
Uncertainty and Risk-Taking in Peacemaking: The Israeli Experience

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Introduction

The negotiation of peace agreements poses potential dilemmas for decisionmakers. Although some of these exist in other situations, such as crisis or war, they have a different and unique salience in a peacemaking process. The dilemmas involve not only recognition and interpretation of a new situation but also changing attitudes and values, and coping with issues of uncertainty and risk-taking, value-complexity, legitimacy, and consensus building. Here I shall concentrate mainly on the dilemmas related to uncertainty and risk-taking. After a theoretical discussion of these two categories, I shall examine how Israeli peacemakers perceive and cope with these dilemmas.

The Problem of Uncertainty

A shift from war to peace entails a high level of uncertainty, which is different from other situations of decisionmaking such as crisis or war. Although the concluding of a peace agreement aims to resolve or minimize the uncertainty between the sides, uncertainty in a peace process seems to remain high concerning the development of the peace relations. This is especially so after a bitter, protracted conflict that has engendered deep mistrust between the sides.

The first cause of uncertainty is the lack of information and experience concerning both the situation at hand and the conditions of shifting from war to peace. Whereas formerly the rival sides were certain about war, they are less certain about peace, especially when they have had no experience of peace in their relationship. The second cause of uncertainty is the lack of general knowledge needed for assessing the expected outcomes of peace relations.

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Any possibility of shifting from war to peace creates a situation of inadequate information. Decisionmakers have difficulties in observing and interpreting the situation, and in anticipating and evaluating the outcomes. Peacemakers are often uncertain about the other side: Has it really changed its attitudes and intentions about the conflict? Is the attitude change tactical or strategic? Will the other side respect the agreement in the short and in the long term? What factors would increase or decrease the probabilities of positive or negative outcomes in the peace relations? Even if the other side is presently sincere in its desire to end the conflict, would changes in domestic or international conditions lead it to violate the agreement (Arad, 1992: 24; Jervis, 1976: 168; Touval, 1982: 26)?

Uncertainty complicates the task of making accurate assessments of the peace process, as well as reliable cost-benefit appraisals of the alternative courses of action (George, 1980: 4–5, 27; Steinbruner, 1974: 18; Vertzberger, 1990: 33–34). A high level of uncertainty directly affects the attitude toward risk-taking in peacemaking. It may discourage decisionmakers from undertaking a peace initiative, or from making the necessary concessions for concluding peace agreements because of the risks embedded in them. Since ignoring uncertainty is too risky and since there is no effective way to resolve entirely the problem of uncertainty, the only remaining question is how to minimize uncertainty so as to enable decisionmakers not only to undertake a peace initiative but also to take calculated risks that make peacemaking possible. Before they will consider concessions, peacemakers require a certain threshold of certainty and confidence as to the outcomes of the peace process; this is particularly important because peace agreements tend to be largely ambiguous.

The Problem of Risk-Taking

Peacemakers will normally enter into a peace agreement only if they believe that the outcome of such a decision “is likely to be favorable—that its

prospective benefits will exceed, or at least not be less than, its prospective costs” (Bilder, 1981: 12).

Since peace decisions are made under conditions of uncertainty that may involve risks (although uncertainty does not in itself necessarily involve risks), decisionmakers should be aware of the possible risks. We can specify the following risks in peacemaking, which refer mainly to the other side’s potential behavior following the signing of the agreement:

- (1) The other side will not perform its full obligations in the agreement.
- (2) It will perform less satisfactorily than promised and expected.
- (3) It will not be capable of fulfilling its obligations because of weakness.
- (4) It will revert to certain previous demands after the implementation of the agreement.
- (5) It will deliberately violate the agreement after receiving what it sought.

Because of these risks, peacemakers should beware that a prospective peace agreement may turn out badly, leaving one in a worse situation than if one had avoided the agreement (Bilder, 1981: 13, 106-107, 112). They should, therefore, consider the following questions before making a decision: What calculated risks should be taken in peacemaking? How controllable and containable are these risks? How can the risks be managed so as to minimize the costs in case the agreement is violated? How serious are the likely consequences of violation of the agreement?

