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The Atkin Paper Series

The Israeli-Palestinian  
conflict and the Israeli  
perception of ‘No Partner’  
for Peace: An insight into  
the Israeli political mindset

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Yael Patir, ICSR Atkin Fellow

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# About the Atkin Paper Series

Thanks to the generosity of the *Atkin Foundation*, the *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR)* offers young leaders from Israel and the Arab world the opportunity to come to London for a period of four months. The purpose of the fellowship is to provide young leaders from Israel and the Arab world with an opportunity to develop their ideas on how to further peace and understanding in the Middle East through research, debate and constructive dialogue in a neutral political environment. The end result is a policy paper that will provide a deeper understanding and a new perspective on a specific topic or event.

## Author

Yael Patir, from Israel, joined ICSR as an Atkin Fellow in Spring 2011. Since 2006 she has worked at the Shimon Peres Center for Peace where she serves as Director of the Civil Leadership Department, overseeing cross-border peacebuilding programmes that engage a wide range of civil society figures, including Palestinian and Israeli young political leaders. Yael took part in the establishment of the Palestinian-Israeli Peace NGO Forum, a network of some 100 Palestinian and Israeli peace and dialogue organisations, and has served as the Israeli Coordinator since the Forum's inception in January 2006. Yael holds a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology, Anthropology, and Political Science from Tel Aviv University.

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# Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been at the centre of the world's attention due to its location, geo-political importance, and the fact that many elements in its nature fuel the interest and become symbolic to other conflicts. While it can be and often is explained from different angles using various paradigms, the key to its resolution rests in its people – Israelis and Palestinians – and their chosen leaders. In providing a solution to the conflict there must be an account of the people – their beliefs, perceptions, emotions and aspirations. This paper will provide insight into the Israelis' collective mindset in order to look for a gateway for conflict transformation.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu recently gave his account of the Israeli perception of the conflict:

*The root of the conflict was and remains the refusal [of Palestinians] to recognise the Jewish state. This is not a dispute about 1967, but on 1948, meaning the very existence of Israel... We must stop beating ourselves and blaming ourselves, the reason there's no peace is that Palestinians refuse to recognise Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people.<sup>1</sup>*

Netanyahu was building on a common Israeli view that the two-state solution – namely, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel – is not within reach because the Palestinians refuse to settle for anything less than a Palestinian state on all of historic Palestine (and, thus, the elimination of Israel). This claim, known as the 'no partner' concept, is why many Israelis do not regard Palestinians as real partners for peace. This notion has come about following failed attempts to reach a peace agreement whilst violence continued, and is based on the Israeli historical narrative and collective memory.

Like Israeli leaders before him, Netanyahu exploits entrenched Israeli fears in order to increase public suspicions of the peace process and Palestinian intentions, thus reducing public pressure and relinquishing responsibility for the absence of peace. In light of growing Israeli support for the two-state solution and the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, the 'no partner' claim assists Israeli leaders in maintaining the status quo. I argue that instead of this approach Israeli leaders should recognise, address and eventually shatter the 'no partner' claim in negotiations and through public speech. While negotiating borders, the leaders should also deal with core fears and grievances stemming from the aftermath of 1948 War, as this is the only way to deal with the current reality and damage of recent years.

<sup>1</sup> On 16 May 2011: <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4069558,00.html> (in Hebrew)

To advance, trust-building must take place between the two sides, and indeed throughout the 1990s this was the case: Israelis and their leaders gave peace a chance. Accordingly, in April 1999, 65.8 per cent of Israelis thought negotiations would bring peace. But events that took place between the summer of 2000 and the winter of 2001 – namely, the failure of Camp David peace talks and the eruption of the second Intifada – and the way these events were communicated to the public served as a tipping point, breaking Israeli confidence in the peace process and trust in the other side. In February 2001, belief in the prospects of negotiations dropped in 29.1 points, staying more or less at the same level until today, when only 31.4 per cent of Israelis believe negotiations can lead to peace (according to a poll conducted in January 2011).<sup>2</sup>

The impact of events of the summer of 2000 on Israeli public opinion provide a good example of how public perception comes about and should also be used to learn how perception can be changed. As such, rather than providing an historical description of events that took place during this transformative period, my paper will look at the way these events were framed, conveyed to the Israeli public, and subsequently perceived in their eyes through the ‘no partner’ claim. The examination will assist in understanding the dynamics of leadership and public opinion and its effects on the peace process. The paper will go along these lines to trace how the ‘no partner’ claim came about (chapters 3 and 4), the reasons behind its dominance in Israeli discourse (chapter 5) and its effect on the Israeli mindset and political reality (chapter 6). In a quest to transform this perception to a more accurate one, I will make some recommendations (chapter 7). In doing so, I hope to crack the wall of mistrust blinding the people of the region’s eyes to the possible progress that can, and indeed was made, between the two sides to achieve a long-desired peace.

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2 Peace and War Index: <http://www.peaceindex.org>

## A paradox in Israeli public opinion

*Reality does not count. It's what we think about reality that matters.*

Today, an unprecedented majority of Israelis and Palestinians prefer the two-state solution as the most acceptable resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. In a poll<sup>3</sup> conducted in March 2010, those surveyed were asked whether they preferred a solution of two states for two peoples, a bi-national Palestinian-Israeli state, or a Palestinian-Israeli confederation. The results show that 71 per cent of Israelis and 57 per cent of Palestinians supported the two-state solution. In 1988, by comparison, only 20 per cent of Israelis supported the establishment of a Palestinian state.<sup>4</sup> The shift of 50 per cent in support of a Palestinian state from the late 1980s to now raises a few questions: if a majority of Israelis indeed support such a solution, why is it not achieved? Why is there no public pressure on leaders to move in this direction? Why are leaders not held responsible for failing to bring about peace and an end to the conflict?

The answers reveal a paradox: although Israelis support the two-state solution, in reality they do not believe it is feasible to achieve. When asked about the possibility of achieving an agreement based on the principle of ‘two states for two peoples’, Israeli respondents replied pessimistically. Results show that while 71 per cent of Israelis support negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, the executive representing the Palestinian people, less than a third (30 per cent) believe such contact would lead to peace in the upcoming future. The doubt derives from Israel’s Jewish majority estimating that if the Palestinians had the opportunity they would eliminate Israel. The results for the following question in the survey show this clearly. When asked, ‘*Do you or don’t you accept the claim that most of the Palestinians do not see the two-states for two-peoples solution as the end of the road, accordingly even if a permanent peace agreement will be signed, an end to the conflict will not come because they will continue to fight for the establishment of a Palestinian state in all of Israeli territories*’, only 29 per cent of Israeli Jews opposed the claim, while 68 per cent agreed with it (a mirror response exists with Palestinians: while 17 per cent think Israel will withdraw from the territories, 60 per cent believe Israel wants to control all the area between the sea and the river). The majority of Israelis that support the two-state solution also think that such a formula is not within reach because of the ‘other side’ who, in their eyes, is not willing to pursue peace nor accepting of them. Interestingly enough, although the respondents perceive themselves and others amongst their own constituency as willing to make the concessions needed for peace, the ‘other side’ is perceived as reluctant and, even more important, as not trustworthy.

