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***Israel and the Intifada:  
Adaptation and Learning***

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## INTRODUCTION

The Palestinian intifada in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in the years 1987–1993 played a crucial role in changing Israeli attitudes toward the Palestinian problem. It induced in Israeli leaders a long process of adaptation and learning that culminated in the negotiation of the Oslo agreement with the PLO. Like the Yom Kippur War, the intifada constituted a strategic and tactical surprise for Israel and a traumatic event, which helped foster the Israeli ripeness that made Oslo possible. Whereas the Yom Kippur War was itself a major event that highlighted the need for reduction and resolution of the interstate conflict, particularly the Israeli-Egyptian one, the intifada as both an accumulation and sequence of events gave salience to the intercommunal dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and made possible the movement toward its reduction and resolution.

The intifada brought into question most of the Israeli beliefs about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, especially those that had developed since 1967. It compelled both the Israeli leaders and people to reconsider this conflict, as well as the future of the West Bank and Gaza. Indeed, for the Oslo agreement to emerge, it was necessary for most of these beliefs to erode and for the attitudes of Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres to change.

This change of Israeli beliefs and attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict developed through a process of conflict management that included three stages: adaptation, simple or tactical learning, and complex or strategic learning.<sup>1</sup> The adaptation stage lasted from December 1987 to

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1 On adaptation and learning, see, e.g., Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Nuclear Learning," *International Organization*, vol. 41 (1987), pp. 371–402; Ernst B. Haas, *When Knowledge Is Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Ernst B.

January 1989; the simple or tactical learning stage transpired in different variants from January 1989 to January-February 1993; and the complex or strategic learning stage began in early 1993 and culminated with the Oslo agreement.

The adaptation stage resulted from repeated military failures in suppressing or containing the intifada. This stage involved a recognition that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was not only between Israel and the Palestinian organizations, but also encompassed the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza. In addition, some political and military leaders realized that old and new military means alone were not effective in managing the conflict with the Palestinians, though at this stage the Israeli government did not consider any political initiative for coping directly with the intifada.

The simple or tactical learning stage involved an understanding that only a political agreement of some kind with the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza could put a stop to the intifada. This led the Israeli government to initiate in May 1989 a new peace formula for reaching a political agreement in stages with the Palestinians in the territories. However, its failure caused the collapse of the National Unity Government and the freezing of the diplomatic efforts, which were renewed only after the Gulf War with the convening of the Madrid Conference (October 1991) and of the subsequent Washington talks.

The complex or strategic learning stage involved a recognition that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as manifested by the intifada could only be

Haas, "Collective Learning: Some Theoretical Speculations," in *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy*, eds. George W. Breslauer & Philip E. Tetlock (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 62-99; Philip E. Tetlock, "Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy: In Search of an Elusive Concept," in *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy*, pp. 20-61; Jack S. Levy, "Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield," *International Organization*, vol. 48 (1994), pp. 279-312.



resolved by direct negotiations and mutual recognition with the PLO. This became possible only with the accession to office of Rabin and Peres in June 1992.

The shifts in the conflict management process occurred sequentially, and dependently on the failure of each previous stage. The linear movement from adaptation to simple or tactical learning and then to complex or strategic learning proved necessary for reaching the Oslo agreement. The different levels of learning of various political and military leaders, as well as different population sectors, determined the timing and the level of changes in attitudes and policies. It became clear that leaders learn differently, and that some could not arrive at the learning that enabled ripeness for conflict resolution. Although the military leaders were the first to move from adaptation to simple or tactical learning, Likud and other right-wing leaders never advanced past the adaptation or the simple or tactical learning stage. The Labor Party leaders were the only ones who experienced all three stages.

This study examines how and why the intifada influenced the change of Israeli attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the three stages of adaptation and learning during 1987–1993.

## **PRELUDE TO THE INTIFADA**

The intifada constituted a strategic as well as tactical surprise for both the military and the political leadership. Although there had been many signs that major developments were transpiring in the territories, these were ignored or not taken seriously. Not only did Israel fail to anticipate such a massive and popular uprising, its military and political establishment took several months to grasp the strategic significance of the new challenge.<sup>2</sup>

2 On the intifada as a strategic and a tactical surprise, see, e.g., Zeev Schiff & Ehud Yaari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising—Israel's Third Front* (New York: Simon &

Until the uprising the potential political and security problems in the territories were assumed to be minimal, mainly because of the general Israeli belief that the Palestinian population there had adjusted to the occupation. Both the political and military leaders believed that the Palestinians would continue to accept the occupation, mainly because it was liberal and economically beneficial. Palestinian political aspirations were ignored or downplayed.

Most of the Israeli leadership perceived the Palestinian problem as a minor issue in the protracted Arab-Israeli conflict. They saw the conflict as an interstate one, with the Arab states, not the PLO or the Palestinian population of the territories, constituting the main threat to Israel or, alternatively, the main partners for peace negotiations. Most of the Israeli leaders also drew a sharp distinction between the PLO and the Palestinian population of the territories. Whereas the conflict with the PLO was perceived as zero-sum, and the PLO as a terrorist organization aiming at Israel's destruction, the Palestinian population of the territories was regarded as a social community entitled to live in peace with Israel, not as a national group that deserved national independence. It was believed that providing them the economic means to improve their standard of living would secure their obedience and adjustment to the occupation. As Schiff and Yaari observe, "when it came to the occupied territories and their Palestinian inhabitants, there seemed to be a collective mental block in Israel that the national leadership, most of the experts, and even a large portion of the press was unable to overcome."<sup>3</sup> This collective mental block was best exemplified by Golda Meir's pronouncement that there was no such thing as a Palestinian people.<sup>4</sup>

Schuster, 1989), pp. 17–50; Aryeh Shalev, *The Intifada: Causes and Effects* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1991), pp. 34–42; Shlomo Gazit, *Trapped* (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1999) (in Hebrew), pp. 254–258.

3 Schiff & Yaari, *Intifada*, pp. 40–41.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 42.

Until the Sadat initiative of 1977, which led to Menachem Begin's proposed autonomy plan for the Palestinians, the Palestinians were not even considered potential partners to negotiations for a settlement of the Middle East conflict. The right-wing parties, mainly the Likud, denied any possibility of making territorial concessions in the West Bank and Gaza in return for a peace agreement. Begin's autonomy was aimed only at people, not at territory. However, because Begin himself as well as his successor, Yitzhak Shamir, realized that the autonomy could develop into a state, they did not do much to promote it. The Labor Party, for its part, supported the principle of territorial compromise but saw Jordan as the only partner for negotiations. Indeed, the London Agreement of 1987 between Shimon Peres and King Hussein actually ignored the Palestinians as a partner for negotiations on a political solution.<sup>5</sup>

Although the territories were never formally annexed, the general notion was that they were part of Israel. The fact that no serious disturbances or riots had taken place in the first twenty years of Israeli rule (1967-1987) only strengthened the confidence that the Palestinians had adjusted to the situation. The war in Lebanon in 1982, which led to the PLO's expulsion from Lebanon, reinforced the notion that the Palestinians in the territories were too weak to undertake any serious action against Israel. Indeed, no one in the military or political echelons anticipated a massive popular uprising in the West Bank and Gaza, and the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were unprepared for it.