Risk, as Bilder points out, is “one of the most important and pervasive obstacles to achieving international agreement” (Bilder, 1981: 11), and especially peace agreement. Risk refers to the possibility of suffering damage or loss. The prime concern of each actor in peacemaking is to what extent a violation of the agreement will harm its security or even threaten its survival. Would such a violation place the actor in an even worse situation than before the agreement? Will the other side exploit the advantages of peacemaking to advance its own interests even further? Will concessions, including tangible ones such as territorial ones, decrease one’s security? Here, the main risk concerns how changes in the territorial status quo

would affect the balance of power between the sides. Since any territorial concession is perceived as a change in the balance of power in the adversary's favor, the territorial concessions made for the sake of peace increase one's vulnerability. This, for example, was Israel's concern in signing the disengagement and peace agreements with Egypt in 1974-1975 and 1979, the disengagement agreement with Syria in 1974, and the Oslo Accords with the Palestinians in 1993 and 1995.

When the territorial status quo is identified as a current asset, any change of it even as a result of concession-making may be defined as risk and loss (Kahneman and Tversky, 1997). "This ... may be particularly important with respect to territorial acquisitions that result from wars; the more costly the war in human and economic terms, the greater the perceived value of the new possessions" (Levy, 1996: 187).

Since risks in peacemaking are potential and perceived rather than actual, and involve subjective estimates of peacemakers, it is very important to examine how decisionmakers perceive risks. Peacemakers may have "different propensities to perceive risks or different 'security levels' or propensities to accept risk. ... Some may be more risk-prone and willing to accept a given risk in order to achieve agreement; others may be more risk-averse ... and more likely to forego agreement rather face such a risk" (Bilder, 1981: 14).

The way in which potential risks are framed is of great importance in a peace process, especially in legitimizing concessions. Framing results in the focusing of attention on particular problems in peacemaking while diverting attention from other aspects. This affects not only decisionmakers' attitudes toward risk dimensions, but also how these are structured and presented (Levy, 1996: 183-184; Vertzberger, 1995: 362). Moreover, the framing of peacemaking problems may have a strong influence "on which values and beliefs will be triggered and become reference points for the choice process, because people will tend to evaluate options in relation to reference points that are suggested or implied by the statement of the problem" (Vertzberger, 1995: 363).

The basic framing options of shifting from war to peace are identified in terms of risk/opportunity dichotomy. Decisionmakers tend to associate the risk in peacemaking with potential negative developments in the peace process, which involve the other side's potential behavior. The perception is that any peacemaking poses a plausible possibility of violation of the agreement, which may adversely affect not only the peace relations but also one's security. On the other hand, the peace opportunities are associated with potential positive developments in the relations with the adversary and with other actors, as well as with potential gains not only in security but also in political and economic terms.

When peacemaking is framed in terms that emphasize the risks rather than opportunities, losses rather than gains, then peacemaking will be seen as a mistaken and irrational policy. When peacemakers overweight the losses of peace compared to the gains, they are risk-averse with respect to gains and risk-acceptant with respect to losses. Loss aversion leads peacemakers to value what they have (tangible assets) more than comparable things that they do not have and are not sufficiently certain about receiving (security and other benefits of peace) (Levy, 1996: 182; Levy, 1997: 47; Vertzberger, 1995: 363–364).

Peacemakers may tend to attach greater weight to losses than to gains when peacemaking involves territorial or other tangible concessions. In this case, decisionmakers may be more sensitive to tangible changes than to the changes in the conflict relations, especially when peace is regarded as intangible and an uncertain asset. The changes in assets may be defined around a reference point, which in peacemaking is usually identified with current assets, such as a territory. When this is the case, peacemakers overvalue the losses of peacemaking relative to “comparable” gains and have a different risk orientation toward losses than toward gains. Even when the benefits of peace and the costs of departure from the territory are equal in “objective” terms, the perception of the losses will dominate the peacemaking policy (Levy, 1996: 186). The level of risk taken also reflects the balance of gains/losses associated with a possible positive/negative

outcome, as well as the certainty effect. Peacemakers may overweight tangible assets that are certain, such as territory, compared to peace assets that are uncertain. These conclusions can be directly inferred from prospect theory; accordingly, the prospect of losing some benefit outweighs the prospect of gaining the equal benefit (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992).