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3 Israeli-Palestinian opinion poll: <http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/polls/2010/p35ejoint.html>

4 Peace and War index: <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=201>

Mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians has always been a fundamental element of their relations, shaping the two nations' concepts of and modes of dealing with each other. It is also clear that for the two sides to realise a solution through negotiations, trust must be in place, at least to an extent which would allow each side to believe its counterpart will live up to its commitments. With the initiation of the peace process in the beginning of the 1990s, trust between the two sides was on the rise.

## High Hopes for Peace: From Oslo to Camp David (1992-2000)

### **The Birth of a Partner: 1993**

On 13 September 1993, the 'Oslo Accords' were signed between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), turning two rival national movements into partners in negotiation. This was by all means the most significant breakthrough in the century-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict and led to mutual recognition. Yasser Arafat, chairman of the PLO, wrote to Israeli Prime Minister Itzhak Rabin on 9 September 1993:

*The PLO commits itself to the Middle East peace process, and to a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two sides and declares that all outstanding issues relating to permanent status will be resolved through negotiations... Accordingly, the PLO renounces the use of terrorism and other acts of violence...*

Rabin replied:

*I wish to confirm to you that, in light of the PLO commitments included in your letter, the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process.*

The struggle between the Palestinian and Israeli national movements which started in the late 19th century was for many years irreconcilable and total. It was looked at as a zero-sum game, meaning one side's gain was the other's loss. The dispute involved fundamental issues invoking the basic existential needs of each side, and so finding an agreeable solution for both parties seemed to be impossible. Both sides utilised all possible efforts and backing within their group's and the international community in order to win it. By the summer of 1949 it was clear that the Zionists had been more successful than the Palestinians in organising and soliciting international support for their cause. Israel's great 'Independence War' became the Palestinians' 'Naqba' (Arabic for 'disaster'): while Israel expanded its borders (to what is known today as the 1967 borders) hundreds of thousands of Palestinians became refugees not allowed to return to their homeland.

It was the ripening of both Israeli and Palestinian societies which made possible this mutual recognition, along with the brave leadership of Rabin and Arafat. One should not underestimate the significance of the shift that allowed the peace process to come about, where both sides moved from total denial to acceptance of each other's claims over the land.

In explaining the shift in Israeli perception from disregarding Palestinian national claims over the land to recognising them and seeking pragmatic compromise, I will highlight two processes: the consolidation of Palestinian leadership under the PLO and its strategic shift, and a prioritisation change in Israeli guiding values.

### Israeli Partner: Shift of priorities

*Every conflict is justified by a narrative of grievance, accusation, and indignity. Conflicts depend on narratives, and in some senses cannot exist without a detailed explanation of how and why the battles began, and why one side, and only one side, is in the right.*<sup>5</sup>

Israel's policy since 1948 should be understood through the balance between the society's guiding – yet conflicting – values, which are translated into the desire for a Jewish State with a Jewish majority, democracy, peace, and Greater Israel (Eretz Israel).<sup>6</sup> These values consist of territorial, cultural and ethical dimensions.

The Israeli (Jewish) narrative tells the story of the Jews' return to Eretz Israel, to establish their state after 2000 years in exile. Inspired by the nationalist ideology of Zionism, Jews were provided with the first goal of establishing a Jewish state in the ancient homeland of Eretz Israel. The goal was based on two major arguments: that during their exile Jews maintained close ties with Eretz Israel, continuously aspiring to return to it; and that the persistent experience of anti-Semitism by the Diaspora, resulting ultimately in the Holocaust, highlighted the need of the Jewish people for a secure existence in their homeland. The conquest of the Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights in the 1967 War greatly augmented the territorial dimension of the Israeli goals. In the aftermath of the war, many Israeli Jews believed that Israel had the right to retain these territories.

In the context of Israel's right to the occupied territories in the West Bank and Gaza, attempts were made over the years to refute Palestinian claims. The contested territory was described as being only recently populated by Arabs, or neglected by its inhabitants. Palestinian national identity was also denied: the claim was made that they were Arabs, part of the Arab nation, and that their national Palestinian identity was a relatively new development.

According to the Israeli narrative, Jews did not want to expel the Palestinians, or to annihilate them, but they also did not wish to integrate amongst them. The Palestinian refusal to accept the presence and aspirations of the growing Jewish settlement from the 1920s to 1948, and more so their refusal to accept the UN resolution of November 1947, calling for the establishment of an Arab State and a Jewish State on the land of Palestine, brought about a reality where Israel had to fight for its survival. The Arab refusal and subsequent war were also connected to

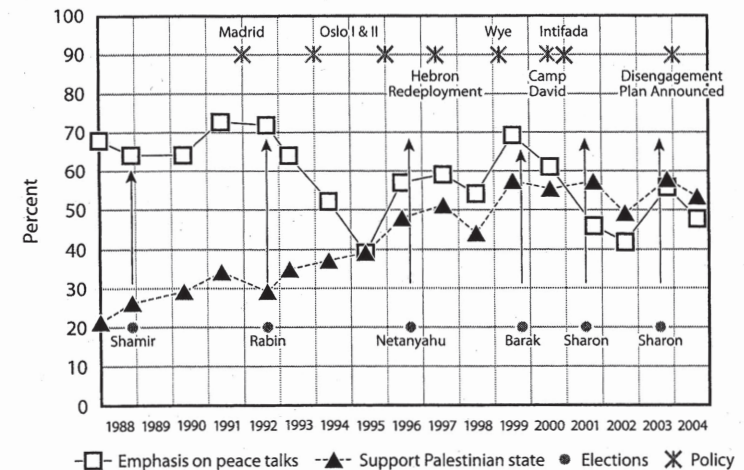
5 Rotberg (2006), Preface.  
6 Bar-Tal and Salomon (2006)

old Jewish existential fears, represented in an everlasting sentence which Israelis carry to heart: 'the Arabs want to throw us all to the sea'. In Israel's first years of existence the people had a good reason to believe so; indeed, until the late 1970s Israel could not find any partner in the region to accept its presence.

The visit of President Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem in 1977 and the treaty subsequently signed with Egypt signaled a regional change of acceptance toward Israel. The Palestinians' perseverance, expressed through the first Intifada which erupted in 1987, contributed to convincing Israelis that Palestinian national demands were, and are, serious and will not go away. More important, the Intifada highlighted the conflict between Israel's guiding values. Under the new conditions, Israelis started to understand that they could not attain all the above-mentioned values and that in order to sustain Israel as a Jewish state they must give up Greater Israel. The determination of Israel's western borders and the establishment of a Palestinian state became vital for the realisation of Zionism.

