Peace in a Divided Society

Hassan A. Barari *

ABSTRACT

The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians has failed. This paper examines the role of domestic Israeli politics in impeding peacemaking. It argues that changes in the Israeli society over the last three decades have negatively affected the peace process. In addition to these social changes, the nature of coalition-building and the influence of small parties in government formations have bestowed disproportionate power for small, yet radical right-wing political parties. The growth of ethnic and religious subgroups that favor the radical right can also influence Israeli foreign policy. Much of the positions adopted by the right-wing forces in Israel are anchored in a perilous ideological discourse with direct ramifications on the peace process. Therefore, short of a close analysis of Israeli social and political dynamics, observers run the risk of misunderstanding the root causes of the peace process's current malaise.

Keywords: Peace process, demography, cleavages, Halakha, Israeli right, religious discourse.

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is arguably the most intractable conflict in modern history. It is hard to ignore the reality that resolving the conflict once and for all is no easy task. History has proven that the conflict is beset with inherent contradictions which can only make peace difficult to realize. And yet, the unprecedented handshake between bitter enemies Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin on September 13, 1993, raised hopes that solving the world's most stubborn and thorny conflict would only be a matter of time.

But beyond the handshakes and accords, a detailed examination of events as they transpired on the ground reveals that peace talks between the two sides continue to fail. Since the initiation of the Madrid Conference in 1991, both Israelis and Palestinians have passed the buck for the peace talks' failure on the other party. Indeed, the debate has devolved into a blame game to determine whether the Palestinians or the Israelis were more culpable for the impasse.

Of course, there are a number of deep-seated factors that have made peace hard to achieve. Ron Pundak, one of the Israeli architects of the Oslo Accords, offers three possible explanations; the first explanation argues that peace between the two parties is simply not possible. Another explanation is that the two sides have yet to recognize that peace is the only viable option. And finally, Pundak argues that peace did not materialize due to miscalculations and mismanagement of the process altogether (Pundak, 2000).

Explicit in the concept of peacemaking was the deep conviction that peace requires confidence-building measures. The psychological impact of years of bitter conflict on both sides was not expected to fade away. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians took the initial steps necessary to embark on a historical reconciliation. Hopes were high by the mid-1990s, especially with Rabin's commitment and US President Bill Clinton's personal involvement in the peace process. However, Benjamin Netanyahu's assumption of power in 1996 was a game-changer (Barari: 2003). To the Palestinians, it became clear that the newly-elected Netanyahu government was adamant to undo the Oslo process. Therefore, Netanyahu's election is widely seen as a catalyst for the beginning of a new era of mistrust between the two sides.

Despite the international community's involvement in peacemaking, peace appears to remain a far-fetched goal.

This paper delves into the dynamics of the peace talks' failure and examines how Israeli domestic politics has rendered the process meaningless. The key argument advanced in this paper is that every Israeli peacemaking attempt that entails territorial concessions to the Palestinians has automatically become a domestic political issue. The division among Israeli political parties, and in most cases, within the ruling coalition itself on this issue could not be clearer. Needless to say, Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated because he signed the Oslo Accords. Interestingly, no single Israeli prime minister has pushed for peace without jeopardizing his political survival, and sometimes even his physical survival, as in the case of Rabin. Implicit in the conduct of all successive Israeli prime ministers is the impact of the trauma over Rabin's assassination in shaping their views on offering concessions as a quid pro quo for peace.

This paper is made up of five sections. Section one introduces the conceptual framework with a particular focus on the research questions, hypothesis, and the methodology employed in conducting this research. Section two examines cleavages within Israeli society and their impact on peacemaking. Section three addresses the dynamics of successful and failed peace-making attempts. Section four surveys the key components of the discourse that impedes peace. Section five offers an explanation for the victory of the far-right vision embraced by political parties. In the conclusion, the paper reflects on the issue of making peace in a divided society.

The Conceptual Framework
Methodology

With the use of qualitative data, drawing insights from various secondary studies will be the key method used in this research to examine the failure of the peace process. Besides, theoretical concepts derived from different International Relations (IR) theories will be employed account for the dependent variable of the study. This methodology is suitable for such a complex topic.

