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Identities, Identifications, and Evaluation of Concessions in the Israeli–Palestinian Negotiations

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INTRODUCTION

Individuals belonging to groups in conflict often construct the identities of their own group and of the other group in a dichotomous fashion of "we" and "they." In such a construction the in-group is conceived as good, just, and moral, whereas the out-group is often thought of as evil, unjust, and immoral (Haque & Lawson, 1980; Sande et al., 1989; White, 1984). In the dynamics of conflict, we tend to construct our identities around shared group meanings that often include justification of our own side and negative images and stereotypes of the other side (M. Ross, 1995, in press; Volkan, 1998).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict clearly exemplifies this process of building in-group and out-group identities, images and stereotypes of "us" and "them," good and bad (Bar-Tal, 1989, 1990, 1996). Cultural mechanisms of socialization instill and propagate these images through mass media and school textbooks (Bar-Tal, 1997, 1998), which present social constructions of the enemy as evil and violent and of the in-group as moral and as fighting for a just cause, namely, survival.

Arguably, in times of acute conflict and of state-building the effects of such monolithic, dichotomous identities on the cognitions, interpretations, and reactions of the involved sides are functional. Such constructions can help muster the motivation to fight for one's own side and to set aside one's own interests for the interests of one's group during war.

However, such constructions may become more problematic during transitions from war to peace. The persistence of dichotomous identities and identifications can

create a barrier to conflict resolution (Bar-On, 1997, 1999). If one's interpretations of the measures and behaviors of both one's own side and the other side are still dominated by conceptions of win-lose, self-enemy, one's response to peacemaking initiatives is not likely to be cooperative.

One of the main instruments in shifting from conflict to peace is concession-making. Conflict resolution is often crucially dependent on the sides' ability to agree on a set of concessions between them. Such agreement must occur not only between policymakers of the respective sides but also among wider circles of both publics. This, unfortunately, does not always happen. Even when leaders sign peace agreements, the public (and also socialization systems) on both sides may still lag behind, clinging to the old antagonistic conceptions and rejecting notions of peace and compromise.

The present study deals with barriers to the acceptance of concessions, barriers that involve conflicting identities and identifications. It appears that identification with one's own side and with its political subgroups, together with identifications of the source of the concession, are all factors that can influence perceptions of concession agreements. The specific focus here is on one such perceptual barrier to conflict resolution, namely, the reactive-devaluation bias.

Research in the domain of social information processing in conflicts has demonstrated that negative beliefs and expectations related to the stereotypic view of opponents can influence the way in which the involved parties evaluate acts or communications ascribed to the opponent (Griffin & Ross 1991; Hirshberg, 1993; Rosenberg & Wolfsfeld, 1977; Silverstein & Flamenbaum 1989). Once the opponent is construed as evil and

ill-intentioned, and the conflict as a zero-sum, win-lose situation, then any action the opponent chooses to take is perceived as harmful to one's own side.

Several studies have examined subjective construals in disputes, focusing on biased interpretations of the behavior or strategies of opponents. Heradstveit (1974, 1979) interviewed members of political elites (Israeli, Egyptian, Lebanese, and Syrian) on both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He found that the sides tended to magnify the extreme and hostile behavior of the opponent, with apparent signs of extremism used as indications of bellicose intentions in general. In contrast, the sides devalued the opponent's positive signs and moderate strategies, expressing skepticism about the "genuine moderacy" of each other's intentions.

The reactive-devaluation phenomenon was first demonstrated by Ross and his colleagues at Stanford University (L. Ross, 1995; L. Ross & Stillinger, 1991). They found that the act of offering a compromise or concession can cause it to be devalued by the recipient.

Thus, Ross and Stillinger (1991) found in a survey that American respondents evaluated a proposed plan for nuclear disarmament as biased against the United States when it was (correctly) ascribed to the Soviets. However, they evaluated the very same plan as equitable and even advantageous to the United States when it was ascribed to a neutral source or to then-President Reagan.

In a second survey within the same study, Stanford University students were asked to evaluate two compromise proposals in which the university offered to partially withdraw its investments in South Africa. (At the time this was a

controversial issue of long standing, some student groups having demanded that Stanford completely withdraw its shares in companies doing business with apartheid South Africa). When the two proposals were presented as alternatives, they were judged to be equally satisfactory and significant. However, when the students were led to believe that the university was about to ratify one of the two compromises, that one was judged to be less satisfactory and significant than the one not chosen for ratification.

Because of the reactive-devaluation bias, a side that has proposed a compromise may end up disappointed and even hostile when its proposal is received without enthusiasm and the concessions are regarded as trivial or even self-serving. Meanwhile, the ostensible recipients may be angry that their reaction has led not to continued negotiation, but rather to allegations of unreliability. Such reactions harm the prospects for cooperation or peacemaking.