This is evident in Israeli public opinion polls from the late 1980s, which show growing support for a Palestinian state (see figure 1 below). Supporters of both the Israeli right (historically against the division) and left (historically for the division) became aware that Israel was left with no alternative to gain peace other than to renounce parts of its historic homeland, which would include parts of Jerusalem. Therefore there was a need to find the most authoritative partner on the Palestinian side to reach an agreement with.

Figure 1 Israeli Elections, Public Opinion, and Policy since the first Intifada<sup>7</sup>



7 Shamir and Shikaki (2010), p. 121.

## Palestinian Partner: United leadership under the PLO

*When the PLO was founded in 1964 the existence of the Palestinian people as a coherent entity, indeed the very idea of 'Palestine', appeared to be in grave, and perhaps terminal, state.*<sup>8</sup>

Before the appearance of the PLO, the Palestinian leadership did not manage to create the strategic thought and action needed for the establishment of a state nor did it manage to unite the different factions into one struggle. With its creation in 1960, '[T]he PLO under the leadership of Fatah was broadly seen in terms of a teleology of evolution from a liberation movement to a para-state that would eventually lead the Palestinians to full-fledged statehood and independence'.<sup>9</sup>

The Palestinian leadership has also come a long way from the PLO covenant in 1964 – with its goal of eliminating Israel, which in 1968 was amended to the establishment of a secular democratic state in Palestine for Muslims, Christians, and Jews, replacing Israel – to finally supporting the two-state solution. For many years the PLO refused to have contact with Israel. During these years the PLO used violence as one of its main means, with its member organisations initiating terror attacks against Israelis throughout the world.

The gradual change in the PLO's position started in the 1970s and did not receive notice at first from Israel – nor by the United States, who viewed the PLO as a terror organisation, refused to negotiate with it, and did not support the idea of the establishment of an independent Palestinian State alongside Israel. Israel and the United States demanded that the Palestinians cease all violence against Israel, Israeli troops and settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Also, during these years Israel favoured the 'Jordanian option', which supported resolving the Palestinian problem through the Jordanian kingdom. When King Hussein of Jordan announced in July 1988 the kingdom's disengagement from the West Bank, Israel was left with the PLO as its partner to the solution. Consequently in December 1988, in the 'Stockholm Document', the PLO recognised the State of Israel and called for an agreement to be achieved between the two entities through an international convention based on Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

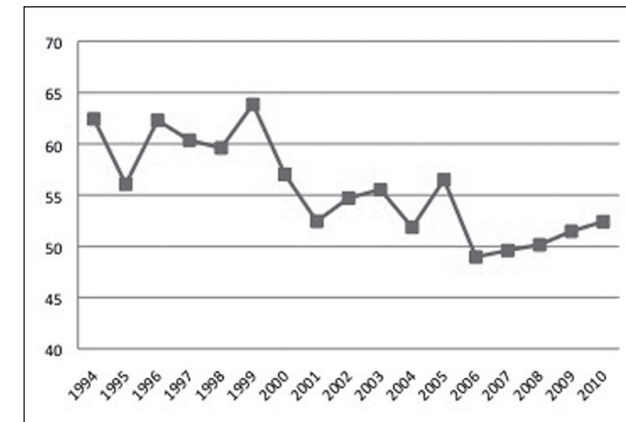
In Israel the PLO was considered a serious threat. The organisation itself and Arafat were detested. In 1986 the Knesset amended its 'command patch to prevent terrorism', making it illegal to make contact with the PLO. The meaning of the amendment was a prohibition on all contact between Israelis and Palestinians who were PLO members even if they did nothing to harm the security of the state. This amendment was valid until January 1993.

8 Khalidi (2007), p. 164.

9 Ibid., p. 150

## A Broken Dream: the aftermath Camp David (Summer 2000– Winter 2001)

**Figure 2** Israeli public opinion support to the Oslo process 1994-2010<sup>10</sup>



'Right' and 'Left' in the Israeli party system are labeled according to positions on the Palestinians and Palestinian territory occupied in 1967. The Right defined itself as the national or nationalistic camp, and the left as the peace camp. The growing yearning for peace talks (see figure II above) led to the election of left-wing Labor governments (Rabin in 1992 and Barak in 1999). During the 1990s the Israeli peace camp, represented through Left-leaning parties, had the biggest blocs in the Knesset (out of 120 seats total, the Left attained in 1992 61 seats, in 1996 56 seats, and in 1999 52 seats, in comparison to 49, 50 and 44 seats attained by the Right).<sup>11</sup> In the same years, Israeli support of the peace process was most evident in the outcome of the 1999 elections. Ehud Barak, leader of Labor, promised in his campaign to move decisively on all fronts to finalise peace with the Palestinians and with Syria, and to withdraw the Israeli army from South Lebanon. His promise won him 56 per cent of ballots cast.

10 The Peace index: <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=201>

11 The Knesset website: [http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/heb/heb\\_mimshal\\_res.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/description/heb/heb_mimshal_res.htm)

With a clear mandate to promote peace and high public support for negotiations, the Israeli Prime Minister was ready to go the lengths needed to conclude a peace deal with both Syria and the Palestinians. To do so he set a plan with a timetable to move forward on both fronts, and successfully convinced the American Administration to support it. After the Syria track reached a dead end in March 2000 he moved to the Palestinian track. In an attempt to reach a framework agreement for a final status settlement of the conflict a summit was convened at Camp David on 11 July 2000, at the invitation of US President Clinton. On 25 July the summit ended with no agreement reached.

Two months after the summit on 28 September, violent clashes broke out between Palestinians and Israeli security forces. What started as mainly spontaneous Palestinian demonstrations in the West Bank then spread to the Gaza Strip and inside Israel, and was met with massive force. This marked the beginning of the second Intifada, which in January 2001 shifted to the use of terror attacks and suicide bombers inside Israel until a cease fire was declared in 2003. These were years of total insecurity for Israeli citizens.

Despite the failure of the Camp David summit, scattered talks between the parties continued throughout October and November 2000 in an attempt to salvage the peace process against the backdrop of intensifying violence, the disintegration of Barak's government and the approaching end of the Clinton presidency. On 23 December President Clinton presented bridging proposals to the two sides for a final status settlement known as the 'Clinton Parameters' (ideas presented to facilitate an agreement and not as an official American proposal). A last attempt to bring the parties to an agreement in Taba (Egypt) ended on 27 January 2001 with no results, closing the lid on peace negotiations for the next seven years (until the Annapolis peace summit in November 2007).