Domestic factors may also lead peacemakers to regard peace policy as risk rather than opportunity, loss rather than gain. They may be uncertain about the domestic reaction to concessions, or certain that these would arouse strong opposition that may even endanger their staying in office. Framing may be used, therefore, also as a manipulative means to underestimate or overestimate losses or gains in the peacemaking—not only as a bargaining tool vs. the adversary but also for coping with domestic opposition, or for acquiring legitimacy for the peace process or the concessions it entails. On the other hand, loss avoidance and concession aversion by peacemakers may be a rational reaction to domestic constraints (Levy, 1996: 187).

If, however, peacemakers view peacemaking in terms of eliminating or minimizing risks and losses to central values and interests, then the risks taken and the concessions made may be seen as reasonable. Moreover, when peacemaking is perceived as necessary and beneficial, then its expected utility may be seen as higher than the concessions even if the latter are still regarded as a loss. Peacemakers who believe that they must resolve the conflict and are accountable to their constituencies for achieving peace are more risk-acceptant. When peacemakers are particularly eager to reach an agreement, they may tend to underestimate risks, believing that they are able to control events and take more risks than others. A belief in their ability to cope effectively with negative developments in the peace process may also encourage risk-taking (Kahneman & Tversky, 1997: 53–58; Vertzberger, 1998: 49, 68).

Peacemakers may also perceive the risks of the current status quo as very high—higher than the risks of peacemaking, so that the latter are

preferable. In other words, peacemakers may be more risk-acceptant of peacemaking mainly because of the difference in the certainty effect. Although people attach greater value to the complete elimination of risk than to its reduction, they seem to prefer the potential risks of violation of peace to the risks of imminent war, especially when they also expect peace benefits.

Coping With Uncertainty

The literature suggests different strategies for coping with the problems of uncertainty and risk in decisionmaking, and some of them are applicable to peacemaking. Although some of these strategies aim at coping only with uncertainty or with risk, most of them pertain to both problems, mainly because many uncertain situations (such as peacemaking) also involve risk.

Most of the strategies for dealing with the uncertainty problem aim at minimizing the psychological tensions that beset decisionmakers under conditions of uncertainty instead of at helping them cope effectively with the situation. The following strategies are, however, relevant to our case: calculated procrastination; the use of a “satisficing” rather than “optimizing” decision rule; incrementalism; sequential decisionmaking; and historical analogies (George, 1980: 35–45).

Calculated procrastination may be a useful strategy when there is no time pressure to make a decision, and there is reason to believe that more information and a better assessment of the situation will be available later, or that the situation itself may improve (George, 1980: 35; Janis & Mann, 1977: 239–242). In a negotiation process, a decisionmaker might use the negotiations as a communication and learning process for gaining better information about the rival’s attitudes and intentions and about the situation, thereby reducing uncertainty. However, while the accumulated information and knowledge might be sufficient for a peacemaking decision itself, it is unlikely to enable an accurate assessment of future outcomes.

A satisficing decision-rule strategy has only limited effectiveness in minimizing uncertainty because it enables only a limited search for better information and assessment (George, 1980: 40; Janis & Mann, 1977: 25-35). However, it reflects people's recognition of their limited ability to minimize uncertainty, especially with respect to long-term outcomes of a peace process or relations. Since uncertainty about future outcomes of peace relations tends to be very high, decisionmakers will concentrate on minimizing the short-term uncertainty, hoping that the achievement of a peace agreement will itself reduce uncertainty.

Incrementalism may enable leaders to cope with dilemmas of uncertainty gradually, via a sequence of decisions aimed mainly at improving the present state of the peace process and relations (George, 1980: 40-41; Janis & Mann, 1977: 33-35). The incremental mechanism helps leaders cope with uncertainty when they find it difficult to secure long-term objectives in the peace process or when the information and knowledge needed to achieve these is lacking. Although reliance on incrementalism may encourage policies aimed at minimizing uncertainty in the near future, it fails to address longer-term developments. Hence, incrementalism is a limited strategy for dealing with uncertainty in shifting from war to peace; there is no guarantee that by securing minor or even major improvements in the agreement, the decisionmakers can ensure favorable outcomes in the future. Moreover, actions taken to achieve short-term gains may actually endanger longer-term outcomes. For example, although attempts to secure a better agreement by pressuring the other side to make concessions may minimize uncertainty in the shorter term, an unsatisfied side will be more likely to eventually violate the agreement or demand changes in it. Therefore, incrementalism is not a substitute for policy analysis that includes longer-term considerations, especially in a situation of peace building.