## **THE ADAPTATION STAGE**

At the outset of the intifada the Israeli leadership, including the military, still believed that the disturbances and riots, which were not yet defined as an

5 Avi Shlaim, "Prelude to the Accord: Likud, Labor, and the Palestinians," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 23 (1994), pp. 5-19.

uprising, could be ended by using the same measures as in the past. The intifada was regarded as a current security problem, for which standard operational procedures would suffice to restore the status quo within two or three weeks.<sup>6</sup> When using the old methods such as collective punishment, especially curfews, while avoiding close confrontation with the rioters proved ineffective, and the civil strife burgeoned and spread from Gaza to the West Bank, the adaptation stage had begun.

Adaptation resulted from repeated failures in suppressing the intifada, and involved a recognition that the disturbances and riots were different than in the past and had far-reaching strategic and political objectives. The uprising was now perceived as an attempt to induce Israel to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza so that a Palestinian state could be established.<sup>7</sup> The new low-level violence seemed aimed at reaching the same objectives that the Arabs had failed to achieve via conventional and subconventional warfare. Thus it became clear that the old tactics and strategies were inadequate to cope with the intifada. Instead, a military response was sought that would effectively suppress the uprising and prevent its organizers from achieving their goals. The new tactic adopted was that of close confrontation with the demonstrators, involving the use of beating, while minimizing fatalities and limiting escalation. In addition, civil sanctions, mass arrests, and curfews were used to bring about the intifada's termination.<sup>8</sup>

This constituted a rational adjustment of military tactics to the conflict situation, rather than a thorough reevaluation of attitudes and beliefs about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The common belief was still that a better employment of military means could bring the intifada to an end. However,

6 Shalev, *The Intifada*, p. 99; Efraim Inbar, "Israel's Small War: The Military Response to the Intifada," *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 18 (1991), p. 32.

7 Inbar, "Israel's Small War," p. 33; Schiff & Yaari, *Intifada*, pp. 104–105.

8 Shalev, *The Intifada*, pp. 100–106.

when this new policy failed to stop the intifada, especially the mass demonstrations, the result was a further adaptation process involving a new attempt to find a better match between military means and the same political objectives of suppressing the intifada and especially the desires for political independence.

The first real change in the Israeli attitude toward the intifada occurred in March 1988, when then-Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the military establishment realized that the intifada was much more complicated than at first perceived. "Breaking their bones" had proved a counterproductive tactic. Not only had it failed to stop the uprising, it had triggered both domestic and international criticism. Rabin, who saw himself as basically the one responsible for fighting the intifada and managing the conflict with the Palestinians, learned how difficult managing such a conflict actually was. He now regarded the intifada not as terrorism but as an uncompromising civil war waged by a politically aware population that demanded an end to the occupation. Having come to view the uprising as a "continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict by other means,"<sup>9</sup> as distinct from interstate conflict and war, Rabin realized that this sort of conflict posed a serious challenge to Israel and the IDF. Not only was the army not trained for this type of violence, but legal, political, and military constraints prevented it from effectively using its power. Thus, military force was insufficient to cope with the intifada. Although military means were crucial in managing the conflict, so that violence would not dictate the military and political outcomes, Rabin acknowledged that in the long run only a political process could resolve the intifada. Although he himself was not yet ripe for raising new ideas about a political solution, he changed Israel's military objectives in the intifada: since suppression of the uprising would be too

9 Hemda Ben-Yehuda, "Attitude Change and Policy Transformation: Yitzhak Rabin and the Palestinian Question, 1967-95," in *From Rabin to Netanyahu: Israel's Troubled Agenda*, ed. Efraim Karsh (London: Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 209-210.

costly, Israel should limit its goal to containment—or, as Rabin put it, “to bring about calm and lower violence to a reasonable level.”<sup>10</sup> This meant that Israel should prepare itself for a lengthy struggle, indeed a war of attrition.

Rabin was the first in the political echelon to realize the need for a political solution to the intifada. In arriving at this conclusion, he relied on the assessments of the military and security experts. After only a few months of the intifada the military leaders, headed by the chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Shomron, grasped the uprising’s strategic-political significance and the army’s limitations in coping with it. They maintained that the army could deal only with the symptoms of the intifada, not its causes. Its task was to ensure a satisfactory level of security; but essentially the uprising was a political problem that could only be dealt with by political means. They rejected the idea of using total measures against the Palestinians, not only for moral reasons but also to preserve the possibility of future negotiations with them.<sup>11</sup>

These arguments, which Rabin endorsed, were totally rejected by Prime Minister Shamir and the other Likud ministers of the National Unity Government. They denied that the uprising had resulted because of the Israeli occupation, and rejected the army’s claim that there could be no military solution but only a political one. They insisted that the solution to the intifada was indeed military, and that higher levels of force would succeed in quelling it. The uprising, they charged, had continued only because the army had failed to employ its power effectively. An ongoing intifada might, in the long run, be even more effective than previous Arab attempts to destroy Israel. Some even accused the army of deliberately failing to crush the uprising because of its ideological beliefs. The

10 Shalev, *The Intifada*, p. 100; Schiff & Yaari, *Intifada*, pp. 138–139; Inbar, “Israel’s Small War,” pp. 34–38.

11 Schiff & Yaari, *Intifada*, pp. 135–144; Gazit, *Trapped*, pp. 256–258.

army, it was claimed, should not speak about a political solution, not only because this was not its role but also because it reflected Israel's weakness.<sup>12</sup> Later, the Likud ministers and especially Ariel Sharon focused their criticism on Rabin, blaming him for the military failure and arguing that Sharon as defense minister would have succeeded in suppressing the intifada.<sup>13</sup>

This debate, between the Likud leaders on one side and Rabin and the military leaders on the other, indicated that whereas Rabin and the military leaders were moving toward the simple or tactical stage, the Likud leaders were still at the adaptation stage. They refused to regard the intifada as a political problem, and still believed that a better matching of military means and ends could eliminate it, even if this proved politically and morally costly. Any acceptance of the notion that only a political solution could end the violence would have implied that Israel must negotiate with the Palestinians the future of the territories, something the Likud ministers could not countenance.

Nevertheless, the government made no serious assessment of the possibility of undertaking political measures aside from the military ones. The power sharing between Labor and the Likud would, of course, have made this all the more difficult.

The question of how to respond to the intifada became the principal issue in the 1988 elections to the Knesset, which were held on 17 October.<sup>14</sup> The Likud continued to regard the intifada only as a military problem, to be

12 Ibid., pp. 136–137, 169; Moshe Arens, *Broken Covenant: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis between the U.S. and Israel* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 14.

13 Schiff & Yaari, *Intifada*, pp. 136–139.

14 Some 55% of the television time allotted to party propaganda was devoted to the intifada. See Gad Barzilai, "National Security Crises and Voting Behavior: The Intifada and the 1988 Elections," in *The Elections in Israel—1988*, eds. Asher Arian & Michal Shamir (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1990), p. 67.

handled only by extensive and intensive military means. Likud leaders continued both to stress the dangers that the intifada posed to Israel's existence unless it was forcefully suppressed, and to reject territorial compromise. Nevertheless, the Likud reaffirmed its commitment to negotiating an autonomy arrangement for the Palestinians in the territories. The Labor Party emphasized, as Rabin had earlier suggested, that the intifada was mainly a political problem, to be resolved by diplomatic means in the form of a peace proposal based on territorial compromise. Yet the "Jordanian option," which had been Labor's preferred political option, had ceased to be viable when King Hussein announced in July 1988 Jordan's administrative and legal disassociation from the West Bank. Since Labor refused to negotiate with the PLO, this seemed to leave it without any real partner for negotiations. Closer to the elections, however, Labor came out with a new peace plan. Although mostly a reaffirmation of old positions, it included some new points that later became the basis for the peace plan proposed by the subsequent National Unity Government: after three to six months of calm in the territories, free elections would be held there; Israel would then negotiate interim measures with the elected Palestinian leadership, and later would negotiate a final agreement with a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.<sup>15</sup>