## The No Partner Concept:

### **Framing Camp David failure and the eruption of the 2nd Intifada (July 2000-January 2001)**

*Yet, if we will find ourselves in a confrontation, we will be able to look straight into the eyes of our children and to say that we have done everything to prevent it.*<sup>12</sup>

*This man will do nothing... he will not implement anything... he will just blame us for the failure of everything.*<sup>13</sup>

Many have written about the course of negotiation at Camp David 2000.<sup>14</sup> From all accounts of the events that took place during the summit there is a consensus on how it came about: that it was Barak's idea and not difficult to convince the Americans, and that it was largely imposed on the Palestinians.<sup>15</sup> There is also a wide agreement between the writers as to the different proposals which were negotiated and the sequence of events. The variation is found in the way these proposals and events have been analysed in terms of their repercussions, influence and mainly as to who was to blame for the failure.

In hindsight historians can attempt to give an objective description of events but in real time it is politicians and public opinion designers (journalists, media advisors, etc.) who create the framing which contributes to the public's understanding and collective memory. Prime Minister Barak's version of events was vastly accepted by Israeli media and public alike. It was summarised in his interview with Benny Morris:

*The true story of Camp David was that for the first time in the history of the conflict the American President put on the table a proposal, based on UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338, very close to the Palestinian demands, and Arafat refused even to accept it as a basis for negotiations, walked out of the room, and deliberately turned to terrorism. That's the real story - all the rest is gossip.*<sup>16</sup>

12 Statement by Prime Minister Barak at a press conference upon the conclusion of the Camp David Summit, July 2000: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/2000/Statement+by+PM+Barak+on+Conclusion+of+the+Camp+Da.htm?DisplayMode=print>

13 Yasser Arafat, July 1999, Gaza (quoted by Dr. Saeb Erekat) after a meeting between Arafat and Barak in July 1999: Bregman (2005), p. 15-16.

14 For instance: Ben Ami (2004), Pundak and Arielli (2004), Rubinstein (2004), Sher (2001), Druker (2005), Hussein and Malley (2001), Hannieh (2001), Klein (2005), Ross (2004), Bregman (2005), Barak (2003)

15 Ben Ami (2004), Sher (2001), Ross (2004)

16 Morris (2002), p. 42.

Barak then described Arafat's plot to annihilate Israel gradually and in stages. The 'stages plan' resonated with the deepest Israeli Holocaust fears and anxieties, and Barak's invocation of these fears in his interpretation of the Camp David failure was clearly a strategic framing step on his part.

Another theme in Barak's frame was that the Palestinians did not come to Camp David to negotiate in good faith, and that for the time being Israel did not have a real partner for peace. Although he did not use these precise words, he presented a gloomy outlook for the chances of success in future negotiations, and consequently advocated unilateral steps on the part of Israel.

Palestinian and Israeli leaders framed the results of the summit differently. Gadi Baltianski, media advisor to Barak, remembers a TV interview given by Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat on the last day of the summit where he described the results positively: 'We have not reached an agreement', he said, 'but who would assume that within two weeks we will reach one on all issues, but we did reach substantial breakthrough and need to continue negotiating'.<sup>17</sup> This could well have been the framing provided to the Israeli public – but it was not. The framing provided to the Israeli public was prepared at the request of Barak in advance and correlated with his strategy towards negotiations of 'everything or nothing'.

The public, usually not having direct information about political and military events, bases its analysis on information given through mass media or directly by their leaders. The media frames information in stories which help consumers to digest and comprehend events while leaders do not always give all the information. Barak's strategic framing, which was effectively orchestrated, proved to be extremely successful and damaging.<sup>18</sup> It resonated well with Israeli cultural tenets and actual developments on the ground.

According to Bar Tal and Halperin the success of Barak's framing stemmed from a distinctive combination in a certain moment in time of a leader with unique characteristics (Barak), a compatible audience (majority Israeli-Jews), certain information and well-matched environmental conditions (of violence). They highlight three events (between summer 2000 and fall 2001) while comparing the actual events with the information given about them to the Israeli public:

**1) Preparation for the summit:** Before going to Camp David, Barak told Israelis that this was the last chance for peace and that he would be willing to go very far and test for real this option. Framing the summit as a test, Barak said it would prove if the Palestinians were serious and really wanted peace, or not. In actual fact, the summit was not prepared appropriately and was forced upon the Palestinians as they felt that the timing was not right for them. Although Barak was told by Israeli intelligence before the summit that the Palestinians would not agree to his maximalist stance, he still insisted on making the summit an 'everything or nothing' scheme.

17 Quoted in 'No one to talk to', a critical look at the media-politics connection, edited by Yehezkel Rachamin (2005), in Hebrew: <http://www.tau.ac.il/institutes/herzog/talking.pdf>

18 Bar-Tal and Halperin (2008); Rachamin (2005)

**2) The summit (Camp David, 11-24 July 2000):** Since the summit was closed to the media the information which was delivered by leaders was crucial. Barak's version of events was that he suggested overarching concessions to the Palestinians and they declined. This was supported by all the members of the Israeli delegation. In the closing speech of Camp David President Clinton 'said he had enormous respect for what Barak had done and the Israeli public should be proud of their Prime Minister, there was no similar praise for Arafat'.<sup>19</sup> The Israeli media repeated this time and time again: Barak had offered the Palestinians all that was possible for an Israeli leader to offer and they refused. Actually, this framing was not a result of what had happened at the summit, as it had been prepared beforehand in case of failure. Barak's willingness to negotiate Jerusalem, an issue which until then was a taboo in Israeli perceptions, further strengthened this orchestrated campaign. From the information Barak provided it was clear that he was willing to go to great lengths to compromise but that Arafat was unwilling to compromise. Information was also given that Arafat demanded the return of millions of refugees to Israel. In fact, in writings about the negotiations, criticism is made not only of the Palestinians but also of the Israelis' unsatisfying proposals, Barak's handling of the negotiations and more. Writers also point to gaps between the sides: although in the eyes of Israelis the compromises were overwhelming, in the eyes of Palestinians they were far from sufficient, such as on the issues of territories or Jerusalem. Furthermore, Israel's acceptance of the Clinton parameters in Taba 2001 further proves that Barak was actually willing to go beyond the concessions made at Camp David, what he then described as his final red lines.

**3) Eruption of Al-Aqsa Intifada (28 September 2000 to January 2001):** The fierce protests and Palestinian violence during the first months of the second Intifada registered with the Jewish Israeli population as a fundamental threat to their personal security. The combination of a Palestinian front, an internal front of Arab Israelis, and a northern front following the kidnapping of soldiers in Lebanon created a feeling of an existential threat to the Jewish-Israeli collective, bringing up known Israeli feelings from the past: 'the world is all against us', 'the Arabs will always betray you', 'the Arabs will never accept our existence here', and mostly 'the Arabs only understand force'.<sup>20</sup> In fact the number of Israeli victims during the first months of the Intifada (and before the election) was low, especially in comparison to the following year; however, until the end of October 2000, the number of Palestinians killed and injured was high. Palestinian terror acts were first directed at soldiers and Israeli cars in the West Bank. In November 2000 a car exploded in Jerusalem, then in Hadera, and the first suicide attack took place in March 2001 in Kfar Saba (after Sharon was elected Prime Minister).