The strategy of sequential decisionmaking aims to improve incremental decisionmaking by providing a framework of sophisticated policy planning. It does so in two ways: (1) by breaking a large policy decision into a

series of smaller-step decisions over time, and (2) by attempting to deal with different uncertainties at different stages in the sequence of inter-related decisions (George, 1980: 41–42). This strategy enables decision-makers to determine what has to be decided immediately and what can be left for a later stage. It also enables them to seek the different information and knowledge required at each stage of the decisionmaking process in order to cope with various types of uncertainty. This strategy may suit a peace process that includes various stages characterized by different problems of uncertainty, where coping effectively with each may be necessary for shifting to the next stage. However, such a strategy may fail to address uncertainty effectively when the peace process is not divided into stages.

The use of historical analogies is another strategy for coping with uncertainty. Historical lessons from previous agreements with the same actor or other actors may help peacemakers to reduce uncertainty, especially in seeking better policies than those undertaken in previous cases. Personal as well as others' experience may help in choosing measures for minimizing uncertainty. The use of historical analogies may, however, be mistaken if not dangerous, not only because it does not provide concrete means to cope with a specific problem, but because it may fail to differentiate between the old cases and the new one. The differences between or among historical cases could be crucial. A mistaken analogy may cause not only a wrong diagnosis of the specific uncertainty problem, but also the adoption of inappropriate measures to deal with the situation.

The strategies surveyed here do not offer concrete rules or basic assumptions as to the best ways of coping consistently and effectively with the uncertainty problem in peacemaking. We are still left with two problems: how to identify the uncertainty problem, and how to cope with it successfully while assuring a high degree of control of the peace-process outcomes in the desired direction.

In general, to minimize the uncertainty dilemma, decisionmakers should

develop criteria for judging the other side's intentions with respect to maintaining the peace relations—for example, the stability of its regime, its reputation for respecting commitments, its satisfaction with the agreement, and the extent of domestic support for the peace process. The assumption is that a stable regime may promise a continuation of foreign policy and somehow secure the possibility of maintaining the peace relations. The same is true concerning the other side's reputation for respecting agreements. The other side's satisfaction with the agreement may also assure the continuation of the peace relations, since it does not see any reason to violate the agreement.

Coping With Risk

Peacemakers who are interested in concluding a peace agreement but who fear that its risks/losses may outweigh its opportunities/benefits may cope with this problem in one or more of the following ways suggested by Bilder.

The first way is to refuse to take risks and avoid reaching a peace agreement. However, nonagreement can also involve risks and opportunity costs. Peacemakers who choose this course may face a risk of war with their adversary, and of losing the benefits that a peace agreement may have brought. These may include not only direct benefits in the security domain, but also indirect benefits such as the economic and political support of third parties that have a special interest in the resolution of the particular conflict.

A second way is to ignore the problem of risk for the time being, in the hope that the problem will not arise or that if it does, it can be dealt with through further negotiations or third-party mediation. However, when the concessions involved in peacemaking are tangible and painful it is unlikely that decisionmakers will ignore or defer problems of risk.

A third way of coping with risk is to change perceptions of the risks involved in the agreement, deciding that they are less threatening than initially evaluated. This may result from gaining more information,

reassessment of the situation, or persuasion by a third party. However, such changed perceptions are probably insufficient to eliminate the risk problem, and decisionmakers will still need assurances if they are to cope with it.

A fourth way is to attempt to obtain substantive terms in the peace agreement that compensate for the perceived risk. A very substantial benefit offered by the other side may compensate for even a very substantial risk. In peace agreements, however, this way of coping with risk is difficult to adopt, since the risks involved concern vital national interests and decisionmakers may be unwilling to accept these risks at any price.

The fifth way is a simple decision by peacemakers that they can trust their partner to honor the terms of the agreement, not only because the partner is sincere and responsible but because it has a genuine interest in upholding its commitments. However, since trust still tends to be limited between actors who are considering peacemaking, and since vital interests are at stake, it is doubtful that peacemakers will accept risks by relying only on trust (Bilder, 1981: 15–18).