The election outcomes did not indicate which of the two approaches the Israeli public favored. Both Labor and the Likud lost Knesset seats (Labor five, the Likud only one), and again they were forced to establish a National Unity Government. Surveys, in fact, pointed to contradictory tendencies among the public regarding the impact of the intifada. Barzilai and Inbar found that in November 1988 most (59.7%) of the public preferred a more limited military response to the intifada (27.7% preferred very

15 Ami Ayalon & Haim Shaked, eds., *Middle East Contemporary Survey (MECS)*, vol. 12 (1988) (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1990), pp. 109–110; Yitzhak Shamir, *Summing Up: An Autobiography* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1994), pp. 182–184.



limited force, 32.0% limited force), whereas 24.9% preferred the use of extensive force and transfer of population.<sup>16</sup> In other words, most of the public supported Labor's orientation rather than the Likud's.<sup>17</sup> Shamir and Arian found that during the period from December 1987 to October 1988, respondents "became more conciliatory on the future of the territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state, and less in favor of encouraging Arabs to leave the country."<sup>18</sup> Additional findings by Shamir and Arian, however, do not confirm the argument that the intifada had a dovish impact on Israeli public opinion.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, the Likud held an edge over Labor on performance evaluations on all items referring to peace and security. The Likud's largest margins were on the ability to be firm in negotiations over peace in the territories, to deal with the intifada, to secure the necessary amount of territory, and to lead the country to real peace.<sup>20</sup>

The election outcomes and the contradictory survey findings indicated that though the intifada had had a major impact on the public, it had not generated significant uniform changes in the direction of attitudes; instead, existing attitudes had been reinforced and the public had become more

16 Gad Barzilai & Efraim Inbar, "The Use of Force: Israeli Public Opinion on Military Options," *Armed Forces & Society*, vol. 23 (1996), pp. 55–56.

17 Some 59.8% of the Likud's supporters preferred the use of very limited force or limited force, and only 21.4% preferred the use of extensive force. Among Labor's supporters, 66% supported the use of very limited force or limited force, with only 7.2% favoring extensive force (*ibid.*, p. 62).

18 Michal Shamir & Asher Arian, "The Intifada and Israeli Voters: Policy Preferences and Performance Evaluations," in Arian & Shamir, *Elections in Israel*, p. 78.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 85. A total of 56% of the respondents reported that the intifada had not changed their voting intentions; 4% reported that the intifada had increased their inclination to vote for the religious parties, 13% for Labor or its satellites, and 24% for the Likud or its satellites.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

polarized.<sup>21</sup> It seemed that the public was worried about the intifada's continuation, and realized that there was no way to restore the status quo. They also doubted that military measures alone could end the uprising, and believed that only a combination of military and political measures could do so. However, they were not certain if Labor could accomplish this better than the Likud.<sup>22</sup> The public still seemed to believe that a National Unity Government was better suited to cope with the intifada than any one party or bloc of parties.

Theoretically, this sort of government was suited to make fateful decisions because it included both major parties and the most experienced individuals in national security matters. In reality, the two sides' major differences on almost every political issue, and especially the Palestinian one, made decisionmaking very difficult. Although the intifada somewhat agitated this paralyzed political system, its effect was short-lived. The right wing of the government adjusted to a situation of chronic disorder, and remained opposed to any political concessions. Much depended on new developments in the intifada, or on the international and domestic reactions to the uprising.

## THE SIMPLE OR TACTICAL LEARNING STAGE

The simple or tactical learning stage, which began on 14 May 1989 when the Israeli government promulgated a peace plan directly aimed at coping with the intifada, continued until the Rabin government's accession to office in June 1992. One may identify three subperiods in this stage: (1) up to March 1990, when the second National Unity Government collapsed, (2) from that point to October 1991, when the Madrid Conference

21 Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar, "The Intifada as Viewed by the Israeli Public," *International Problems: Society & Politics*, vol. 29 (1990), pp. 17-33.

22 Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 16-17.

convened, and (3) from that point to January-February 1993, when the Oslo track began.

### **1. The New Peace Plan**

The new Israeli peace plan was elaborated in stages and was a direct result of the international ramifications of the intifada and the increased internal pressures (political and public) on Shamir to cope with it differently.

For the first time, Likud ministers, headed by the new foreign minister Moshe Arens, came to realize that the political outcomes of the intifada were severely damaging. The increased international support for the intifada, and the erosion of support for Israel in the United States, had augmented Israel's isolation in the world. The most serious international outcome was the U.S. change of policy when in December 1988 it recognized the PLO and opened a dialogue with it. This development together with the coming to power of the Bush administration, which Shamir and Arens perceived as less friendly toward Israel than the Reagan administration, created a crucial impetus for a new Israeli peace proposal. Arens describes why a new peace initiative was so urgent: "We were becoming progressively isolated under a diplomatic offensive aimed at returning us to the 1967 lines; ... the PLO had become very active politically and was scoring significant diplomatic successes."<sup>23</sup>

Under ongoing pressures from the international community as well as the United States, the new peace initiative was elaborated during the

23 Ibid., p. 65; Eytan Bentsur, *The Road to Peace Crosses Madrid* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1997) (Hebrew), pp. 30–31. It is interesting to note that the Palestine National Council's resolutions of November 1988, in which the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist, accepted UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and renounced the use of terrorism against Israel, which brought the U.S. to recognize the PLO, were rejected by Israel.

early months of 1989.<sup>24</sup> It was based on different proposals that were introduced by Rabin in January and by Arens in February.<sup>25</sup> Although these proposals were not new, their presentation as a peace plan aimed at coping differently with the intifada marked a significant departure. The peace proposals aimed “to break the stalemate and keep the peace process alive—and moving in a direction of which both the United States and Israel could approve.”<sup>26</sup>

The four salient points of the peace initiative that was initially discussed in regard to the Palestinian problem were as follows:

1. Israel wished to begin peace talks immediately in the form of direct negotiations based on the principles of the Camp David Accords.
2. Democratic elections would be held among the Palestinians in the territories, aimed at producing a Palestinian representation with which Israel could negotiate, provided that all violence in the territories ceased and there was no PLO intimidation of voters.
3. Following the elections, Israel would negotiate with this representation, together with Egypt and Jordan, the establishment of a self-governing administration (i.e., autonomy) in the context of an interim agreement.
4. After a testing period, negotiations would be held among these parties to decide on the permanent status of the territories.

24 France and the Soviet Union called for negotiations between Israel and the PLO, and Secretary of State James Baker did not exclude the possibility of such negotiations. See Ayalon, *MECS*, vol. 13 (1989), pp. 68-69; Shamir, *Summing Up*, pp. 196-197; Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 36-52.

25 Rabin played a prominent role in formulating the Israeli peace plan that he publicized on 19 January. The main points of his plan were incorporated into the Israeli initiative. See Shalev, *The Intifada*, pp. 141-143; Ayalon, *MECS* (1989), p. 67. On Arens's plan, see Arens, *Broken Covenant*, p. 44.