19 Bregman (2005), p. 120.

20 Drucker (2002)

The campaign of 'no partner for peace and negotiation' which started after Camp David was furthered. During the first months of the Intifada Israeli government and military officials repeated the message: not only were the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian leadership not doing anything to stop the violence, but in fact, they were directly responsible for the terror attacks. However, later it was discovered that this was not the information given by Israeli defense systems at the time.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Shlomo Ben Ami, Foreign Minister and Minister for Internal Security at the time, said there was a difference between the leadership's instructions and what the army executed.<sup>22</sup> Later Israeli security officials said that the second Intifada was not designed in advance by the PA and was in fact a spontaneous act that gathered momentum, fueled by the massive reaction of the IDF – in October 2000 alone the IDF shot one million bullets – and internal rivalries inside Fatah.<sup>23</sup> Even Barak explained that the reason to continue negotiations in 2001 in Taba was driven from political reasoning as he did not want Israel to be perceived as the one who failed the peace process.<sup>24</sup>

Bar-Tal and Halperin<sup>25</sup> argue that the information Barak provided to the Israeli public was designed in a particular way to affect the way they comprehended events that took place in summer-autumn 2000, contributing significantly (although not solely) to the change that accrued in Israeli public opinion. Events were thus viewed not on the basis of historical truth but rather by the meaning they carried in the eyes of the public.

The 'no partner' concept is an excellent example of broader political aims meeting specific political needs. Barak was indeed willing to make far-reaching concessions in order to settle a deal with the Palestinians but he also had to ensure his constituency would not hold it against him.

### **'No Partner' Concept: Dynamics of Leadership and Public Opinion**

While many concentrate on the dynamics of negotiations and the strategies of negotiators, Shamir and Shikaki in their account of Camp David 2000 highlighted the role of public opinion and its relationship with the leaders:

*We believe that the public opinion played an important role in the course of the summit and its outcome... We suggest that Barak and Arafat entered Camp David with declining public support and eroding legitimacy for the ethos-shattering deal they were supposed to strike... both failed to prepare their own and the other side's public for the colossal tasks they faced at the summit.*<sup>26</sup>

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21 Drucker and Shelach (2005)

22 Ben Ami (2004), p. 295.

23 Eldar (2004), Malka (2004), Harel and Issacharof (2004), Shikaki (2004)

24 Barak (2005)

25 Bar Tal and Halperin (2008)

26 Shamir and Shikaki (2010), p. 51.

Indeed in the aftermath of Camp David, 57 per cent of Israelis surveyed believed that Israel compromised too much in Camp David, 13 per cent thought Israel could have compromised more, and only 25 per cent suggested that the position Barak offered was correct.<sup>27</sup>

If an agreement had been achieved at Camp David, Barak would have had the mission of convincing his coalition and then the Israeli public to support it. President Shimon Peres highlights this complexity:

*Negotiations for peace is not a simple proposition... It begins with the problem at your own home. When you have to make peace, you have to make concessions. You have to compromise. And your people say yes, we are for peace. Yes, we know that you have to compromise but why so much? Why do you give away so fast? Why do you trust other people? ... And it's not simple... to convince your people that you're a great negotiator, that you achieve the maximum, that you give away the minimum. It doesn't happen. And that's one of the reasons why it is so difficult. Not because of peace but because the cost of the peace and because the appreciation of your own people about your negotiations. I paid quite heavily in elections because of that...*<sup>28</sup>

Undeniably, when a leader seeks to promote foreign policy, domestic concerns play a major role. For leaders in a democracy the concern is based on two underlying assumptions: first, leaders are office-seekers and hence try to maximise their chances for re-election; and second, they are constantly evaluated by their constituency and therefore accrue audience costs. Leaders might be punished electorally if they back down or back away from a publicly stated policy, even more so in societies structured by conflict where any failure can be perceived as harmful to the state's national security.

Over the years the bitter conflict has structured both Israeli and Palestinian societies, economies, politics and value systems. Thus any attempt to solve the conflict creates domestic opposition. Accordingly Israeli leaders navigate domestically between powerful bureaucracies, political institutions, and key interests, all trying to influence public opinion (the most important actors in this regard are the IDF and the Settlement movement). In Israel's multi-party coalition system the challenge of maintaining government stability becomes a complex operation. As such, Israeli leaders will constantly seek public credit which will in turn allow them freedom to act, while protecting themselves (and their government) from the subsequent costs of this freedom. For this reason Israeli leaders are known to consult public opinion polls regularly.

When dealing with the conflict (as opposed to maintaining the status quo) Israeli leaders play a dual game: seeking to gain credit they tell the public that they

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27 Ibid.

28 Transcript from Speech by Shimon Peres on the occasion of 'Sixty Years of British-Israeli Diplomatic Relations' at Chatham House, London, on 30 March 2011: [www.chathamhouse.org.uk](http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk)

are hard-line negotiators, and seeking to promote peace they are bound to make concessions. The gap between what is said to the public and what is acted upon in foreign policy causes problems of trust between leaders and the public.

### Consequences of the 'no partner' claim

In October 2000 Barak used his mandate to announce new elections for the position of Prime Minister, explaining his enigmatic move with the need to get a renewed mandate from the people.<sup>29</sup> Barak hoped his explanation of events since being elected would convince Israelis that the problem was not his leadership but rather the impossible circumstances. Paradoxically, many voters trusted Barak's explanation of an existential conflict with the Palestinians, and so moved to the right side of the political map. Under circumstances of a violent conflict voters preferred a powerful leader like Sharon, with hawkish stands and a tough image to fight the Arabs and the Palestinians specifically. In following years Barak explained that he sacrificed himself for the sake of Israel, but his political suicide was also about to kill the hopes for the peace process.

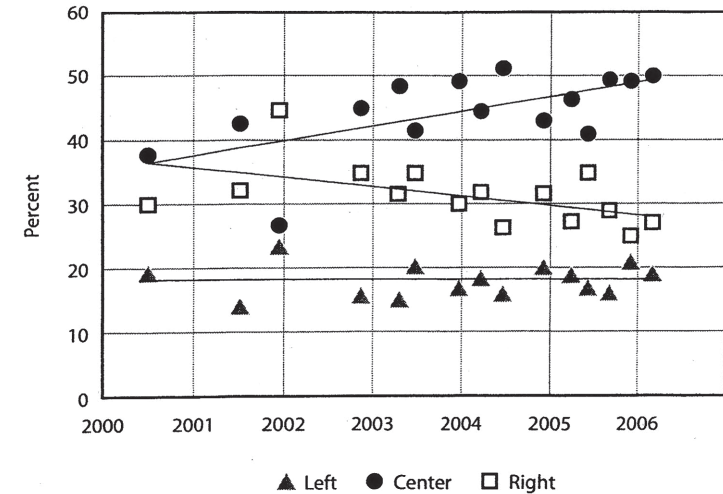
On the eve of the election in 1999, 65.8 per cent of Israelis believed that the Oslo process would lead to peace; after the failure of Camp David only 42.7 per cent agreed. Since then and until today the number has continued to decrease, with the lowest point of optimism seen in 2006. In February 2000, 71 per cent of Israeli Jews believed that peace would be enhanced over the next three years; this figure dropped to 35 per cent in April 2001.<sup>30</sup>