Finally, there is the option of adopting specific risk-management strategies. Here, the main problem consists of finding strategies that will actually increase the probability that the other side will live up to the agreement, or will reduce one's vulnerability and costs in case it does not. Although Bilder suggests certain risk-management strategies that may enable decisionmakers to accept risks, not all of them are applicable to peace agreements involving tangible exchanges or to long-term peace relations, and some address problems of uncertainty rather than of risk. Some of the strategies aim to cope with risks of inadequate performance by the other side, others with risks of violating the peace agreement. We turn now to a consideration of such strategies.

Risk-Management Strategies

The most relevant strategies for coping with risk in peacemaking are: a detailed written agreement; a gradual-sequential strategy; dispute settlement

procedures; publicly associating the other side's political leadership with the agreement; ensuring the other side's performance; a comprehensive system of security arrangements; third-party guarantees; building trust and fostering cooperation.

1. *A detailed written agreement.* A written agreement that establishes iron-clad commitments to deal with problems in legalistic terms may avoid or minimize future vagueness, misinterpretations, and disagreements, and may assure some certainty, reliability, and stability. Although this will not necessarily prevent a violation of the agreement by the other side, it will at least define what constitutes a violation and create some legal and political constraints for both sides. Nevertheless, there are limits to the effectiveness of this technique. Even the most carefully drafted agreement cannot preclude ambiguity and different interpretations. Moreover, excessive specificity and rigidity in an agreement can retard or even foil negotiations, and may create difficulties in implementation (Bilder, 1981: 6–7, 118–119; Touval, 1982: 26).

2. *A gradual-sequential strategy.* This strategy copes with risk in the same way that incrementalism copes with uncertainty. It enables moving from limited risks to less limited ones dependent on the other side's behavior and reciprocity—thus, for example, the first territorial concessions made are minimal, gradual, and conditional. Such an approach not only enables the testing of the other side's sincerity, but helps build mutual trust. It also makes possible the reassessment by each side of attitudes toward risk/opportunity or cost/benefit with each completed stage. If one side has already carried out one or more of a series of obligations, and finds that the other side is not performing adequately, it can withhold its own further obligations, or even terminate the agreement. As we shall see later with respect to the Israeli-Egyptian peacemaking in 1974–1982, this strategy is applicable to a conflict resolution process that sets out a detailed schedule of phased and reciprocal actions by each side (Bilder, 1981: 55–56;

Schelling, 1960: 45–46; Touval, 1982: 21). This could also be a learning process where the parties realize that there is more than one possible solution for security dilemmas and are encouraged to take more risks. In these situations the sides may move from interim conflict-reduction agreements to peace agreements (Bilder, 1981: 40–43).

3. *Dispute settlement procedures.* This risk-management strategy sometimes employs third parties. The peace agreement includes specific provisions that obligate the sides to settle future dissatisfactions or disputes by peaceful means, thus lending some protection against arbitrary violations of the agreement. Dispute settlement procedures serve as risk limits that constrain the sides against acting unilaterally, exposing the violator of the agreement to sanctions imposed by the international community. Third-party involvement in dispute settlement tends to encourage more restrained behavior. Nevertheless, dispute settlement procedures may prove ineffective when one side is determined to violate the agreement and cares less about the potential costs of its action (Bilder, 1981: 56–61.)

4. *Publicly associating the other side's political leadership with the agreement.* When the agreement is signed at a public ceremony, leaders' reputation and credibility are closely tied to its effective implementation. Any violation may damage the leaders' standing. This strategy may both act as a constraint on decisionmakers and encourage self-restraint (Touval, 1982: 27).

5. *Ensuring the other side's performance.* This strategy is especially necessary where the other side has the willingness to carry out the agreement but may fail to do so because of lack of the necessary legal, technical, financial, or other resources. To cope with this potential risk one must ensure that the other side has these capacities before signing the agreement, or help it in acquiring them (Bilder, 1981: 112–117). This

strategy is relevant in cases of a peace agreement between a strong side and a weak one—for example, between Israel and the Palestinians.

6. *A comprehensive system of security arrangements.* Risk-taking in peacemaking depends not only on the peacemakers' certainty that the other side will not violate the agreement, but also on their ability to minimize the costs of violation. This involves not only self-protection but also making clear to the other side that not only will it not gain by breaching the agreement, it will suffer a severe loss. This means that a treaty must incorporate a comprehensive system of security arrangements, external guarantees, and punitive sanctions to be imposed by the injured side or with the assistance of a third party.