26 Shamir, *Summing Up*, p. 194.

None of this was to involve negotiations with the PLO or the establishment of a Palestinian state.<sup>27</sup>

The simple or tactical learning was reflected not only in the realization that only a political solution could terminate the intifada, but also in the recognition that Israel's negotiating partner could be found only among the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza.<sup>28</sup> After Jordan's disengagement from the West Bank, this indeed became the only viable option for those who refused to negotiate with the PLO.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, the peace proposal did not mark a real change in Shamir's attitudes toward the Palestinians or the future of the territories; it manifested a more temporary and tactical understanding that something had to be done to cope with the increased external and internal pressures. Shamir, who would have preferred to take no initiative because of the recognition of the risks involved for Israel in the search for peace, was induced by some of his Likud colleagues as well as by Labor ministers, headed by Rabin, to accept the new peace initiative.<sup>30</sup>

On 3 April 1989, Shamir presented to President George Bush an outline of a new peace plan even before it had been discussed and adopted by the Israeli government.<sup>31</sup> It was officially entitled the Four-Point Plan. The last

27 Ibid., pp. 194–195.

28 During the Arabic-language time slot of Israel Television, on 20 January 1989, Rabin appealed directly to the Palestinians in the territories, saying: "I want you to know that we are ready to talk to you. You are the partners to negotiations." See Ayalon, *MECS* (1989), p. 67.

29 On 3 January 1987, the Knesset adopted a resolution stating readiness to talk to Palestinian representatives who recognized Israel and renounced terror. It reiterated its opposition to negotiating with the PLO.

30 Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 44–45, 60–61; Shamir, *Summing Up*, p. 195; Schiff & Yaari, *Intifada*, pp. 318–319.

31 Shamir was concerned not only that the peace plan would immediately be leaked but also that he would face severe opposition, mainly from senior Likud ministers David Levy and Ariel Sharon.

of its four points spoke of free elections for choosing a Palestinian representation to negotiate with Israel an interim agreement and later a permanent agreement. Bush endorsed the idea of elections as contributing to a process of dialogue and negotiation, but added that Israel and the Palestinians should arrive at a mutually acceptable formula for such elections. Although Shamir made a commitment to negotiations without preconditions and without yet defining Israel's preferred solution, he totally rejected negotiations with the PLO, any steps that could lead to a Palestinian state, or a change in the status of East Jerusalem, and opposed the idea of exchanging territories for peace.<sup>32</sup>

On 14 May, the Israeli government adopted the peace plan by a 20-6 vote.<sup>33</sup> It included the Four-Point Plan that Shamir had presented to Bush, but contained twenty clauses and further details about the elections in the territories. It stipulated that at the stage of preparation and implementation of the election process, "there shall be a calming of the violence in Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza District." In the elections, a representation would be chosen to conduct negotiations for a five-year transitional period of self-rule. Subsequently, negotiations would be conducted for a permanent solution. The interlock between the two stages was to be ensured by a timetable limiting the transitional period.<sup>34</sup>

The new text, which was first approved by Shamir, Arens, Peres, and Rabin before being presented to the government, reflected the division in the government between the two major blocs and was aimed at reaching a wide consensus. The peace plan, therefore, did not include any explicit reference to withdrawal from the territories or to the formula of land for peace, which

32 Shamir, *Summing Up*, p. 201; Ayalon, *MECS* (1989), p. 70.

33 Among the six ministers who opposed the peace plan were Ariel Sharon, David Levy, and Yitzhak Modai (Likud), Ezer Weizman and Rafi Edri (Labor), and Avner Shaki (National Religious Party). Following the vote, Sharon, Levy, and Modai established a triple alliance aimed at "constraining" Shamir.

34 Shalev, *The Intifada*, pp. 251-254.

the Labor Party accepted, nor to the issue of East Jerusalem residents' participation in the elections. The document expressed opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian state, negotiations with the PLO, or any change in the status of the territories not in accordance with the government's guidelines.<sup>35</sup>

The new peace plan was rejected outright by the Palestinians of the territories, regardless of organizational affiliation. The proposed elections were denounced as a deception aimed at buying time and relieving pressure on Israel. Israel was accused of ignoring the Palestinians' right to self-determination, trying to create an alternative leadership to the PLO, and seeking to separate the Palestinians inside the territories from those outside of them, whom the plan referred to as refugees.<sup>36</sup>

The Palestinian reaction triggered new U.S. pressures on the Israeli government to make further concessions so as to render its peace plan more acceptable to the Palestinians. The United States asked Israel to consider the participation in the elections of Palestinians not residing in the West Bank and Gaza and of East Jerusalem residents, and also to consider, among all of the options for the final settlement, the Palestinian demand for sovereignty.<sup>37</sup>

The issues of the Palestinian representation in the negotiations, their right to self-determination, Israel's acceptance of the formula of land for peace, and Israel's settlement policy would form the main issues in the peace process in the following months, causing severe friction in Israel's relations with the United States and with Egypt, and in Likud-Labor relations within the National Unity Government. Shamir and his Likud colleagues, constrained by their beliefs, refused to make any substantial concessions on these issues. The outcomes of these develop-

35 Ibid.; Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 67–68.

36 Ayalon, *MECS* (1989), pp. 243–244.

37 Ibid., p. 71; Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 69–84.

ments included the ongoing political stalemate, the collapse of the National Unity Government, and the continuation of the intifada. Labor, rejecting Shamir's refusal to make further concessions, caused the downfall of the government, hoping to establish a government of its own. When it failed to do so, Shamir in June 1990 formed a government with the right-wing parties, with Arens as defense minister and David Levy as foreign minister.<sup>38</sup>

Although the Israeli peace plan reflected some simple or tactical learning, it seemed this was too minimal to enable a real change of the attitudes of Shamir and his colleagues. The intifada only equivocally influenced the Likud ministers. They adjusted to its continuation and even came to regard it as a chronic disorder that Israel had to live with. The international reactions to the intifada were what led Shamir to endorse a peace policy. Labor's leaders were more strongly influenced by the intifada itself and became more ripe for limited attitudinal and policy changes, including acceptance of the formula of land for peace, of the participation of East Jerusalem Palestinians in the elections, and of the freezing of settlement activity in the territories. Both parties, however, refused to change their attitudes toward negotiating with the PLO and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Although the collapse of the National Unity Government and the coming to power of a right-wing government highlighted a trend in the political elite toward hawkish attitudes, the intifada, as of 1989–1990, seemed to have strengthened dovish attitudes among the Israeli public. Surveys taken in those years found not only that the public favored greater restraint in coping with the intifada than did the politicians, especially those on the right, but that it also realized that the old status quo

38 On these developments, see Ayalon, *MECS* (1989), pp. 71-77; Shamir, *Summing Up*, pp. 203–214; Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 69–139; Bentsur, *Road to Peace*, pp. 33–57.



could no longer be maintained, and supported political solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that were based on separation from the Palestinians.

Thus, polls by Barzilai and Inbar in those years found that the public's preference for a more restrained approach (limited and very limited force) to the intifada had increased from 59.7% in 1988 to 61.8% in 1989 and 67.0% in 1990, whereas the support for harsh measures (extensive force and transfer) had decreased from 24.9% in 1988 to 19.8% in 1989 and 18.3% in 1990.<sup>39</sup>

As to the public's attitude toward the future of the territories, a May 1990 survey by Goldberg, Barzilai, and Inbar indicated a clear trend toward dovish attitudes and political solutions. Only 2.4% of the respondents preferred the status quo as a permanent solution (compared to 8.2% in 1986); 7.0% thought there could be no permanent solution; 30.6% supported the establishment of a Palestinian state, in three different versions (a Palestinian state in all of the territories; in the Gaza Strip alone; a Jordanian-Palestinian state in the framework of a territorial compromise). Some 19.0% preferred a territorial compromise with Jordan; 18.5% favored autonomy under Israel's rule; 10.3% supported transfer. Only 5.1% were willing to annex the territories as a permanent solution; 7.1% had other ideas. Whereas 49.6% supported dovish permanent solutions (combining those supporting a Palestinian state with those supporting a territorial compromise with Jordan), different hawkish solutions were favored by only 36.3% (annexation, transfer, status quo, autonomy). This figure is quite significant in comparison to the support for hawkish positions before the intifada. Thus, in 1978 some 50% of the public opposed yielding any part of the West Bank.