The link between domestic politics of a given state and its foreign policy is a contested subject in IR. Different IR paradigms view the relative importance of domestic inputs in a state's foreign policy differently. Neorealism, a dominant approach in IR, assumes that a state is a unitary and rational actor which responds to constraints and opportunities offered by the anarchic international system (Waltz, 1979). Thus, neo-realists draw a clear distinction between a country's domestic politics and its foreign policy. A state's relative position in the anarchic international system, not its internal composition and dynamics, is viewed as the basis of foreign policy decision-making. In other words, there is no need to deconstruct a state to fully explain its foreign policy. According to neo-realists, domestic variables – such as ideology, personalities, and internal politics – influence the style rather than the content of foreign policy. As Kenneth Waltz (1979) succinctly puts it, "the anarchic international system is the domain which conditions the behaviors of all states in it."

To be sure, the neo-realist approach can explain strategic and security-related issues, particularly during the Cold War. However, the main weakness of this approach is that it underestimates the crucial impact of domestic politics. Indeed, the impact of ideology and personalities on foreign policymaking is documented. Not only is there an interaction between domestic factors and foreign policy, but internal factors are also important in their own right. For example, such factors were important in the Israeli policy shift that led to the collapse of the peace process. Ironically, two renowned IR scholars — who both subscribe to the realist paradigm of IR — wrote a book on American foreign policy vis-à-vis the Middle East citing the role of the Israel Lobby as the most significant variable influencing the orientation of American foreign policy in Iraq (Mearsheimer, 2007).

There is no shortage of discussion on the linkage between domestic politics and foreign policy in literature. Yet our knowledge of the connection between domestic politics and peacemaking is not as rich. Besides, little attention has been paid to the impact of intra-party rivalry on foreign policy and peacemaking. In the case of Israel, intra-party factors such as personal differences and rivalry have been a key factor for the impasse of the peace talks (Barari, 2004). Some party leaders put the unity of the party over issues of foreign policy. On some occasions, peacemaking can lead to intra-party backlash. Hazen (2000) argues that "the government's ability to implement its foreign policy and to elicit

popular legitimacy is influenced by the extent of partisan cohesion." If anything, a political party should not be dealt with as if it is a unitary actor (Aronoff, 1993).

Contrary to the argument advanced by neorealism that domestic political dynamics do not matter, or are of little importance when it comes to foreign policy, this paper argues that domestic politics and foreign policy overlap. This is particularly true in the interaction between domestic politics and peacemaking. With this in mind, one needs to examine how domestic politics are important compared to systemic factors in accounting for foreign policy of a given state. This leads to another question: how do domestic politics helps shape foreign policy?

In his seminal article, Robert Putnam (1988) presents a model that could help understand the role domestic politics play in foreign policy. It also assumes that party cohesion is a prerequisite for a successful push for peace. Putnam examines whether domestic politics affect foreign policy or vice-versa; his answer is both. For him, the politics of many international negotiations can be conceived as a two-level game. Level I is a type of negotiation between two parties that end in a tentative agreement. Level II is a domestic negotiation to guarantee the endorsement and ratification of the agreement. For an agreement to get ratified, it should fall within Level II win-sets of each party to the agreement. It is worth mentioning that the smaller the win-set, the greater the possibility that negotiations will fail. On the other hand, the larger the win-set, the more they will overlap and vice-versa. But Putnam warns that there is always the chance of ratification failure. He makes a difference between two types of defections: voluntary defection, which refers to reneging made by a rational egoist in the absence of enforceable contracts, or involuntary defects, referring to the behavior of an agent who is unable to deliver.

In this paper, I argue that the two-level game can account for the failure of peace talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis. That being said, this study focuses on the Israeli side to highlight the internal impediments that have prevented peace from becoming a reality.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians has run aground. Changes in the Israeli society over the years have made the peace process pointless. Seen in this way, the key research questions of this paper is how domestic politics has impeded the shift from the state of war to peace. Put differently, the papers ask the following question: in what why has domestic politics affected the peace process?

This paper makes three assumptions. First, it assumes that domestic politics matter in many foreign policy decisions. Second, it is not possible to understand the emergence and decline of Israel's peacemaking efforts without examining domestic politics and social change. Third, most, if not all, Israeli prime ministers since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 have had twin objectives: to retain political power (political survival) and to build and maintain their coalition. Implicit in this argument is the desire of prime ministers to use foreign policy to achieve domestic goals and not to allow foreign policy to jeopardize his or her domestic agenda. According to Professor Avi Shlaim (1995), "The relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy is not a one-way street. Just as internal political forces influence foreign policy decisions, developments in the sphere of external relations feed into the domestic political scene in a never-ending process." The changing dynamics of domestic politics have influenced the public debate in Israel on the future of the territories seized in 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The debate has prevented successive Israeli governments from forging a national consensus on the territorial issues raised by the annexation (Barari, 2004). The inability to make policy has been aggravated by political fragmentation and intra-party differences.