Security arrangements may be the best means of making violation less feasible and reducing one's vulnerability or losses. Such arrangements can create political and military barriers to violating the agreement and enable better planning to cope with possible violations. There are various kinds of security arrangements, such as demilitarization of the evacuated area, buffer zones, zones of limited armaments, third-party peacekeeping forces, verification systems, and "tripwires" or early warning devices.

A verification system that includes monitoring and inspection measures such as aerial and satellite reconnaissance may give each side means to determine whether the other side is fulfilling its obligations. Thus, each side is able to make a timely and appropriate response to any violations, and to prepare itself in case of further violations. Verification may play the role of a confidence-building measure, especially where there is a good record of compliance.

When the sides still distrust each other, and do not have the technical means for effective verification, third-party supervision may better meet the sides' concerns over possible violations. Moreover, clear evidence of a violation obtained by a third party will be broadly accepted by the international community, and this will pressure the violator to cease the

violation and honor the agreement, and may well legitimize the offended party's taking of unilateral measures to protect itself (Bilder, 1981: 117–118, 120–122).

Tripwires or early warning stations are another means of providing advance information on the other side's intentions to violate the agreement. Such stations, placed in a neutralized buffer zone between the sides, may be automatic or manned by each side or by a third party. Any armed penetration of the zone is defined as a violation of the agreement, against which one may take measures to protect oneself (Bilder, 1981: 139).

Although verification and early warning systems provide indications of violation of the agreement, one must consider how to react to violation events. Ignoring such an event indicates weakness and invites further violations. One can appeal to a third party to halt the violation and force the other side to honor the agreement, or, alternatively, take unilateral measures to enforce the other side's compliance; this, however, may lead to further deterioration and even hostilities.

7. Third-party guarantees. Although security arrangements provide certainty thresholds and reduce vulnerability in case of violation, third-party guarantees can also contribute in cases where there is mistrust and a need to build trust. Such guarantees constitute “the common risk-sharing devices” in peacemaking, i.e., the transference of part or all of the risks to a third party (Touval, 1982: 20, 23). The guarantees may be seen as effective only if the guarantor will perceive any violation of the agreement as an act against itself, and has the power and willingness to threaten and even punish the transgressor; in this way guarantees can act as deterrents. They promise that no party will be exposed by itself to loss and that the guarantor will take measures to reduce its vulnerability, or the loss suffered. Formal, written commitments by a third party can make such guarantees more reliable. However, when binding commitments are legally impossible or politically impractical, nonbinding commitments are still

better than nothing, especially when the third party has a strong reputation for honoring its commitments. Guarantees of this sort can be provided only by a superpower, with both sides being confident in its ability and willingness to perform impartially and effectively as risk-manager. When the sides regard any violation of the agreement as costly not only vs. the rival but also vs. the guarantor, there is some certainty that the agreement will be honored. In addition, the third party's assistance in the form of political, economic, and military aid may reduce the risks and the costs of violations. Such assistance may also be perceived as compensation for painful concessions.

Although the combination of security arrangements with external guarantees and assistance may somewhat reduce the risks of shifting from war to peace, they cannot resolve the problem entirely, and one must accept the potential risks and costs of peacemaking. An effective risk-management system is necessary but cannot anticipate all contingencies or control risk problems completely (Bilder, 1981: 195–206).

8. *Building trust and fostering cooperation.* Although the building of trust and the fostering of security, political, and economic interdependence between the parties are the best guarantees for stable peace, such peace may emerge only after a long process; therefore, the maintenance of peace still requires techniques of risk-management. A gradual-sequential strategy can also be helpful in building trust, by dividing the peace process into different stages of formulation and implementation, every stage being a test case for formulation and implementation of the next one. Although this cannot ensure that the treaty will not be violated after implementation, it may provide indications about future behavior. No less important for building trust is to reach an agreement that is perceived as fair and balanced; a party that feels it has given more than it has received is more likely to alter or violate the agreement (Bilder, 1981: 78–79). Although distrust and uncertainty can never be eliminated, building trust and cooperation between the parties is essential. Uncertainty can be reduced by

modifying the image of the other side so that it is perceived as less hostile and more trustful (Touval, 1982: 19).