The present paper examined the operation of the reactive-devaluation bias in the real-life context of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. Using an experimental design, a series of studies investigated how the national identity of the source of concessions (Israeli or Palestinian delegation to the negotiations) affected the way in which respondents who were identified with the Jewish Israeli side evaluated authentic offers of concessions. This paper presents the results of one of these studies,[1] which was done at an interesting, historic point of transition from conflict to peace,

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1 For a full description of the entire series of studies, see Maoz et al.

and focused on two main questions about factors that influence the willingness to move from conflict to peace through concession-making.

The first question was whether respondents identified with the Jewish Israeli side actually demonstrated the reactive-devaluation phenomenon. Would they value a given concession more negatively when it was ascribed to the Palestinian delegation in the negotiations—while valuing the exact same concession more favorably when it was ascribed to their own side?

As noted, the reactive-devaluation phenomenon was found in laboratory studies done with American students in relation to disputes in which they were not deeply and personally involved. Israeli Jews, however, tend to be deeply and personally involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, are highly knowledgeable (to the point that some scholars define them as political experts), know exactly what solution they favor in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and deeply care about the matter. They have been bombarded since childhood with political information and discourse through family, social, and professional circles as well as the media, and are actively involved in the conflict through service in the standing army and the reserves, through having friends and family in the army, and through recurrent incidents of violence stemming from both sides.

In light of this, our study examined whether these more politically involved Jewish Israeli recipients will still be affected by the source identity when evaluating a concession in the negotiations.

Based on the previous findings regarding the reactive-

devaluation phenomenom (L. Ross, 1995; L. Ross & Stillinger, 1991), the following hypothesis was formulated:

H1: The source's identity will have a major effect on Israeli Jews' evaluation of a proposal for concessions. Thus, concessions presented as offered by the Palestinians will be rated as less beneficial to the Israeli side and as more beneficial to the Palestinian side in comparison to the same concessions when presented as offered by the Israeli side.

The second question is perhaps the more complicated one and deals with another source of identification, namely, the identification with hawks or with doves within one's own side. In other words, this question concerns the effects of respondents' political identification on their attitudes toward concessions, and the degree to which Jewish Israeli hawks and doves may be differentially prone to the reactive-devaluation bias.

A central political distinction within sides in conflict is that between hawks and doves. These subgroups tend to have different views of the conflict, taking opposing stances in regard to relations with the out-group and the strategy to be used in dealing with it. Generally, hawks favor a tough defense of collective interests, are oriented toward struggle when dealing with the other side, and oppose compromise and concessions. In contrast, doves favor negotiation and problem solving with the out-group, are oriented toward cooperation, and are willing to compromise and make concessions (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994; Sigelman & Sigelman, 1986).

The distinction between hawks and doves is a crucial benchmark in Israeli political life, used for organizing beliefs about the Arab-Israeli conflict in general and the Palestinian

problem in particular. Especially in regard to the Palestinian issue, hawks and doves form two groups with differentiated opinions. Hawks take a less compromising stance toward the Palestinians, support the notion of a Greater Israel, and advocate Jewish settlements in the territories. Doves favor compromise with the Palestinians, advocate yielding the territories in return for peace, and oppose Jewish settlements there (Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Freund, 1994). These differences led us to predict that:

H2: Compared to Israeli hawks, Israeli doves will express more favorable attitudes toward offers of concessions in negotiations.

In addition, because of their different conceptions of the conflict and of the out-group, Israeli hawks and doves may be differentially prone to source-identity biases when evaluating concessions. These differences could conceivably work in two alternate directions.

On the one hand, hawks tend to hold more competitive views of the opposing side and to attribute more extremism to it (Rouhana, O'Dwyer, & Morrison Vaso, 1997). Hawks also are arguably more ethnocentric in their attitudes, showing a marked preference for their own side and a higher devaluation of anything coming from the opponent. These factors may increase the discrepancy between hawks' evaluation of a concession originating with the opponent and their evaluation of the concession when offered by their own side.

H3a: The effect of the source identity will depend on the recipient's political affiliation and will increase in hawks as compared to doves.

On the other hand, hawks are generally opposed to acts of compromise and concession in the first place (Rubin, Pruitt, & Kim, 1994). They also are arguably more rigid in their positions than doves and therefore less prone to the influence of various factors such as the communicator's identity. Thus, hawks may view a given concession as negative to a similar extent whether it is offered by the opponent or by their own side.

H3b: The effect of the source identity will depend on the recipient's political affiliation and will decrease in hawks as compared to doves.