Interestingly, it has become almost an axiom for many analysts to equate Israeli foreign policy with national security (Jones, 2000). Such analysts view Israel as a small political entity struggling for survival in a hostile region, surrounded by neighbors committed to its destruction. This perspective is also held by a majority of Israelis and neatly fits the framework of realism. Nevertheless, this one-dimensional view does not accurately depict reality, nor does it reflect a real understanding of Israel's foreign policy making.

Demographic change and cleavages

While Israeli leaders underscore the centrality of peace for Israel, cleavages within Israeli society have made the shift to peace a difficult path. To be sure, Israeli society has undergone a far-reaching transformation that has accentuated the Jewish identity of Israel. It seems there is no escape from the impact of this radical transformation, particularly for the peace process with the Palestinians. A key argument in this study is twofold: the changing demographic makeup has deepened social, religious and political cleavages in Israel. Therefore, these cleavages have made peacemaking a hotly-contested domestic issue. Right-wing parties' rise to power can largely be understood against the backdrop of changing demographic dynamics in Israel. This study seeks to examine the shifting demographic reality to fully understand the internal obstacles to peacemaking.

Two key overlapping trends have characterized the demographic reality since the establishment of the state of Israel (Bergren, 20017). Following the 1948 War, Israel witnessed a high population growth thanks to immigration. This trend continued unchecked until today where immigration and natural demographic growth hovers around two percent. By all yardsticks, Israel is a demographic outlier concerning population growth as a developed country. Upon its establishment, Israel's population stood at 806,000, but it experienced a 10-fold population increase to 8.06 million by 2013 due mainly to immigration (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Indeed, the mass migration of nearly 700,000 Jews in the period from 1948 and 1951 coupled with exodus of Palestinians has fundamentally changed Israel's ethnic structure. Israeli Arabs stands now at around 20 percent of the population.

The second trend pertains to Israeli Jewish communities' heterogeneous demographic character. The vast majority of Jews who lived in Palestine before the establishment of the State of Israel were born in Eastern Europe. This has changed with the migration of the 1950s onwards. Mizrahi Jews (those who came of the Middle East and North Africa) attained numerical parity with Ashkenazi Jews (those who came from North America and Europe). Obviously, Ashkenazi Jews were dominant for almost four decades (Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013). For this reason, Israel has complex cultural, religious and political identities. The diversity of Israel's demographic landscape is clear when you examine the situation beyond aggregate national figures. Official data on the growth rate of subgroups in Israel yields a more multifaceted reality. For instance, Jewish population growth is disproportionately driven by the high birth rate among the ultra-Orthodox. This lopsided birth rate could alter the structure of Israeli society.

As a result, the changing sizes of ethnic and religious subgroups can always influence key Israeli domestic and foreign policies. Michal Shamir, a well-known Israeli political scientist who has systematically analyzed Israeli public opinion, argues that voting behavior, and indeed public opinion, in Israel have delineated the "the major lines of division between Jews and Arabs, and among Jews according to religious adherence." Take for instance the *Halakha* (Jewish religious law). Not surprisingly, religious parties across the board in Israel advocate for a state rune by *Halakha*, particularly in matters of marriage and divorce, conscription and military. In 2015, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin delivered a key speech at the fifteenth annual Herzliya Conference where he stated that "Israeli society is undergoing a far-reaching transformation. This is not a trivial change, it is a transformation that will restructure our very identity as 'Israelis' and will have a profound impact on the way we understand ourselves and our national home; there is no escape from this change." (Bergren, 2017: 6).

However, the religious camp is not monolithic. A closer look at religious groups reveals deep rifts amongst them. While the Shas party represents that Sephardic (Mizrahi) community, the United Torah Judaism party is representative of the Ashkenazi interests. In fact, these rifts are caused by differing approaches to values and identity which translate to differences over foreign policy issues. These rifts will continue to impact government coalition-formation and Israeli foreign policy.

It is worth pointing out that peacemaking is a rather complex process. As this paper argues, while external factors rather than domestic ones are behind the initiation of any peace process, domestic factors decide the process's ultimate fate. Seen in this way, the challenge in Israel has been finding an acceptable tradeoff between the value of land and the value of peace. Explicit in the Israeli public debate is the view that peacemaking is in effect a key domestic political

issue, as is addressed in the next section.