When a comparison was made between solutions favoring separation from the Palestinians (all dovish solutions and transfer) and solutions

39 Barzilai & Inbar, "Use of Force," p. 56.

opposing separation (all hawkish solutions excluding transfer), it emerged that the public favored separation over retaining the Arab population by 59.9% to 26.0%.

In addition to these findings, 81.7% of the respondents believed that there was an urgent need to resolve the Arab/Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or at least some of its issues. Some 40.0% of the sample favored holding direct and public negotiations with the PLO; 48.9% rejected this. The attitude toward settlement in the territories indicated even greater dovish inclinations: 25.8% of the respondents opposed any settlements; 9.8% opposed settlements except in very exceptional cases; 22.2% agreed to settlements only in limited security zones; and 10.3% accepted settlements if they were not disruptive to local Arabs. Only 25.9% favored settlements anywhere (5.9% had no answer).<sup>40</sup>

This 1990 May poll showed that, more so than the politicians, the public not only grasped the significance of the intifada but was more prepared to change attitudes in a direction enabling the adoption of new political solutions, including ones that involved negotiations with the PLO and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

## **2. Freezing the Peace Initiative**

Shamir's new right-wing government did not bring about a significant change in the Israeli policy toward the intifada. Notwithstanding the heavy pressure from the right to use harsher measures to suppress the intifada, the new defense minister, Arens, understood that the uprising could not be crushed militarily. He concentrated on strengthening the settlers' security, while taking measures aimed at reducing tension in the territories. He also revived talks with Palestinian figures in the territories

40 Giora Goldberg, Gad Barzilai, & Efraim Inbar, "The Impact of Intercommunal Conflict: The Intifada and Israeli Public Opinion," Policy Studies No. 43, Leonard Davis Institute, Hebrew University, 1991.

(including PLO and Hamas supporters) in an attempt to find a local, alternative leadership to the PLO, but this did not yield any significant results.<sup>41</sup>

The intifada, in its third year, showed no sign of abating. Although in the territories it was more under control, its infiltration into Israel proper (within the 1967 borders) created a severe threat to personal security there. The stabbing attacks in Israeli cities and kidnapping and murder of Israeli soldiers by Hamas members brought the violence to a new pitch. The government reacted by temporarily prohibiting the entry of Palestinians from the territories into Israel. However, an extended closure of the territories was problematic because most of the Palestinians residing in them depended on work in Israel for their livelihood, and part of the Israeli economy, in turn, depended on cheap Palestinian labor. A protracted closure could have brought severe deprivation to the Palestinians and impelled them to greater violence, as well as causing serious economic harm to Israel. Indeed, after a few days the closure was lifted.<sup>42</sup>

During the summer of 1990, Shamir's government was not ripe for a dramatic change in its policy. Not even the intifada could induce such a change. The government perceived the intifada as a threat to Israel's existence, to which Israel must adjust. The government also perceived the peace process more as a threat than as an opportunity. The refusal to make concessions regarding settlement activity or East Jerusalem Arabs' participation in the autonomy elections reflected a concern that Israel's presence in the territories would thereby be endangered.<sup>43</sup> Without Labor

41 Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 143–144.

42 *Ibid.*, pp. 162–163.

43 On 18 October 1990, Shamir declared that the founding fathers of the Herut Party had bequeathed to their successors a clear legacy to retain Eretz Yisrael from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River for the sake of future generations. On 14

in the government, Shamir was freed of the internal constraints that previously had led him to accept the peace policy.

Israel's stance caused an aggravation of its relations with the United States. Although the latter even warned that it would halt its peace efforts unless Israel offered the necessary compromises, this did not much worry Shamir's government. In any case, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990, and the building of the coalition against Iraq, brought the U.S. peace efforts to a halt.<sup>44</sup> Those in Israel who opposed any discourse with the PLO or even with the Palestinians claimed that they were vindicated by the enthusiastic Palestinian support for Saddam Husain.<sup>45</sup>

### 3. Madrid as a Constraint

In 1991, Israel's attitude toward the intifada was strongly influenced both by the ramifications of the Gulf War and by the renewal of the peace process that led to the Madrid Conference. Although after the war the Israeli army's general assessment was that there had been a significant moderation of the intifada, the uprising had in fact developed into terrorist acts against Israeli civilians and military targets both in the territories and in Israel proper. The increased use of stabbing posed a severe threat to personal security. The intifada "continued to define the present," as Arens put it. Although Arens did not believe that military means alone could stop the uprising, others in the government, headed by Sharon, insisted

January 1991, he made a similar statement: "Big immigration required Israel to be big as well." See Ayalon, *MECS*, vol. 14 (1990), pp. 111–112.

44 On the Israeli-U.S. exchange, see Ayalon, *MECS* (1990), pp. 107–111.

45 The PLO's support for Iraq particularly upset the Israeli left. Ironically, on 5 August, three days after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and before the Palestinian support for Iraq became clear, sixteen Knesset members, six of them Laborites, met with twelve prominent PLO supporters from the territories and published a joint declaration in which Israel recognized the Palestinians' right to self-determination (Ayalon, *MECS*, 1990, p. 110).

that the government should adopt a decision to quell the uprising militarily. Arens called on the government to think “very seriously why it was that the Intifada had begun after twenty years of Israeli control over Judea, Samaria, and Gaza—a period during which successive governments had presumably tried hard to bring about Palestinian acceptance of Israeli rule.” The government was not, of course, ready for such stocktaking. Although Arens maintained that the most important thing was to ensure that the intifada would not “yield the Palestinians any political gains,” he believed that Israel should “address the grievances and aspirations of the Palestinians.” Nevertheless, he mentions offering only “a temporary arrangement along the lines of the Camp David Accords.”<sup>46</sup>

This was, indeed, the most the Shamir government could offer the Palestinians. The Likud and most of its partners in the right-wing coalition were ideologically opposed to ceding any territory even for the sake of peace. The government seemed able to adjust to the altered nature of the intifada, perceiving it as a protracted conflict that was now, overall, under better control than before. The government did not feel itself to be in a hurting stalemate that would have required a new peace effort. Since the perceived costs of the uprising were tolerable, any peace process that threatened the status quo in the territories was to be rejected.

Yet the U.S. determination, following the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, to advance a new regional order in the Middle East that would include the resolution of the Arab-Israeli (not only Israeli-Palestinian) conflict changed the cost balance in favor of acceptance of the new U.S. peace initiative. The United States proposed “a two-track approach” that would include both the Arab states and the Palestinians. From March 1991 to the convening of the Madrid Conference on 30 October that year, Israel bargained with the United States to minimize

46 Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 222, 234.

its participation costs, mainly by obtaining U.S. assurances on various issues.