Coping With Uncertainty and Risk-Taking in Peacemaking: The Israeli Experience

The Arab-Israeli peacemaking experience indicates that the Israeli peacemakers perceived the issues of uncertainty and risk-taking as the most difficult ones, for the following reasons: (1) the bitter experience of the conflict and resulting mistrust, (2) the nature of the Arab regimes, (3) the need to make territorial concessions, (4) the concern that territorial concessions would, in case of violation of the agreement, make Israel even more vulnerable than before the agreement.

The bitter conflict with the Arab side made Israeli leaders deeply suspicious about peacemaking. Until Egyptian President Sadat's initiative in 1977, it was felt that the Arab side in general was not really interested in resolving the conflict with Israel and should not be trusted, since any agreement it would make with Israel would be for tactical and not strategic reasons. The Arabs, it was believed, would violate an agreement at the first opportunity. This was based on the lessons learned from the violation of the armistice agreements signed in 1949 after the 1948-1949 War, and from the violation of the cease-fire and the standstill agreement signed in 1970 that terminated the War of Attrition with Egypt (Shalom, 1995; Bar-Siman-Tov, 1980).

The fact that Arab regimes are nondemocratic constituted another obstacle. Israeli leaders believed that nondemocratic regimes tend not to honor agreements they have signed, and hence Israel could not trust the Arab regimes as sincere partners in peace but had to wait for the democratization of the Arab countries. So long as there was no real prospect of conflict reduction or resolution, this problem remained theoretical (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996: 46). It became actual, however, after the 1973

War with the beginning of the conflict reduction process with Egypt and Syria.

When the first opportunity for conflict reduction emerged, Israeli decisionmakers in fact decided to negotiate with the nondemocratic Arab regimes and not to wait for their democratization. They realized that the democratization process would take many years if it would transpire at all. However, they acted to minimize the uncertainty and risks involved in conflict reduction and resolution. This was especially crucial insofar as every conflict reduction agreement required territorial concessions.

The initial Israeli assumptions about uncertainty and risk-taking in peacemaking were as follows: (1) Very high uncertainty is entailed in conflict reduction or resolution because of a general mistrust of the Arab actors, because of their nondemocratic regimes, and because of a lack of absolute control over the development of the process. (2) Much should be done to minimize the uncertainty, but there is no way to eliminate it. (3) There is a need to take risks for conflict reduction and resolution, although the respective risks are not the same; those entailed by the latter are greater because the territorial concessions made for conflict resolution are much larger than those for conflict reduction, even though those for conflict resolution are made only in return for a peace agreement. (4) The territorial status quo is the reference point and therefore, even if conflict reduction or resolution is a gain, every territorial concession is a loss because it entails the relinquishment of a tangible and certain asset that has security and ideological significance, and also because the territorial acquisitions made via war were very costly (Shalom, 1995). (5) Peace is a significant gain, but because it is intangible and uncertain, the disadvantages of any alternative to the status quo, even if it is peace, are weighted more heavily than its advantages (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1994, 1996; Kimmerling, 1983, 1987).

For Israel, the main risk in peacemaking concerns the influence of potential territorial change on the country's future security. Since territory

is perceived as a security asset, then by definition any territorial concession decreases Israel's security and increases its vulnerability, especially in case of violation of an agreement. This vulnerability, it is feared, may even tempt the Arab side to breach an agreement because of the perceived change in the balance of power in its favor.

Israeli peacemakers identified the basic framing options of peacemaking in terms of risk/opportunity; in turn, the risks and opportunities of peace were framed mainly around the value of security. On the one hand, peacemaking was perceived as a great opportunity to eliminate or minimize the danger of war, thereby increasing Israel's security; on the other, the violation of peace might endanger Israel's security if not its existence. Nevertheless, to ignore the opportunity of making peace is dangerous not only because of the possibility of a new war, but because of the impact on relations with the United States and the international community.

Several different problems of uncertainty and ways of coping with them can be distinguished in Israel's peace negotiations with Arab actors. Israeli decisionmakers faced uncertainty problems at different stages of peacemaking, and they used different strategies to deal with them. Overall, they tended to act according to a worst-case analysis, believing that Israel should be prepared for possible violations of the agreement and that the question was how to cope in the least costly way with the worst risk.