Between 2001 and 2003 many Israelis left the 'peace camp' and voted for the Likud leader (in 2001) or for one of the center-right parties (in the 2003 general election).<sup>31</sup> In January 2001 Ariel Sharon obtained 62.4 per cent of the ballots cast – the largest victory in Israel's electoral history. In January 2003, more than two years into the Intifada, elections for the Knesset took place in which the left bloc declined from 46 to 33 seats and the right bloc increased from 33 to 47 seats (out of 120). Increased support was given to the use of military and violent means to counter Palestinian violence. At the same time Israelis continued to support negotiations despite disbelieving their viability.

The Israeli-Jewish preference for a state with a Jewish majority over the dream of Greater Israel and holding onto the occupied territories continued to prevail. The meeting point between the Israeli desire for separation from the Palestinians and the lack of trust in negotiations brought about the unilateral approach. It also brought about a change in the political map (see figure III below), breaking the Right and Left blocs with the emergence of 'Kadima' in November 2005 – a new Centre party which represents a combination between the Left's willingness to compromise and the

Right's in-group orientation stressing separation, a Jewish state, and pessimism and distrust in the Palestinians as a partner.

Figure 3 Israeli's Right-Left Identification, 2000-2006<sup>32</sup>



29 Drucker (2002)  
 30 Arian (2001)  
 31 Arian and Shamir (2005)

32 Shamir and Shikaki (2010), p. 100.

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## No Partner = No Negotiations = Unilateralism (2001-2006)

Sharon's 'no partner' approach, as expressed here by his Chief of Staff Dov Weissglass was put into policy:

*...we have reached the conclusion [that there is no one to talk to on the Palestinian side] after years of thinking otherwise and years of failed attempts to negotiate. But when Arafat thwarted Abu Mazen at the end of summer 2003 we came to the sad conclusion that there is no one to talk to, no one to negotiate with, hence the Disengagement. Because once it becomes a Solitaire game, when no one sits on the other side of the table, you have no choice but to deal the cards yourself.<sup>33</sup>*

Accordingly, in an Israeli cabinet meeting on 12 December 2001, it was decided that Yasser Arafat was no longer relevant, since Sharon refused to meet the Palestinian President let alone to negotiate with him. Convinced that he had no partner to negotiate with but knowing he needed to act on the Israeli-Palestinian front, Sharon adopted the idea of unilateral disengagement from the Palestinians.

In April 2004 Sharon wrote to President Bush of his plan:

*Having reached the conclusion that, for the time being, there exists no Palestinian partner with whom to advance peacefully toward a settlement and since the current impasse is unhelpful to the achievement of our shared goals, I have decided to initiate a process of gradual disengagement with the hope of reducing friction between Israelis and Palestinians.<sup>34</sup>*

Sharon's unilateral policy was vastly accepted by Israeli public opinion, which supported settlement evacuation and did not believe in the viability of negotiations. The disengagement from Gaza took place in summer 2005 with Israeli withdrawal, including the evacuation of all settlements, totaling 8600 settlers. As part of the disengagement another four settlements were evacuated from the West Bank as a symbolic move.

Israelis had no problem marking Arafat as a non-partner: in their eyes he was a very problematic and multi-faced leader whom they did not trust. Arafat was perceived as a terrorist who most Israelis believed did not and would not put down his armed struggle. It was easy then for the Israeli government to convince

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Peace+Process/Reference+Documents/Exchange+of+letters+Sharon-Bush+14-Apr-2004.htm>

Israelis and even the wider international community that he was irrelevant; Sharon's government besieged Arafat inside the Muqata (Palestinian headquarters) from February 2002 until his death in November 2004. Nevertheless, Arafat's death and the election of the moderate leader Abu Mazen as President did not make the 'no partner' concept go away.

When interviewed, Weissglass gave another explanation for the 'no partner' claim: 'He [Sharon] understood that the Palestinian minority had no control over the majority. He understood that the ability of a central Palestinian governing body to enforce its will on the wider Palestinian society is close to none'.<sup>35</sup> Now, it became a question of whether the PA actually represented the Palestinians' genuine will and whether it could impose its policy on those opposing it. In fact, by disregarding Arafat as someone to negotiate with and with no alternative, the Israeli government weakened, whether intentionally or inadvertently, the Palestinian Authority and strengthened religious factions over pragmatic national ones. Sharon's insistence to continue unilaterally even after Arafat's death threatened the survival of Abu Mazen, and eroded the latter's standing among his domestic public.

The unilateral approach served to further entrench the 'no partner' narrative. In January 2006 Hamas' victory in Palestinian elections was perceived by Israelis as final proof of Palestinians' renunciation of diplomatic means and negotiations with Israel. Hamas' coup d'état in Gaza in summer 2007 strengthened the Israeli understanding that the Palestinian Authority was no longer representing the Palestinian people.

In March 2006 only a quarter of Israelis polled believed a settlement with the Palestinians might be reached in the next few years and another quarter thought peace with Palestinians was not possible; the rest thought it would happen in the next decade or generation.<sup>36</sup>

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35 Haaretz, 4 October 2004: <http://news.walla.co.il/?w=9/609133>

36 The Peace Index: <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonthEng.aspx?num=29>

## Summary and Reflections

Israeli yearning for peace is a constant element in public opinion. As such, when taking the position of Prime Minister, Israeli leaders are immediately expected to progress towards peace. As politicians, however, their goal is often to stay in power. Where public expectations meet political survival a dilemma arises: to promote peace a leader must make concessions, exposing a weak side, while to stay in power one needs to show strong leadership and uncompromising stands and provide the people with a sense of security. Accordingly, Israeli leaders' maneuverability stretches between two polarities – making concessions and standing strong – while they move between them to win public support.

The failure of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak in 2000 to deliver a promised peace agreement, as well as leading Israel during one of its most insecure times, lost him his ministry by a landslide to Ariel Sharon. Concerned with his legacy or perhaps with his future career Barak framed his failure in a way that proved detrimental to the future of the peace process. Barak's narrative after Camp David put all the blame for the failure of negotiations and the eruption of violence on Arafat and the Palestinians, framing them as 'non-partners'. According to this concept, Palestinians would not compromise nor give up their violent resistance until achieving a Palestinian state on all of historic Palestine. The claim found fertile ground in deep Israeli fears and suspicions, halting a process of trust-building which had taken place between the two sides, and eventually contributing to the current Israeli standpoint – unparalleled majority support for the establishment of a Palestinian state as the means to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and disbelief in its feasibility. Such distrust brought about an era of Israeli unilateral moves aimed to design the end-game without needing to negotiate it. It further added to a shift in the political map, strengthening powers that opposed the peace process at the expense of the Israeli peace camp.