The settlements issue, the composition of the Palestinian delegation, and the power and authorities of the international conference continued to pose obstacles to Israel's participation in the new peace process. The Israeli government refused to freeze settlement or even to consider a temporary halt, claiming that this was not an issue to be discussed in the context of an interim agreement on the establishment of a Palestinian autonomy. It accepted, however, that the issue could be raised in the negotiations on the permanent status of the territories. As to the composition of the Palestinian delegation, Israel insisted that the Palestinians be part of a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, and refused to accept PLO members or residents of East Jerusalem among the Palestinian representatives.

After a long bargaining process, some of Israel's demands regarding the Israeli-Palestinian track were accepted by the United States:

- The Palestinians would be represented in a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.
- Only Palestinians who were residents of the territories, accepted the two-track approach as well as negotiations in phases, and were willing to live in peace with Israel could participate in the delegation and in the negotiations on an interim agreement.
- The United States would not bring the PLO into the peace process or bring Israel into a dialogue or negotiations with the organization.
- The negotiations with the Palestinians would be conducted in phases, beginning with talks on an interim self-rule arrangement; these talks would aim at reaching agreement within one year. Once established, the interim arrangement would last for a period of five years. In the third year of the interim arrangement, permanent-status negotiations would begin.

- Negotiations would be direct.
- The parties had different interpretations of UN Resolutions 242 and 338.
- The conference would have no power to impose a solution on the parties or to veto agreements reached by them.

Israel refused, however, to make any concessions on the settlements issue. Although this created severe tension in U.S.-Israeli relations, it did not prevent the convening of the conference.<sup>47</sup>

The U.S. pressures on Israel and its assurances were what determined Israel's attitudes, rather than the direct costs of the intifada. Shamir's government agreed to participate in the Madrid Conference and in the Washington talks because of its concerns about how refusal would affect Israel's relations with the United States, which had deteriorated over the past two years. When Arab actors, including Syria and the Palestinians, agreed to participate in the negotiations, it was impossible for Israel to refuse. Nevertheless, without the intifada and its international ramifications it is doubtful whether Israel, particularly under Shamir's government, would have participated in the Madrid Conference or in the Washington talks. The general feeling in the Israeli government was that Israel was constrained to participate in the negotiations. The government perceived the negotiations as a loss and a risk rather than an opportunity or a benefit, since the Arabs, the United States, the Soviet Union, and the European Community wanted "to see Israel return to the borders of 1967." Negotiations were perceived to be "equivalent to withdrawing, or of necessity lead[ing] to withdrawal."<sup>48</sup>

47 On the Israeli-U.S. bargaining, see *ibid.*, pp. 218-245; Shamir, *Summing Up*, pp. 225-242; Bentsur, *Road to Peace*, pp. 79-139; Ayalon, *MECS*, vol. 15 (1991), pp. 97-105.

48 Arens, *Broken Covenant*, p. 242.

#### **4. From Madrid to Rabin**

Israel's agreement to participate in the Madrid Conference and in the Washington talks represented a climax in simple or tactical learning. The Shamir government realized that it had to negotiate the future of the territories, despite the great military and ideological value it placed on them. The government's acceptance of negotiations with the Palestinians, even as part of a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, implied its recognition of them as partners who had rights in the same land. Moreover, though the government did not acknowledge it, it realized that the Palestinian members of the delegation were affiliated in one way or another with the PLO. The government also implicitly accepted behind-the-scenes PLO involvement in the negotiations. This was the most that could have been expected from the most right-wing government Israel had ever had. Although Shamir consented to enter the negotiations, he had no intentions of making any territorial concessions. His real aim was to temporize, even if that would mean ten years of negotiations. Indeed, it quickly became clear at the Washington talks that the gap between Israel and the Palestinians was too wide to be bridged. Whereas the Palestinians aimed at an autonomy with almost all the attributes of an independent state, Israel could accept only a limited autonomy that would not develop into a state.

Throughout the period from the Madrid Conference to the June 1992 elections, the Shamir government faced increasing domestic criticism both because of its participation in the negotiations and inability to restrain the intifada in its new form. This criticism led to the government's collapse when three small right-wing parties left the government, forcing Shamir to call for new elections, which he lost. Ironically, after the government agreed to cope with the intifada politically via negotiations, the uprising became more violent, and this increased violence, or the government's failure to cope with it effectively, contributed to the electoral defeat. Although one might argue that the deadlock in the negotiations increased Palestinian frustration and



prompted the increased violence, there were also apparently some who believed that such an escalation would improve the Palestinians' bargaining position in the negotiations. Another reasonable explanation is that those who opposed the negotiations were responsible for the stepped-up violence.<sup>49</sup>

The increase in violence occurred during the last months of 1991 and first half of 1992. Although as a popular uprising it had significantly declined in size and intensity, the intifada continued to be directed by a small, violent core of activists who constantly sought to escalate it. This caused a particularly sharp increase in the number of incidents involving firearms and an unprecedented number of Israeli military and civilian casualties.<sup>50</sup> In 1990 there were 168 shooting incidents in the West Bank and Gaza; in 1991, 297; in 1992, 508. The number of Israeli soldiers and civilians shot, stabbed, or axed to death by Palestinians in the territories and Israel in all of 1991 came to 23; in the first six months of 1992 there were 20.<sup>51</sup> The number of Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers also increased, from 80 in 1991 to 121 in 1992.<sup>52</sup>

The ongoing wave of violence was perceived as endangering not only the government's future but also the peace process itself. As Arens asserted: "We are facing a wave of terror aimed at killing and at interfering with the peace process. If we are not successful in stopping it, many people will lose their lives and the government will be hindered in pursuing its peace

49 Half of the attacks against Israelis during the first half of 1992 were carried out by Fatah and the rest by the Hamas. See Ayalon, *MECS*, vol. 16 (1992), p. 302.

50 IDF statistics showed a significant decline in incidents of public disorder such as stone throwing, burning of tires, erection of street barriers, demonstrations, and rioting—from 65,944 in 1990 to 30,948 in 1991 and 24,882 in 1992. See Ayalon, *MECS* (1992), p. 301.

51 *Ibid.*, pp. 286, 302.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 302.

initiative. It is now the IDF's foremost mission to halt this wave of terror—nothing is more important.”<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, as with the 1988 elections, the intifada again had a significant impact on the June 1992 elections. The increased threat to personal security made the question of how to deal with the territories and how to proceed in the peace process the most urgent issue.<sup>54</sup> Labor headed by Rabin was perceived as offering a better answer to the personal security problems, based on a more realistic political approach than the Likud's. Rabin's credibility as a security leader was an asset to Labor. In addition, Labor exploited the intifada to attack the Likud for ineffectiveness in coping with it, blaming the Likud both for the deterioration of personal security and the lack of progress in the peace talks. Labor criticized the Likud's investments in what Rabin called “political” settlements, as well as Shamir's confrontation with the United States on the settlements issue, which had caused the U.S. refusal to provide the loan guarantees. Rabin even committed himself to reach an agreement on autonomy with the Palestinians in the territories within six to nine months after taking office. Although expressing readiness for territorial compromise in all sectors, he opposed negotiations with the PLO and the establishment of a Palestinian state.<sup>55</sup>

Among the reasons for the Likud's defeat in the elections, Arens noted, were the voters' concerns over: the confrontation with the United States over the loan guarantees; Shamir's inflexible posture and frequent references to Israel's right to the “Integral Land of Israel”; and coping with the intifada. “Five years of intifada had made it clear that the Palestinian

53 Arens, *Broken Covenant*, p. 270.

54 In a survey taken in June 1992, 71% of the respondents indicated that the most important criterion for choosing a party was its platform on national security issues. See Ayalon, *MECS* (1992), p. 531.