THE EXPERIMENTAL STUDY

OVERVIEW

An experimental study[2] was designed in order to test our hypotheses about the effects of source identity and of respondents' political affiliation on attitudes toward concessions in negotiation. The experimental design manipulated the identity of the source of the concessions. Thus, Jewish Israeli hawks and doves received and evaluated an authentic proposal for concessions, drawn from the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, that was ascribed either to the Israeli delegation or the Palestinian delegation. (The proposal actually originated with the Israeli side.)

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2 The study reported here was conducted during May-July 1993.

METHOD

Respondents. The respondents consisted of 74 Jewish Israeli hawks and doves, social science students from Haifa University and Bar-Ilan University. On the basis of their choice of the political party with which they identified out of a list of the political parties active in Israel, we were able to classify them into two major political identification groups: (1) 46 doves (59.4% of the respondents), and (2) 28 hawks (40.6% of the respondents).

Design. A 2x2 experimental design was employed of source identity (Israeli vs. Palestinian) x political affiliation (hawks vs. doves). Respondents from each political-affiliation group were randomly assigned to the Israeli-source or the Palestinian-source condition.

Procedure and measures. Respondents were told that they would be participating in a study examining evaluations of concessions in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and that they would read a proposal taken from these negotiations and answer some questions about it. They then read a proposal that was drawn from the ninth round (May 1993) of the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian peace talks in Washington, D.C. This was an authentic proposal, which was actually offered by the Israeli delegation to the Palestinian delegation in these negotiations. It concerned interim arrangements between the sides and dealt with the following eight issues:

1. The goal of negotiations and terms of reference
2. General arrangements for the interim period
3. The Palestinian Executive Council
4. Powers and responsibilities (transfer of responsibilities)

5. Jurisdiction
6. Security and police issues
7. Joint liaison committee
8. Agreed arrangements for cooperation and coordination

The source identity was manipulated by presenting the proposal as offered either by the "Palestinian delegation to the negotiations" or by the "Israeli delegation to the negotiations."

After reading the proposal, subjects completed a questionnaire in which they rated the degree to which it was pro-Palestinian on a 7-point scale ranging from very bad for the Palestinians (1) to very good for them (7), and rated the degree to which it was pro-Israeli on a corresponding 7-point scale.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research hypotheses were examined by analyses of variance (ANOVA) performed on the pro-Israeliness and the pro-Palestinianness measures, with the source identity and the respondent's political identification serving as between-subjects predictors.

The respondents' ratings on both scales clearly demonstrate the basic reactive-devaluation bias, as illustrated in Table 1.

In keeping with H1, respondents perceived the interim-arrangements proposal as less pro-Israeli and as more pro-Palestinian when ascribed to the Palestinian delegation in comparison to when the same proposal was ascribed to the Israeli delegation, $F (1,70)=7.79$, $p < .01$, and $F (1,70)=12.97$, p

Table 1: Jewish Israeli Hawks' and Doves' Mean Ratings of the Concessions as Pro-Israeli and as Pro-Palestinian

Source/Political identification	Measure	
	Pro-Israeliness[a]	**Pro-Palestinianness**[b]
Concessions offered by Israelis, raters = doves	4.46	3.89
Concessions offered by Palestinians, raters = doves	3.66	5.11
Concessions offered by Israelis, raters = hawks	3.26	5.53
Concessions offered by Palestinians, raters = hawks	2.69	5.69

a 1 = very bad for the Israelis, 7 = very good for the Israelis.
b 1 = very bad for the Palestinians, 7 = very good for the Palestinians.

< .001, for the main effects of the source identity on the pro-Israeli and the pro-Palestinian ratings, respectively.

Apart from varying as a function of the source identity, the ratings of the proposal also depended, as predicted, on the political identification of the respondents.

First, in keeping with H2, the respondents' ratings of the proposal reflected their political identification with hawks or with doves within the Jewish Israeli side, $F(1,70)=14.58$, $p < .001$, and $F(1,70)=21.88$, $p < .001$, for the main effects of respondents' political identification on the pro-Israeli and the pro-Palestinian ratings, respectively. Thus, as predicted, hawkish respondents perceived the proposal as

less pro-Israeli and as more pro-Palestinian than did dovish respondents.

Second, and also consistent with the predictions, the results for the pro-Palestinian measure clearly indicate that the effect of the source identity on the evaluation of the proposal depended on the respondent's political identification. In keeping with H3b, the source-identity effect was much stronger on dovish evaluations of the original Israeli interim-arrangements proposal as pro-Palestinian than on hawkish evaluations of the proposal. We found a statistically significant interaction effect of the source identity x respondents' political identification on the pro-Palestinianness ratings, F (1,70)=4.35, p < .05. The data in Table 1 show that the source identity strongly affected the dovish ratings of the proposal as pro-Palestinian, with dovish respondents judging the proposal to be more pro-Palestinian when offered by the Palestinians (M=5.11) than when offered by the Israelis (M=3.89), a difference that was highly statistically significant, F (1,44)=18.04, p < .001.