The Israel Political Interactive Map

Over the years, a growing body of research has examined the impasse in the Palestinian- Israeli peace process. Moving beyond the blame game employed by the two sides of the conflict, the failure of the peace process is first and foremost due to domestic politics in Israel. All successive Israeli prime ministers who have attempted to make peace with the Palestinians have had to take into account two considerations. First, signing an agreement with the Palestinians needs ratification by the Knesset. Second, the political and social cleavages within Israelhave narrowed the ability of the government to maneuver. Indeed, these deep-seated cleavages have hardened the opposition to territorial compromise, a necessary condition for making peace.

The Labor-led government (1992-1996) was unique in that it was a center-left government; by many measures, it was the most dovish Israeli government since the establishment of the state of Israel. With Rabin at the helm of the government and in partnership with Meretz,[1] peace was possible and politically practical. And yet Rabin, who possessed the qualities of a leader who could realize a complex and contested peace process, would soon be shot dead by an Israeli zealot who saw peace with the Arabs as a form of treason.

The assassination of Rabin alone was not enough to derail the peace process. Observers were stunned by the level of incitement by far-right political forces in Israel. The Israeli right was held responsible for the internal anti-Rabin campaign. Ehud Sprinzak, a renowned Israeli expert on the country's far-right, examines the role of the internal dynamics of the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary right wing groups and individuals that led to Rabin's assassination (Sprinzak, 2001). Indeed, the incitement continued after Rabin's assassination, creating a politically crippling environment. Right-wing forces played up the violence between Israelis and Palestinians, a dynamic that secured far-right forces victory in the 1996 elections.

Historically, the Israeli right was a broad coalition given impetus in the aftermath of the 1967 War. It has adopted an aggressive approach to the conflict with the Arabs and a maximalist interpretation of the future borders of Israel. Proponents of this coalition refer to themselves as the "national" camp and as loyalists to the idea of the Greater Land of Israel.[2] This coalition has been a great supporter of settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Members of this coalition have a deep faith in the ability of Israel to maintain both land and security.

During the 1990s, the Israeli right comprised five different groups. These are: the parliamentarians, the pragmatists, the extremists, the terrorists, and the moderates (Sprinzak, 2001: 4). The parliamentarians are the ones who focused on the parliament and considered the Knesset as the playground for their politics. They see themselves as the carrier of the right's nationalist agenda. The ascendance of the Rabin-led Labor to power in 1992 dealt this group a political blow. Implicit in the reaction to Rabin victory was a belief that it marked a turning point in Israeli history. But this sentiment proved to be short-lived. Soon the Likud managed to dislodge Labor and lead a right-wing coalition with one purpose: to undo the Oslo process.

The pragmatists include leading figures among the religious settlers in the occupied territories. They are mainly followers of the Gush Emunim ideology and the legacy of Rabbi Kook. This group is perhaps the most motivated actor in supporting settlements in the occupied territories in order to undermine any future peace agreement. This group has been represented in Israeli politics by the Council of the Settlers of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza (Yesha Council). They enjoyed the support of both Moledet and the National Religious Party (NRP). They, like many in the Israeli right,

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[1] Meretz is a left wing secular political party. It came into being in early 1990s after several smaller parties merged in**to** one bigger party. It played a leading role in the Oslo process and provided Yitzhak Rabin and the Labor Party with the safety net he needed in the Knesset to push for the peace process with the Palestinians.

[2]In the aftermath of the 1967 war, HaTenu'a Lema'an Eretz Yisrael HaSheleima, officially called themselves in English Land of Israel Movement, came into being. It was an Israeli political organization which subscribed to the ideology of Greater Israel. It called on the Israeli government to keep the occupied territories and to settle them with Jewish populations.

strongly oppose the peace process with the Palestinians. Since the beginning of the peace process that led to the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993, the pragmatists have sought to build an anti-peace consensus that can undermine the process altogether. To them, the Oslo Accords was detrimental to Israel. However, to their dismay, a great deal of Israelis did not attach much importance to settlements. When they realized this fact, the group resorted to another tactic: drawing attention to Palestinian violence, arguing that the Oslo Accords have harmed, rather than secured, Israelis' security.

Unlike the pragmatists, the extremists are loyal to the radical legacy of the Gush Emunim. Not only are they committed to messianic convictions, but they also adopt an uncompromising attitude toward the peace process and the Palestinians. This group does not believe in political expediency and instead adopts a strategy "focused on radicalizing the extra-parliamentary struggle of the right and on making it as massive campaign of civil disobedience" (Sprinzak, 2001: 71). Their disbelief in political expediency is a statement of their conviction— namely, that a government could be brought down in the street.