55 *Ibid.*, pp. 507–508.

problem in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza had to be addressed in some manner; although some advocated annexation of these areas to Israel, the majority of Israelis were too concerned with Jewish-Arab demographics to favor such annexation, or to see in the slogan 'The Integral Land of Israel' an adequate response to the Palestinian problem."<sup>56</sup>

Arens added that he regretted that Israel had not evacuated the Gaza Strip while the Likud was in power. This, he believed, could have been done with or without an agreement. He acknowledged that he had failed to convince Shamir to do so. This mistake, as he saw it, had harmed both Israel's interests and the Likud's chances in the elections, since the majority of Israelis wanted to leave Gaza.<sup>57</sup> This interesting remark, which appears only in the Hebrew version of Arens's memoirs, reflects some shift toward complex or strategic learning, a realization that autonomy alone was insufficient and there was a need for a dramatic change of attitude and policy. However, Arens's failure to convince Shamir indicates that the latter as well as his government were not ripe for this sort of dramatic change.

## **THE COMPLEX OR STRATEGIC LEARNING STAGE**

Labor's coming to power, under the leadership of Rabin and Peres, enabled the change of Israeli attitude that in turn facilitated direct negotiations with the PLO, and the reaching of a political agreement that included some territorial withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza. For this attitudinal

56 Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 294–295; see also Asher Arian, *Security Threatened: Surveying Israeli Opinion on Peace and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 156–157.

57 Moshe Arens, *War and Peace in the Middle East: 1988–1992* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1995) (in Hebrew), p. 328. Arens was not the only one in the Likud to call for the evacuation of Gaza; Police Minister Roni Milo also raised the issue but failed to convince Shamir.

change, a change of leadership was necessary. Yet the shift was not immediate; it developed gradually, and required complex or strategic learning.

Rabin took office as prime minister with the realization that there was no military solution to the intifada, and a political solution was needed instead. As defense minister, he had been the first to undergo the simple or tactical learning stage. In the two years since he had been outside the government, the intifada had changed its form. The erosion of personal security in Israel before the elections convinced him, like many other Israelis, that the political solution should involve a separation between Israel and the Palestinians. Rabin, who inherited the situation of the Madrid Conference and the Washington talks, including the Likud's demand for a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, asserted that whereas the Likud was not really interested in advancing the peace talks, he himself was determined to do so in order to reach an agreement. He declared that Israel should relinquish the dream of Greater Israel, and imposed a freeze on settlement policy. He also instructed the Israeli team negotiating with the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to accelerate the negotiations. However, the most he agreed to grant the Palestinians at this stage was autonomy. He also, like the Likud, refused to recognize the Palestinians as an independent partner and opposed the PLO's inclusion in the negotiations. On the other hand, he considered the possibility of separate negotiations with the Palestinian delegation, believing that this would give it an independent status and free it of the PLO's stifling supervision. Nevertheless, he soon realized how difficult and ineffective were the negotiations with the Palestinian delegation, which was in fact directly controlled by the PLO in Tunis.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, even under the

58 Rabin, *Knesset Records*, 13 July, 9 September, 26 October, 21 December 1992, 8 April 1993; Shimon Peres, *Battling for Peace* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995), pp. 320–323; David Makovsky, *Making Peace with the PLO: The Rabin Government's Road to the Oslo Accord* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 82–83.

Likud government, the Washington talks had been conducted indirectly with the PLO.

The most severe and urgent problem remained the intifada. Although Rabin introduced a series of goodwill gestures in the territories, including canceling the deportation orders the Likud government had issued against eleven intifada activists, releasing hundreds of Palestinian prisoners, and reopening many sealed homes and streets, the uprising only escalated. In the second half of 1992, the increased use of firearms and stabbing caused fifteen Israeli fatalities. Most of the terrorist actions were perpetrated by the Hamas. Toward the end of the year the intensification of terror prompted the government to take an unprecedented step: the temporary deportation of over four hundred Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists. The huge number of deportees was a direct response to public pressure.<sup>59</sup> Rabin, who in the election campaign had promised, as a great military figure, to increase personal security, realized the need to show determination in fighting terrorism. By responding firmly, he also sought to strengthen not only Israel's deterrence but also its bargaining power in the negotiations.<sup>60</sup>

However, the goals of the deportation were not achieved. In the first quarter of 1993 the terrorist actions only further intensified, with fifteen Israelis killed. This escalation was both a response to the deportation and an

59 In 1992, there was an increase in the percentage of the public supporting extensive force in coping with the intifada—13.2%, compared to 8.4% in 1991, 10.2% in 1990, and 10.8% in 1989 (the figure for 1988 was 15.2%). Nevertheless, there was a decrease in those supporting a transfer: 5.5% compared to 7.5% in 1991, 8.1% in 1990, 9.5% in 1989, and 9.7% in 1988. See Barzilai & Inbar, "Use of Force," p. 56.

60 The decision on the deportation was taken after the killing of five Israeli soldiers by Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists. The most severe case was the kidnapping and fatal stabbing of Border Police staff member Nissim Toledano. See Ayalon, *MECS* (1992), pp. 304–306; Rabin, *Knesset Records*, 21 December 1992.

attempt to foil the peace process. The frequency of attacks unnerved the Israeli public, creating a deep sense of personal insecurity, a general feeling that Israel could neither deter nor effectively fight Palestinian terrorism. This led to violent antigovernment demonstrations by the right, accompanied by calls for Rabin's resignation.<sup>61</sup>

The government reacted by imposing a closure on the territories. This was aimed at creating a total separation between the Palestinians and Israel, and was perceived by Rabin as the most important measure for providing personal security. He declared that "without separation there will be no personal security"; the closure would preclude the presence of "Gaza in Tel Aviv." He stated that although a political solution might reduce the terror, he was not sure that "a political solution will completely rid us of [it]."<sup>62</sup> This was an interesting formulation that combined a political solution and separation as the only viable response to the terror.

The closure indeed brought an immediate improvement in the security situation; in April there were only two Israeli casualties. However, the closure seriously harmed the economy of the territories, and this could have led to an explosion even worse than terrorism. Thus, the government had to partially and gradually lift the closure. Nor did the closure completely halt the terrorist actions: in June one Israeli was killed, in July three, in August five. Nevertheless, the closure increased Israeli support for the idea of separation as a means of improving security, and even for the notion of "Gaza first," which became an issue of public debate and at the same time

61 Ayalon, *MECS*, vol. 17 (1993). In March 1992, there was a significant increase in public support for both extensive use of force and transfer in dealing with the intifada (18.8% and 11.9%, respectively). This marked the peak of support for extreme measures against the uprising since its eruption. See Barzilai & Inbar, "Use of Force," p. 56.