In contrast, the source identity had a negligible effect on the hawkish respondents' evaluations. The proposal was judged as good for the Palestinians to a similar and high extent whether presented as offered by the Palestinians (M=5.69) or by the Israelis (M=5.53) (p < .69). However, the interaction effect of the source identity x respondents' political identification on the pro-Israeliness ratings did not reach statistical significance, F (1,70)=0.15, p < .07

In sum, the results of this study confirm the research hypotheses. First, we clearly see the effect of the identity of those who offered the concessions. In keeping with the reactive-devaluation prediction, the same interim-arrangements

proposal was perceived more favorably when presented as offered by the Israeli delegation and less favorably—as more pro-Palestinian and less pro-Israeli—when ascribed to the Palestinian delegation.

But perhaps more interesting is the interaction effect that emerged between the respondents' political identification with hawks or with doves and the effect of the source identity. The results for the pro-Palestinian measure show that while the source identity had a significant effect on the doves' evaluations, it had no such effect on the hawks. These, as noted, tended to value the interim arrangement proposal as highly and similarly negative for their side whether offered by the Israeli or by the Palestinian delegation.

There are several possible explanations for this pattern of results. The present paradigm does not enable one to decide among them.

First, the results may reflect a perceptual ceiling effect in hawks' negative evaluation of concessions that prevented them from devaluing the proposal even more when it was ascribed to the Palestinians.

Second, the hawks' general attitudes toward concessions to the Palestinians may have been so negative that the source identity did not matter, once the term "concession" had elicited their negative evaluations.

The third explanation concerns the hawks' low identification with the Israeli side at the time the study was conducted, when the Rabin government was in power. Another result from the same study shows that doves indicated high identification with the Israeli government's official position in the negotiations, 80% of them identifying with this position to a high or very high

degree. In contrast, hawks indicated low identification with the Rabin government's official stance, only 20% showing high to very high identification with it.

This result was surprising at the time of the study, when the low identification of hawks with the peace moves of the then-Israeli government had not quite been expected by the author of this paper beforehand. These marked differences in identification between hawks and doves may also explain the differences in the reactive-devaluation bias between the two groups. It may be that because of their low identification with the Israeli government at the time, for the hawks the Israeli delegation did not constitute an in-group source that they identified with and whose concessions they would view more favorably than concessions offered by the Palestinians.

Another possible explanation that should not be ignored is that the hawks, who may regard concessions to the Palestinians as more fateful, as a matter of life and death, made a deeper and more thorough processing of the terms of the concessions (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), whereas the doves, who may be uncritical lovers of peace, processed the concessions more superficially. The doves may, then, have been more vulnerable to the effects of peripheral cues, such as the source identity, that were unrelated to the contents of the concessions themselves.

In this respect it is interesting to note that doves, who are often assumed to be less prejudiced and to hold more favorable attitudes toward the other side, perceived the concessions more favorably only if their own side proposed them. In spite (or perhaps because) of their dovish views, their trust of Palestinians and what they offered did not seem to be high. The important intervening variable of trust in the other side was not

directly tested in this study. However, the results seem to indicate that hawks and doves may be more similar than perceived in their basic mistrust of anything that comes from the Palestinians (for data directly supporting this observation, see Herman & Yuchtman-Yaar, 1995).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the effect of bias mechanisms on the evaluation of concessions in a conflict. It focused on how these biases operated among those actually involved in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, who were asked to evaluate an authentic proposal for concessions drawn from the ongoing negotiations between the sides. The findings demonstrate that, in keeping with the paradigm of reactive devaluation, Jewish Israeli respondents evaluated the proposal as more pro-Palestinian and less pro-Israeli when offered by the Palestinians than when offered by the Israelis. However, this bias was notably smaller for hawks than for doves.

On the whole, the results of this study show that attitudes toward important initiatives in the transition from conflict to peace, namely, concessions offered in negotiations, are substantially determined by our identities and identifications in the conflict. Thus, variables such as the source identity and the political identification of the respondents significantly affect how such concessions are evaluated.

It is important to stress that the evaluation bias demonstrated in the study occurred in relation to an authentic proposal for concessions that was formulated by experienced politicians and

negotiators. It is reasonable to assume that their intention was to facilitate agreement and cooperation between the sides; clearly, the proposed concessions were not intended to trigger bias and devaluation and reduce the chances for agreement (Maoz et al., under review).

On the practical level of peacemaking, given the possible negative effect of the reactive-devaluation bias on negotiation outcomes, a crucial question arises: How can this bias be controlled? One measure may be to bring this bias to the negotiators' awareness. This could be done by demonstrating to the sides (using the basic procedures set forth in this study) how changes in information about the source identity influence their evaluations of proposed concessions.

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