Another, less-influential group consists of the terrorists who were followers of Rabbi Meir Kahane, who himself was killed in New York in 1991. With their combined messianic conviction and distorted view of history, this group attaches importance to violence, intimidation, and terrorism to create facts on the ground in the occupied territories. Certainly, this group is of marginal importance and their presence is not visible in Israeli politics.

The final group is the moderates, a movement that consists some leading Gush Emunim activists. This group has shifted gears starting from the mid-1980s when certain leading figures began to criticize belligerent policies toward the Palestinians in the occupied territories. That being said, the moderates never abandoned their commitment to the idea of a "Greater Israel". While the moderates have failed to become a significant political player, they have shattered the image of a united right-wing camp pitted against the peace process.

The interaction among these groups has informed much of Israel's positions towards peacemaking. As discussed above, the need to form ruling coalitions has been a constant feature of the Israeli political system. These small, yet influential political groups become king-makers and in turn complicate the peace process. When it comes to peacemaking, it is the right-wing religious discourse that has rendered the transition from the state of war to the state of peace an impossibility.

A dangerous discourse

Many of the Israeli right-wing forces' positions are anchored in a perilous ideological discourse with far-reaching ramifications for the peace process. In other words, peace with Palestinians that entails any territorial concessions is not without a premium. Even with the Shas blessing to the Oslo Accords, there were few signs in Tel Aviv that the right-wing was willing to jettison their dream of a greater Israel. On the contrary, the anti-peace camp among the right-wing became more active in voicing its opposition to the peace process.

Over the span of several months before his assassination, Rabin was facing serious domestic challenges. His opponents on the far-right took advantage of deteriorating security conditions within Israel and blamed him for the violence. They played up the pressing need to restore security in order to embarrass him. This confrontation came to a head in February 1995 when Hamas started a series of suicide bombings inside Israel, killing dozens of Israelis. Here it is worth noting that Palestinian violence was not without provocation. On February 25, 1994, American-Israeli Baruch Goldstein —a member of the far-right Israeli Kach movement—opened fire on a gathering of Palestinians praying inside the Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs in Hebron, killing 29 unarmed prayer-goers. As a consequence of the cycle of violence and counter-violence, the heads of the Yesha's Rabbinical Council decided to put the government on trial according to the rules of din *rodef* and din *moser* in the *Halakha*, a step that paved the way for Rabin's

assassination and the dismantling of peace with the Palestinians.[3]

According to the teachings of *Halakha*, *rodef* and *moser* are among the worst Jews. The first refers to a Jew who betrays the Jewish community and the latter refers to one who provides Gentiles information about Jews or someone who illegally hands over Jewish property. In Jewish law, if a person is chasing another one with the intention to kill him, then it is permitted to kill the first person without a trial. Therefore, *din rodef* is the case where Jewish religious law allows killing a person without the due process of a trial. By the same token, the *Halakha* deems the "land of Israel' as sacred property. As a result, it allows for the killing any Jew deemed guilty of giving away any part of it.

In a persistent campaign of incitement against Rabin's policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians, several extremist rabbis decreed that Rabin had obtained the status of *din rodef* , punishable by death without a trial, creating a tense atmosphere that eventually led to his assassination. The incitement campaign was so intense that the Palestinian suicide attacks in response to Goldstein's Hebron massacre was barely noticed by the extreme right. It was as if everything boiled down to Rabin's signing of the Oslo Accords.

Though religious in nature, this discourse was given relevancy with the conquest of Jerusalem in the 1967 War, an event that inspired a messianic and settler drive among the religious Zionist current in Israel (Reiter, p. 228). No-one closely following Israeli politics can fail to see the growing influence of the religious right. By far, the most influential historical figure in this movement is Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935), whose ideals have inspired the entire religious-Zionist movement until today. His son, Rabbi Zvi Kook (1891-1982) inherited this legacy and became the spiritual inspiration of the Gush Emunim settler movement. He systematically promoted a religious-Zionist ethos in Merkaz HaRav, a religious school in Jerusalem whose graduates became leading figures in the settlement program.[4]