By looking into the 'no partner' concept, I wanted to draw attention to the weight and power of public perception and the ability of leaders to influence such perception which in turn shapes policy. The 'no partner' concept makes an interesting case: its strong hold over society's mindset is self-defeating to society's interest. In actuality, for peace to be achieved a compromise must be found between the sides and therefore they are the partners for peace. Israelis might not like the demands of the Palestinians and vice-versa but that does not mean that the Palestinians are not a partner. Having said that, we should not overlook this phenomenon. The fact that the 'no partner' concept has an iron grip on public opinion exposes the deep concerns Israelis have for the future of their state. Such fundamental concerns have not been dealt with in negotiations.

## Reflections

Throughout the peace process the partners to negotiations chose not to cope and deal directly with the conflict's foundation. Rooted in events of 1948, at the heart of the matter are the questions of Palestinian acceptance of a Jewish state and Israeli recognition of its responsibility for the Palestinian refugee problem and lack of independence. All Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in the past nineteen years dealt only with issues that materialised in 1967 and not with those that led to the events of 1948 and beyond, thinking that a territorial agreement based on a post-1967 situation and separation will in time lead to peace (also building on the successful examples of peace treaties between Israel and Egypt, and Israel and Jordan). But the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have proved insufficient in making these deep fears go away; in fact, in light of actions on the ground (mainly settlements and violence) and leaders' rhetoric, they have only heightened them. In failing to fulfill both peoples' basic yearnings the negotiations and negotiators were bound to fall short.

Now that the sides are well aware of how an end-deal based on the two-state solution will look, it is time to take a step forward. Accepting that negotiations, as traditionally conducted, reached a point of negative returns, it is time to recognise that there can be no end to the conflict without honestly dealing with the past. Leaders should attempt a thorough reframing and reformulation of the issues associated with 1948, placing them at the forefront: Can Palestinians express acceptance of a Jewish state in a way that is perceived by Israelis as genuine while preserving the Palestinian version of the past, refugee rights, and the interests of Israel's Palestinian minority? And can Israel acknowledge its role in the refugees' tragedy, respect and address refugee rights without this threatening its Jewish character?

It would be safe to predict that the two sides will eventually reach a compromise outcome of two states established on the basis of the 1967 borders and an end to the Israeli occupation. But the result should originate from a different process and satisfy a different objective: to focus not only on terminating the occupation but also on answering both peoples' basic concerns.

Indeed dealing with basic concerns might prove very complex. Today we only know of leaders using concerns to move people away from the peace process, not towards it. Like Barak, Israeli leaders signal a desire to move for peace while they also use the same concerns to steer away from it.

Prime Minister Netanyahu is using the same technique. On 1 September 2010 he looked at Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and said: 'Every peace begins with leaders. President Abbas, you are my partner for peace. And it is our responsibility together with our friends, to conclude the agonizing conflict between our peoples and to afford them with new beginning...'.<sup>37</sup> While supposedly signaling a genuine desire to promote peace, Netanyahu also conditioned the resumption of negotiations on Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish State and refused to start negotiations from where they had formally stopped. Most recently the

Prime Minister reacted to the Palestinian Fatah-Hamas conciliation by saying: 'The Palestinian Authority needs to decide whether it wants peace with Israel or a unity government with Hamas'.<sup>38</sup> Such statements serve to raise Israeli concerns and suspicions of Palestinian intentions and heat up the 'no partner' waters.

Indeed Prime Minister Netanyahu has no reason to hurry. His first concern should be his voters and they are not pressuring him to resume negotiations at all costs. Recent Israeli elections resulted in a Right-dominated government (with representatives of the Settlement movement) not keen to pay the price of an arrangement with the Palestinians which will damage and halt the Settlement project. Therefore any progress Netanyahu will make to satisfy Palestinian demands will weaken his coalition. Although domestic concerns are making it easier for the Israeli Prime Minister, it is only a matter of time until external conditions, mainly Palestinian moves to win statehood recognition at the UN General Assembly (in September 2011), and international pressure will leave him with no choice but to make a move. Such developments can also shift internal political conditions and raise pressure from within which could result in Netanyahu losing in upcoming elections.

In the long term and in light of current developments in the region it would be best for Israeli leaders to start a reverse process, to instill hope in peace and in the feasibility of compromise being reached. No partners should be ruled out, no lies should be told about undivided Jerusalem or no return of refugees. After years of negotiations, from media coverage, books written by negotiators and historians, to the most recent wiki-leaks, the constituencies are well aware of the conditions of compromise and will support them if they trust they will get in return true peace and an end of claims. It is therefore the job of leaders, civil society, and the 'other side' to expose the core issues, discuss them openly and convince public opinion that an end to the conflict can and should be reached without losing more lives on the way.

When thinking long-term, Israeli leaders must take upon themselves the role of educating the Israeli public on the need for concessions and the urgency of the hour, and show a coherent strategy. For example, today it is very clear which settlements' evacuation is not debatable. Their evacuation has majority support in Israel and it is clear that there is no way that the Palestinians will agree to having them stay. An Israeli leader that wants to show consistency should initiate a programme offering compensation for settlers that will evacuate today willingly. This will show Israel is serious in promoting the two-state solution, will show the honesty of the leader and will assist in making clear the majority Israeli stance on settlements.

The Palestinian Authority and Palestinian civil society should put efforts into talking to Israelis' fears and convincing them of their will to compromise. Palestinians should stick to diplomatic moves and a non-violent struggle to showcase their honest intentions. This September, if and when Palestinians ask the UN General Assembly to acknowledge a Palestinian state, they must also call on Israel to resume negotiations.

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37 At a speech marking the initiation of direct talks between Israeli and Palestinian leaderships.