62 *Knesset Records*, 8 April 1993.

was being secretly discussed in direct negotiations in Oslo between Israeli and PLO representatives. Rabin, who expressed support for implementing the autonomy plan in Gaza first, would also approve of that idea in the context of the Oslo negotiations.<sup>63</sup>

The intifada in its new form again played a dominant role in Rabin's attitudinal change. Although Rabin never perceived terrorism as a threat to Israel's very existence, he recognized its strong impact on personal security. It became clear to him that only a political agreement could stop or reduce terrorism. However, as noted, the Washington talks proved an ineffective forum for negotiations, not only because the gap between the two sides was too wide but also because the Palestinian delegates were totally dependent on the PLO and could not make any decision without its approval. This led first Peres, and later Rabin, to realize that the PLO was the only Palestinian leadership that was capable of reaching an agreement with Israel.<sup>64</sup>

Peres stressed that if the PLO were, because of its weakness, to collapse, the only alternative would be the militant Hamas. Moreover, in the course of the Washington talks the Israeli delegates realized that the conflict with the PLO was not necessarily zero-sum, and that the organization had changed in some ways. The PLO no longer seemed to base its actual policies on the Palestinian National Covenant calling for the destruction of Israel, and no longer seemed confident of its ability to achieve its national aims via terrorism. Furthermore, though many Israelis increasingly viewed the IDF's continued presence in Gaza as too costly, it was believed that withdrawal from Gaza could only be effectuated through an agreement with an authorized Palestinian body that could take responsibility for the area

63 The chairman of the Likud Knesset faction, Moshe Katzav, expressed support for the idea so long as it did not involve a unilateral IDF withdrawal from the Strip. Shamir, however, rejected the idea. See Ayalon, *MECS* (1993), p. 419.

64 Peres, *Battling for Peace*; Rabin, *Ha'aretz*, 31 August 1993.

after Israel's evacuation. This, again, could only be the PLO, because the alternative was the Hamas.<sup>65</sup>

The necessary conclusion was that without a courageous Israeli initiative the peace process would collapse, leading in turn to a further escalation of violence. Nevertheless, Peres and especially Rabin had serious ideological, psychological, and political obstacles to changing their attitudes toward the PLO. The fact that the Oslo track was initiated at the nonpolitical level first and by officials later, and handled secretly, afforded Peres and especially Rabin an opportunity to examine the realities of prenegotiation with the PLO at minimal personal and public costs of attitudinal change. Indeed, only when both of them, and especially Rabin, had been totally convinced that the PLO was prepared to alter the Palestinian National Covenant, recognize Israel, cease and denounce terrorism, stop the intifada, prevent other Palestinian organizations from undertaking terrorist actions, and accept the idea of resolving the conflict peacefully and in stages, did they formally accept the Oslo track.<sup>66</sup>

There was also a personal factor in the attitudinal change. Both Rabin and Peres were in their early seventies; both realized that this might be their last chance to advance the peace policy they believed in, and felt that they owed this peacemaking to their constituency and to history. Both were motivated more by security than ideology; for them the territories were important because of their security value rather than their historical value. The sacrifice of some territories for the sake of security and peace was, therefore, worthwhile. Also crucial was the real partnership that emerged

65 Shimon Peres, *The New Middle East* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993), pp. 9–10; Makovsky, *Making Peace*, pp. 31, 34.

66 Yossi Beilin, *Touching Peace* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1997) (in Hebrew), pp. 63–164; Itamar Rabinovich, *The Brink of Peace: Israel and Syria, 1992–1996* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1998) (in Hebrew), pp. 76–157; Uri Savir, *The Process* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 1988) (in Hebrew), pp. 17–112.



between Rabin and Peres and their sharing responsibility for the change, together with their joint belief that they could mobilize sufficient public support for their new policy.<sup>67</sup>

Other factors that contributed to the nascent change in the Israeli attitude were Syria's attitude toward peacemaking and its potential costs, and the dramatic global developments. Although Rabin preferred to begin the negotiating process with Syria, the Syrian track turned out to be very difficult, as President Hafiz Asad demanded an immediate Israeli readiness for withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights, including the removal of Israeli settlements there, without committing himself to complete and unequivocal peace. This made the Palestinian option more attractive. It was assumed that with the Palestinians, Israel could achieve an interim agreement that would not, at least in the initial stages, require any major withdrawal or removal of settlements.<sup>68</sup> It is not easy to surmise what would have happened if Syria had been more responsive. Most likely, Rabin would have found it very difficult if not impossible to pursue the Palestinian track.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and its withdrawal from the region, and the United States' assuming the role of sole hegemonic power, were perceived by both Rabin and Peres as a rare, great opportunity for a shift in the Arab-Israeli conflict that Israel must not squander.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The intifada had a major influence on both the Israeli leadership and people, and gradually induced a change of Israeli attitudes that made the Oslo track possible. Thus, the intifada played the role of a learning

67 Makovsky, *Making Peace*, pp. 111–113.

68 Rabin and Peres, *Ha'aretz*, 31 August 1993; Rabinovich, *Brink of Peace*, pp. 29–113.

69 Rabin, *Knesset Records*, 13 July 1992.

agent. It brought the Israeli leaders and public, for the first time since 1967, to reconsider the Palestinian problem, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the future of the territories. The change that Israel underwent during 1987–1993 was a dramatic one. From a belief that there was no Palestinian people and that the conflict was zero-sum, Israel went to negotiating a peace agreement with the PLO on the future of the West Bank and Gaza. The Israeli leadership, which was surprised by the intifada, had to pass through three sequential stages in order to arrive at Oslo: adaptation, simple or tactical learning, and complex or strategic learning.

Overall, the learning process induced by the intifada was responsible for the attitude and policy changes. However, the Israeli leadership learned and reacted to the intifada differently. It was the belief system of each leader or political bloc that determined the level of learning. The ideological and political costs of changing attitudes and beliefs influenced the ability and willingness to learn. Since learning entailed recognition and internalization of the need to negotiate with the PLO, and to make painful territorial concessions, ideological and political barriers limited the level of learning. In general, the Likud leaders had greater learning difficulties than the Labor leaders because of their ideological beliefs. The most the Likud leaders could arrive at was simple or tactical learning. Labor's leaders, being motivated more by security considerations than by ideological beliefs, were able to arrive at complex or strategic learning.

Over against the political and ideological costs of changing attitudes and policies were the perceived costs of the intifada. The heaviest costs of the intifada were the loss and damage caused by its violence, which made ordinary life in the territories and in Israel intolerable. The increase in the danger to personal security to a level that Israeli society had not experienced since the early 1950s, and the inability of the army and the security services to cope with the danger effectively, triggered heavy pressure on the political leadership to undertake political initiatives. In addition, the uprising

imposed serious political costs on Israel in the international sphere. Not only was the intifada supported by most of the international community, it also brought the United States to recognize the PLO and open a dialogue with it, which in turn increased U.S. pressure on Israel to make the concessions necessary for a viable peace process. Israel's refusal to comply with U.S. requests created a political confrontation between the two states—to the point, according to Arens, of a “broken covenant” between them.

The significance of the intifada lay in changing this balance of costs. Although it in fact created a hurting stalemate, Shamir and his Likud colleagues could live with this situation and hence were not ripe for a significant political process that would jeopardize Israel's presence in the West Bank and Gaza. Shamir was influenced mainly by the political costs of the intifada, i.e., U.S. pressures, rather than by its violence. Since he perceived the peace process as endangering Israel's control of the territories, he acted to intensify Israel's presence there by promoting settlement.

Rabin and Peres arrived at complex or strategic learning not only by realizing that there was no military solution to the intifada, but also by internalizing its costs for Israel. In addition, they learned that with the disappearance of the Jordanian option and the inability to find non-PLO Palestinians who could negotiate with Israel, the PLO was the only viable partner for negotiations. It was a nonchoice situation. For these two leaders, the perceived costs of a continued intifada, together with public pressures, outweighed the costs of conflict resolution.

Leaders' complex or strategic learning proved to be a necessary condition for the shift from war to peace. The learning ability of leaders depends on their cognitive characteristics. The “ripeness” of peacemaking depends, in turn, on the presence of leaders who have both learning ability and a strong commitment to reaching an agreement.