The running argument of rabbinical figures affiliated with this prominent school is that "the settlements and their activities manifest the working of the divine providence toward an all embracing spiritual redemption of the Jewish people and its land." (Hellinger, 2008: 4). Explicit in the school's discourse is the most relevant doctrine on the role of the state of Israel: redemption. The latter, a sought-after objective for all Jews, can only be realized once Jews settle in the heart of the West Bank. Therefore, settlers are adamant on using state institutions and mechanisms to realize their ideological objectives. On several occasions, successive Israeli governments looking to quell internal difference gave in to the settler movement. It is worth here to quote Yitzhak Reiter (2011) at length:

The status and sanctity of the territory in dispute – the Land of Israel/Palestine, including Jerusalem – add a significant religious-cultural aspect to the national conflict. Moreover, the actions of Israeli settlers (such as Gush Emunim, "bloc of faithful") – who are motivated by fundamentalist Jewish ideology (Lustick, 1988; Weisburd, 1989; Gorenberg, 2006) and whose activities the governments of Israel have supported, or at least not taken any significant steps to prevent (with the temporary exception of freezing new construction), for over four decades – also create the impression that the religious aspect (Jewish, in this case) is a central element of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and poses an obstacle to the achievement of compromise and a solution. (229).

Undoubtedly, religious values have impeded the otherwise possible compromise between the Palestinians and Israelis, thus becoming a significant barrier to peacemaking. With Israel's military conquest of 1967, the religious current has gained a somewhat disproportionate influence on decisions regarding the future of the occupied territories and peace with the Palestinians. Their disproportionate impact of religious parties is due to their outsized role in government coalition-building and the pivotal status for these governments' survival.

In the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, the National Religious Party (NRP) – known as the *Mafdal* – occupied a pivotal place in successive governments for nearly two decades. The Labor-led governments came to the conclusion

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[3] Hebrew press buzzes with articles about the dramatic impact of Rabin's assassination on successive prime minister and how the assassination crippled Ehud Barark to pursue peace with good faith when an opportunity arise in July 2000.

[4] Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva in Jerusalem (a religious–Zionist Talmudic college founded in 1921 by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook) has exerted tremendous influence over many religious and political personalities

that without the blessing of the *Mafdal*, their governments would not survive. Indeed, the *Mafdal* had been essential to all governments in the period prior to the Six-Day War. During that time, the *Mafdal* was mainly interested in social issues. The Labor Party liked this arrangement as it gave them an almost free hand in defense and external affairs.

And yet, the Six-Day War came as a turning point in the *Mafdal's* politics. The younger generation gained control of the party and pushed for a new agenda, mainly building and expanding settlements in the occupied West Bank. The party adopted the "Greater Israel" ideology, transforming it into an ultra-nationalist movement. As time went on, the religious-nationalism of party hardliners became more acceptable and mainstream within Israeli society.

Labor-led governments were in no position to consider territorial compromises in the West Bank, even in the context of peacemaking. The *Mafdal* made it perfectly clear that its participation in Labor-led governments was conditioned on the latter's commitment to not even open negotiations over the future of the occupied territories. Its radical position with regard to settlements weakened the power of the Labor Party, which had to cave in to the increasing demands by settlers, bolstered by the constantly looming threat of *Mafdal's* withdrawal from the government coalition.

In 1977, another sea change took place in Israel when Likud succeeded in wresting power from the Labor Party. Some even referred to the outcome of that year's elections as an "earthquake" (Peretz, 1977). The *Mafdal* Party was quick to jump ship and join the Likud in a new government. Needless to say, leaders of the *Mafdal* were upbeat as the ideology underpinning Likud is one of a Greater Israel. Hence, the running argument was that with Likud, the *Mafdal* and Gush Emunim would enjoy a free hand in building settlements in the heart of the West Bank.

Since Israel's first elections in 1949, no single party has ever won an outright majority in the 120-seat Knesset. Therefore, all leading political parties have had to form coalition governments with other, smaller parties. Implicit in this arrangement is the ability of small parties to exercise disproportionate power and leverage. The indispensability of the *Mafdal*, for instance, placed it in a pivotal position from where it managed to prevent the dominant Labor Party from negotiating the future of the occupied territories.

Interestingly, small parties who are for an ultranationalist foreign policy were not successful in preventing Yitzhak Rabin from signing the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians in the first half of the 1990s. That is being said, one should not underestimate the role played by these small parties in undermining and impeding the implementation of the Oslo Accords. Tracing these efforts two decades later, it appears the right wing may have achieved a final victory over the peace process.