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38 Haaretz, 27 April 2011: <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/spages/1226166.html>

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## Annex 1

### Time table: Key moments effecting Israeli public opinion on the peace process, 1978 to date

#### 1978

17.9.1978  
*Camp David I (Sadat, Begin and Carter)*

#### 1979

26.3.1979  
*Peace treaty between Israel and Egypt*

#### 1982

6.2.1982  
*Beginning of (first) Lebanon War*

#### 1987

9.12.1987  
*Palestinian first Intifada (until 1991)*

#### 1991

30.10.1991  
*Madrid Convention (Shamir, Palestinian-Jordanian delegation and Bush)*

#### 1992

23.7.1992  
*Itzhak Rabin elected Israeli Prime Minister*

#### 1993

13.9.1993  
*Oslo Peace Accords (Rabin, Arafat and Clinton)*

#### 1994

4.5.1994  
*Cairo Agreement (Gaza and Jericho to Palestinian control)*  
26.10.1994  
*Peace treaty between Israel and Jordan (Rabin, Hussein and Clinton)*

#### 1995

28.9.1995  
*Interim Agreement (Oslo b) between Israel and PLO*  
4.11.1995  
*Prime Minister Rabin assassinated*

#### 1996

20.1.1996  
*Palestinian Authority first election to President and Parliament, Arafat elected President*  
29.5.1996  
*Binyamin Netanyahu elected Israeli Prime Minister*

#### 1997

17.1.1997  
*Hebron agreement (Netanyahu, Arafat and Clinton)*

#### 1998

23.10.1998  
*Wye understanding (Netanyahu, Arafat and Clinton)*

#### 1999

17.5.1999  
*Ehud Barak elected Israeli Prime Minister*  
4.9.1999  
*Sharm al-Sheikh understanding (Barak, Arafat and Clinton)*

#### 2000

April – June 2000  
*The "Swedish Channel" Palestinian-Israeli negotiations*  
May 2000  
*IDF withdrawal from southern Lebanon*  
11–25.7.2000  
*Camp David Summit (Barak, Arafat and Clinton)*  
28.9.2000  
*Second Intifada erupts following visit of Israeli opposition leader Sharon to Temple Mount. By 1 April 2001, 409 Palestinians killed and 1740 injured, during this time 70 Israeli citizens were killed and 183 injured.*

7.10.2000  
*Hezbollah kidnaps and kills 3 Israeli soldiers on the Lebanon-Israel border*  
1–10.10.2000  
*Demonstrations and clashes between Arab-Israeli citizens and Israeli police leading to the death of 13 Israeli-Arab citizens*  
12.10.2000  
*Ramallah lynching: 2 Israeli soldiers killed by mob in Ramallah*  
23.12.2000  
*'Clinton Parameters' presented*

## 2001

21-27.1.2001  
*Taba negotiations (Barak, Arafat, Clinton)*  
6.2.2001  
*Ariel Sharon elected Israeli Prime Minister*  
1.6.2001  
*Hamas suicide bomber attack in Tel Aviv: 21 Israelis killed and more than 100 injured.*  
17.10.2001  
*Israeli Minister of Tourism murdered by Palestinians from the Popular Front*  
12.12.2001  
*Terrorist attack on a bus in Settlement Emanuel, 10 Israelis killed.*  
13.12.2001  
*Sharon sends troops into Ramallah, shelling and surrounding the Palestinian Authority's West Bank headquarters; Arafat is unable to leave the Muqata.*

## 2002

29.3-10.5.2002  
*Israeli Operation Defensive Shield ended with some 500 Palestinians and 28 Israelis killed. In the same year, Israel begins construction of separation barrier.*

## 2003

March 2003  
*Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Nazen) appointed as Palestinian Prime Minister.*  
24.6.2003  
*President Bush presents in American Congress his principles for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement later known as the Road Map.*

May 2003  
*Israeli government accepts the Road Map*  
September 2003  
*Abu Ala replaces Abu Mazen as Palestinian Prime Minister*  
November 2003  
*Palestinian Authority accepts the Road Map*  
December 2003  
*Sharon presents Disengagement Plan*

## 2004

22.3.2004  
*Sheikh Yassin, the founder and leader of the Hamas movement, is killed by an Israeli helicopter gunship.*  
17.4.2004  
*Abd al-Aziz al-Rantissi, the co-founder of Hamas and successor to Yassin, is killed by the Israeli army.*  
9.7.2004  
*International Court of Justice rules that the Israeli separation barrier violates international law and must be removed.*  
11.11.2004  
*President Arafat dies.*

## 2005

9.1.2005  
*Abu Mazen is elected President of the Palestinian Authority.*  
10.1.2005  
*Sharon creates Israeli unity government with Labor and United Torah Judaism parties.*  
15.8–22.9.2005  
*Israel disengages from Gaza and evacuates four West Bank settlements.*  
November 2005  
*Sharon leaves Likud to form the Kadima party.*

## 2006

4.1.2006  
*Sharon suffers a major stroke that leaves him in a coma. Ehud Olmert replaces him as Prime Minister.*  
25.1.2006  
*Palestinian legislative elections - Hamas wins a majority of seats in Parliament. The US, Israel and several European countries cut off aid to the Palestinians.*

1.2.2006  
*Amona settlement evacuation*  
28.3.2006  
*Israeli election. Kadima led by Ehud Olmert wins the parliamentary elections and establishes a government.*  
25.6.2006  
*Armed Palestinians capture Corporal Gilad Shalit on the border of Gaza, killing two Israeli soldiers and wounding four others.*  
12.7.2006  
*Hezbollah kidnaps two Israeli soldiers on the border between Israel and Lebanon*  
12.7-14.8.2006  
*Second Lebanon War between Israel and Hezbollah*

## 2007

8.2.2007  
*Hamas and Fatah agree on a deal in Mecca to end factional warfare and to form a coalition, hoping this would lead Western powers to lift crippling sanctions imposed on the Hamas-led government.*  
15.2.2007  
*Ismail Haniya and his cabinet resign. Haniya is re-appointed by Abbas and begins the process of forming a new Palestinian unity government.*  
17.3.2007  
*The new Palestinian unity government holds its first cabinet meeting in Gaza City, with ministers in the West Bank participating from Ramallah via video link.*  
June 2007  
*Hamas takes control of the Gaza Strip from PA. Abbas issues new government, and announces Salam Fayyad, as the emergency government head.*  
27–28.11.2007  
*Annapolis summit hosted by US President George W. Bush*

## 2008

23.1.2008  
*Palestinians blow up part of the border with Egypt at Rafah crossing.*

21.9.2008  
*Ehud Olmert announces his resignation from the position of Prime Minister*  
27.12.2008  
*Israel launches Operation Cast Lead, on Gaza in response to rocket attacks by Palestinian armed groups. Some 1400 Palestinians are killed, many of them civilians. After 22 days of fighting, Israel and Hamas each declare separate unilateral ceasefires.*

## 2009

10.2.2009  
*Israeli election. Binyamin Netanyahu becomes Prime Minister*  
3.4.2009  
*United Nations establishes a fact-finding mission on the Gaza war, headed by Richard Goldstone*  
4.6.2009  
*US President Barack Obama calls for a 'new beginning between the United States and Muslims' in a historic speech in Cairo.*  
15.9.2009  
*Goldstone report accuses both Israel and Hamas of war crimes during the Gaza War.*  
November 2009  
*Netanyahu announces a 10-month freeze on construction in settlements in West Bank (does not apply to East Jerusalem)*

## 2010

31.5.2010  
*Israel stops Gaza aid flotilla from entering Gaza, killing nine men on board the ship Marmara.*  
September 2010  
*Round of direct negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership begins in DC. The talks collapse in the same month.*

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