Gaza’s borders with Israel are closed and only very few select individuals are allowed into Israel for short periods of time through visas that are hard to obtain. The “Palestinian problem” has, therefore, largely disappeared in Israeli perception, and issues such as the threat posed by Iran or the raging war in Syria have perhaps taken its place in the public’s imagination.

Although the Palestinian problem might largely be out of sight for Israel's politicians and the broader public, the problems for Palestinians, namely those of not having a sovereign state with its own economy, limited or no mobility, economic hardship due to trade sanctions imposed by Israel, and a perceived denial of dignity are real. Desperation among many Palestinians runs high. This in return poses a continuous threat to Israel, and ultimately, perhaps, to the stability of the region. First, Israelis are vulnerable to rocket attacks from Gaza or small-scale terror attacks which continue. Secondly, the lack of a settlement continues to fuel anti-Israeli sentiment worldwide. Thirdly, as long as there is no unison between Israel and the Arab states, no substantial economic agreements can be expected. This is likely to further add to unemployment and economic hardship in parts of the Middle East, and therefore, could be a contributing factor that aids terrorist recruitment. The literature on this topic is inconclusive; therefore, my last point remains speculative (see: Krueger & Malečková, 2003; Cox, Falconer & Stackhouse, 2009; Newman, 2006; Olsson, 2014). The fact is, neither Israelis nor Palestinians can feel truly safe and content as long as this conflict remains unresolved. And without a resolution, the cycle of violence and suffering between Israelis and Palestinians will perpetuate itself and will perpetuate hatred and blame toward the other group. It is a scenario that does not serve either people, but is harming both.

The dilemma seems clear: Israel has been attacked by the Arab states several times, since the inception of statehood. Israel is mostly isolated in a region that is currently lacking stability due to civil wars, Iranian nuclear ambitions, violent clashes between Shi'a and Sunni groups, and the bloody advances of the Islamic State (IS). However, "the rise and success of jihadist elements" argues E. Podeh (2014) comes with

an opportunity, as it “creates fertile ground for potential cooperation between Israel and the moderate Arab forces in the Arab world” (p. 602). I have pointed out that it is difficult for Israel to trust the Arab states after decades of outright rejection and three major wars. However, and as unlikely as it might presently seem, I see only one chance for Israel to live in peace and prosperity with the Palestinians and, ultimately, all Arab nations. Israel must reenter the peace process in earnest and negotiate on all points listed in the API. If it is not through the API, Israel will have to propose her own initiative and actively engage the Palestinian leadership and the Arab League in order to reach peace, acceptance, and normal relations with the Palestinian and the Arab nations.

The API is a groundbreaking initiative, because it is endorsed by all 22 Arab League member states and approved by the 57 member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Israel would be well advised to start negotiations on the API’s premises. Israel otherwise risks further escalation of domestic hostilities in Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza. It would be a leap of faith, surely. But with declining stability in the region, now is the time, perhaps more than ever, for Israel to take a risk and negotiate with the moderate fractions in the Arab world and create alliances. This clearly could be done with the help and supervision of the international community, and, trust-building transitional periods. If Israel enters negotiations on the premises of the API, she can demand normal relations with, and acceptance from all entities in the region and the OIC.

As inconclusive as it may sound, only if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is resolved, with a multi-lateral initiative such as the API, can Israel hope for true safety within her borders and for full recognition of, and normal, peaceful relations with, her regional neighbors and the Islamic nations. And although it is no ultimate guarantee, a

comprehensive, peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will likely take substantial wind out of the sails of those terrorist organizations that use the plight of the Palestinian people to legitimize bloodshed and violence against Israelis. Palestinians and Israelis alike must be able to live in dignity and safety, and a two-state solution seems the only viable option to peacefully and sustainably resolve this conflict. The bottom line is a mutually negotiated settlement would create more winners, on both sides, than any measures by violent means ever will.

## APPENDIX A

### THE ARAB PEACE INITIATIVE

*Official translation of the full text of a Saudi-inspired peace plan adopted by the Arab summit in Beirut, 2002, and again endorsed at the Riyadh Summit in 2007.*

#### **The Council of Arab States at the Summit Level at its 14th Ordinary Session**

Reaffirming the resolution taken in June 1996 at the Cairo Extra-Ordinary Arab Summit that a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is the strategic option of the Arab countries, to be achieved in accordance with international legality, and which would require a comparable commitment on the part of the Israeli government.

Having listened to the statement made by his royal highness Prince Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz, crown prince of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, in which his highness presented his initiative calling for full Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories occupied since June 1967, in implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, reaffirmed by the Madrid Conference of 1991 and the land-for-peace principle, and Israel's acceptance of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, in return for the establishment of normal relations in the context of a comprehensive peace with Israel.

Emanating from the conviction of the Arab countries that a military solution to the conflict will not achieve peace or provide security for the parties, the council:

1. Requests Israel to reconsider its policies and declare that a just peace is its strategic option as well.
2. Further calls upon Israel to affirm:
  - I – Full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights, to the June 4, 1967 lines as well as the remaining occupied Lebanese territories in the south of Lebanon.
  - II – Achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.
  - III – The acceptance of the establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian territories occupied since June 4, 1967 in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital.
3. Consequently, the Arab countries affirm the following:
  - I – Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with

Israel, and provide security for all the states of the region.

II – Establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.

4. Assures the rejection of all forms of Palestinian patriation which conflict with the special circumstances of the Arab host countries.
5. Calls upon the government of Israel and all Israelis to accept this initiative in order to safeguard the prospects for peace and stop the further shedding of blood, enabling the Arab countries and Israel to live in peace and good neighborliness and provide future generations with security, stability and prosperity.
6. Invites the international community and all countries and organizations to support this initiative.
7. Requests the chairman of the summit to form a special committee composed of some of its concerned member states and the Secretary General of the League of Arab States to pursue the necessary contacts to gain support for this initiative at all levels, particularly from the United Nations, the Security Council, the United States of America, the Russian Federation, the Muslim states and the European Union.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- 1) What do you think about the Arab Peace Initiative: Shortcomings, Advantages:
- 2) Assuming that the API is an authentic attempt for peace and that it guarantees what it says it does in terms of security, recognition and normal relations, can Israel negotiate/accept the terms of East Jerusalem, the '67 borders and an agreed-upon solution of the refugees?
- 3) What is the current opposition to a peace plan (if there is opposition) and how likely is the API to be accepted as a basis for negotiations by the Israeli government?
- 4) Does the API stand a chance on a political level or does it need to be pushed through the civil society sector?
- 5) Why do you think the API has never gained recognition or support in Israel (or internationally)?
- 6) What do you think needs to happen in order to promote/recognize the API in Israel, for greater Israeli society/for the Israeli government?
- 7) What alternatives are there to the API? Or for a new peace process?

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