The final victory of the Israeli right

As discussed above, the demographic shift in Israel benefits the far-right, particularly religious constituencies. It is worth noting that Israel is among the few states where small parties enjoy greater influence than their size. Longtime observers of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict attribute the intractable nature of the conflict to the existence of settlers almost everywhere in the West Bank. For some, it is hard to understand how a numerically small constituency (six percent of Israelis) has succeeded in creating that number of settlements and obstructing peace. As some public opinion polls reveal, a majority of 60% of Israelis support "dismantling most of the settlements in the territories as part of a peace agreement with the Palestinians (Alvin, 2010." (Alvin, 2010). And yet, this has not materialized. This paper defines success as the ability of Israeli religious groups to undermine the peace process. Interestingly, the opposition of the religious right to any territorial withdrawal and settlement dismantlement in the context of peace with the Palestinians runs against the position of the majority in Israel. Far from being irrelevant, the religious right has proven to become a real hurdle to the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The national religious right has consistently acted as a spoiler to the peace process. Two factors have a lasting impact on the prospects for peace. First, the structure of the step-by-step peace process which aimed at allowing for mutual confidence-building measures. The nature of the peace process itself gave impetus for settlement activities, undermining rather than boosting confidence among the Israeli government and the Palestinians. Rashid Khalidi argues

that settlement expansion serves the purpose of creating facts on the ground so that Israelis could secure expansion (Khalidi, 2010). Israelis tend to present settlements as a fait accompli. Therefore, the more settlements Israelis build, the more territories will be part of Israel in any future peace treaty.

Israel's parliamentary system gives ample opportunities for insider spoiling, allowing national religious parties greater power than their number of supporters would otherwise garner. Israel's democratic structures should be examined to appreciate how such a small percentage of organized groups have had a lasting impact on the Israeli position on peace. First, the low threshold of votes has enabled tiny and narrow interests to be represented in the Knesset; translating into power that would not have been granted to these small parties under a higher vote threshold. In other words, small and extreme parties can easily get a seat or a number of seats in the Knesset. Second, the requirement of government coalition building has granted small parties, such as the *Mafdal*, disproportionate influence. As discussed above, the *Mafdal* had exercised power far beyond its numerical strength by holding lager parties hostage with its threat to quit coalitions and thereby collapsing the government. For this reason, a moderate party with far more seats in the Knesset inherently offers concessions to these small parties.

No prime minister can afford to ignore the disproportionate power of small parties. Take Benjamin Netanyahu as an example. He is perhaps one of the most intransigent right-wing politicians ever; his efforts to expand Israel's control at the expense of the Palestinians are widely acknowledged. Under American pressure, he signed the Wye River Memorandum with Yasser Arafat in 1998. In the agreement, Netanyahu pledged to exchange land for peace. By doing that, he created deep rifts within the ruling coalition. His government included small parties that favored a "Greater Israel" whereby Israel should cling to every inch of land and not trade territories under its control in return for peace. As his government teetered towards collapse, Netanyahu appeased these parties by announcing that Israel would suspend its slated withdrawal from 13% of the West Bank as stipulated in the Wye Memorandum. Yet, the religious and nationalist parties refused to endorse the principle of conceding land to the Palestinians. Under pressure, Netanyahu's government collapsed.

This study is not about narrating the decline or even the demise of the peace process, however, one should be attentive to Israel's shift to the right and the final triumph of the Israeli right. To be sure, the controversial recent "nation-state" law did not materialize overnight. Indeed, it has been incubating in womb of the radical shift in Israeli society over the last three decades.

Two factors have paved the way for the final victory of the Israeli far-right's vision. First, Israel's demographic composition has changed since the end of the Cold War. The massive influx of Russian Jews to Israel during the 1990s has had profound demographic, social and political effects on the Israeli society. More than one million immigrants (16%) of Israelis originate from the former Soviet Union. Those immigrants proved to be the most politically aggressive towards the peace process (Lily Galili and Roman Bronfman, 2013). *Yisrael Beitenu* – a political party that represents immigrants from former Soviet Union – has become so strong that Likud sought a formal electoral pact in 2013 elections.

Second, the settler community has become a key force to be reckoned with. The success of this community in cementing its presence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem has made every prime minister think twice before even considering conceding territories for peace. The settler community has adopted a far more radical political perspective than other political forces in Israel. Needless to say, the growing impact of the settlers and their success of creating facts on the ground have reduced the likelihood of Israeli territorial concessions to the Palestinians.

In a nutshell, these two developments have contributed to the final victory of the vision long advocated by right-wing parties. The implication of this victory is the current impasse in the peace process. Inter-party as well as intra-party rivalries and domestic politics have shackled successive Israeli governments' ability to pursue peace.

Conclusion

Events that have occurred since the ink dried on the Oslo Accords in 1993 prove that the Israeli-Palestinian peace

process has all but failed. Contrary to many observers' claims, it is clear that neither side is ready for a final resolution of the conflict. There remains a huge trust gap between the two parties; their mutual suspicions have made any step involving concessions a politically difficult choice and a bitter pill. With internal changes in Israel and the divisions within the Palestinian body politic, peacemaking has become almost unattainable.

This paper highlights four key arguments. First, domestic politics matter in explaining much of Israeli foreign policy. Almost every move on the part of successive Israeli governments should be measured against how this would play out internally. As Putnam argues, domestic politics can widen or narrow a win-set, which in turn can encourage or discourage decision-makers from contemplating a daring move in foreign policy. Second, it is impossible to appreciate the rise and fall of the peace process without examining domestic politics. Therefore, deconstructing Israel is critical to better appreciate its foreign policy. Third, Israeli prime ministers' obsession with political survival have prevented them from transcending crippling domestic politics. It follows that leadership is badly needed to restructure domestic dynamics to be amicable to peacemaking (Barari, 2009). By and large, Israeli prime ministers have sought to use foreign policy as a tool to realize their domestic agenda. Seen in this way, the relationship between Israeli foreign policy and its domestic politics is not a one-way street.

Interestingly, the changing dynamics of domestic politics have influenced the public debate in Israel on the future of the territories seized in 1967. Israeli society is not monolithic; pluralism is the hallmark of its body politic. Therefore, it is not unnatural for a diverse society to have a divisive debate. This contested public debate has prevented successive Israeli government from forging a national consensus on the territorial issues raised by the conquest of the territories. The inability to create policy has been aggravated by political fragmentation and intra-party differences (Aronoff, 1993).

While conventional wisdom suggests that states are better off reaching a peaceful settlement in order to avert war, Israelis, on the whole, have a hard time reconciling with this conclusion. Decades of indoctrination have pushed them not to trust the Palestinians. Indeed, Israelis are taught at schools that the Palestinians should not be trusted; an examination of school textbooks exhibits an overwhelmingly negative image of Palestinians (Peled-Elhanan). In her review of Israeli textbooks, noted Israeli philologist and education professor Nurit Peled-Elhanan examines what she considers a strategy of "negative representation" of the Palestinians. "Palestinians are often referred to as 'the Palestinian problem'" (Peled-Elhanan, 65). As illustrated above, some religious schools in Israel project this negative image of Palestinians to justify official Israeli policies towards the occupied territories.

In conclusion, it is hardly possible to fully appreciate the demise of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process without examining domestic factors. Short of deconstructing Israeli political and social dynamics and behaviors, observers may run the risk of misdiagnosing the root causes of the impasse in the peace process. This paper may aid in devising a diplomatic strategy based on paying attention to the domestic Israeli arena. Those who wish to be "honest brokers" in peacemaking must understand that it may take more than mediation alone to secure a successful peace agreement.

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السلام في المجتمع المنقسم

حسن عبدالمهدي البراري*

ملخص

عملية السلام بين الفلسطينيين وإسرائيل فشلت، وتسعى هذه الورقة لتفحص دور السياسة الداخلية الإسرائيلية في إعاقة صنع السلام، وتجادل هذه الورقة بأن التغيرات التي طرأت على المجتمع الإسرائيلي في العقود الثلاثة الأخيرة أثرت سلباً على عملية السلام، فضلاً عن هذه التغيرات الاجتماعية كان لطبيعة بناء التحالفات وتأثير الأحزاب الصغيرة في تشكيل الحكومات أن منح الأحزاب الصغيرة والمتطرفة التي تنتمي لليمين الإسرائيلي قوة أكبر من حجمها بكثير ولاسيما عندما يتعلق الأمر بعملية السلام،وأثر تنامي حجم الجماعات الدينية والإثنية على السياسة الخارجية الإسرائيلية، والحق أن كثيراً من المواقف التي تبنتها القوى اليمينية في إسرائيل ارتكزت على خطاب ديني خطر الأمر الذي كان له انعكاسات مباشرة على عملية السلام، ولهذا السبب فإن أي عمل بحثي لا يتفحص بعناية كبيرة الدينامية الاجتماعية والسياسية يخاطر بالوصول إلى فهم خاطئ للجذور التي تسببت بانسداد عملية السلام.

الكلمـات الدالـة:عملية السلام،الديموغرافيا،الخطاب الديني.