The questions of uncertainty and risk-taking were limited to the current Arab regimes. Although Israeli leaders also discussed such questions as what would happen to a peace agreement in case of a change of the current Arab regime, or in case of negative social, economic, or political developments in Arab states, such concerns never prevented the signing of an agreement.

The experience derived from the disengagement agreements with Egypt and Syria in the 1970s provided some guidelines for the peace agreements with Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinians. Moreover, the lessons learned from the agreement with Egypt were also applied differentially to the agreements with Jordan and the Palestinians, and to the failed negotiations

with Syria under the Rabin-Peres government. The use of historical analogies from the Arab-Israeli experience became an interesting way of coping with uncertainty, mainly in terms of identifying the problems and determining the strategies needed to cope with uncertainty and risk. The use of detailed agreements, gradual-sequential approaches, and security arrangements in the peace agreements with Arab actors was based on lessons learned from the disengagement agreements with Egypt. On the whole, the Israeli-Egyptian peace process became a model for the other processes (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996).

A typical strategy used by Israeli leaders is a detailed agreement that defines each side's obligations in the most careful and precise way, so as to prevent ambiguity or misinterpretations that might lead to a dispute or a conflict over implementation, and also to enable clear identification of any future violation. Although Israeli leaders were aware that even formal obligations could not guarantee the other side's future compliance, they understood the importance of creating at least some legal and political constraints on the other side that would make potential violations more costly. An interesting example is Prime Minister Begin's insistence that Egypt accept that the peace treaty with Israel would supersede any conflicting commitments Egypt had to other Arab states, and that this be formally stipulated in the peace agreement. Another important example is Rabin's and Peres's insistence in the Oslo accords that the PLO commit itself to formally abolish its National Covenant, which calls for Israel's destruction. When this was not done to Israel's satisfaction, Prime Minister Netanyahu demanded a formal vote by the authorized Palestinian institution with President Clinton present. In this case, the public association of the other side's political leadership with the agreement, in the presence of the U.S. president, was also used as a supplementary strategy aimed at making future violations more costly.

Israeli leaders also tended to employ gradual-sequential strategies, based on linking stages of the other side's implementation of conflict reduction and peace agreements to stages of territorial withdrawal by

Israel. These strategies proved highly effective in managing security risks in a way that enabled movement from limited risks to less limited risks, a process in which the other side demonstrated its sincerity. Israel's initial territorial concessions to Egypt and Syria in 1974-1975 were minimal and were made in return for conflict reduction rather than resolution. However, these measures not only enabled the testing of Egypt's sincerity but also helped in building trust with it. Israeli leaders continued to use a gradual-sequential approach in the peace process of 1977-1982. The withdrawal from the Sinai was carried out in two main stages over three years; the second stage was made conditional on Egypt's acceptance of establishing diplomatic relations as well as open borders immediately after the first withdrawal. This withdrawal was limited, so that Israel would still retain the most important part of the Sinai, including the settlements, in case of an Egyptian violation. Israeli leaders were, of course, aware that Egypt could also violate the agreement after the final Israeli withdrawal, but this was a risk that they accepted.

Such a strategy was also used in the Oslo agreement, where Israel insisted on carrying out its withdrawal only in stages and on prolonging it over five years, with each withdrawal conditional on Palestinian compliance. Moreover, each stage of withdrawal was renegotiated. Thus, after concluding the Oslo 1 negotiations to implement the first withdrawal the Cairo agreement had to be negotiated, and Oslo 2 was needed for the second stage of withdrawal. There was also a need to renegotiate the Hebron agreement as well as the Wye agreement. The peace negotiations with Jordan were different in this regard because no real withdrawal was involved. However, Israel will probably insist on applying such strategies to any peace agreement with Syria.

In addition to the gradual-sequential strategy, Israel insisted on including dispute settlement procedures in its agreements with the Arab actors that obligate the sides to settle any dispute by peaceful means. The formal inclusion of the United States in any dispute settlement imposes additional constraints on both sides. This strategy was even further

emphasized in the Wye agreement with the Palestinians, where the U.S. role was increased tremendously compared to the other agreements with the Palestinians. It will probably increase even further in the subsequent agreements.

The most important strategies for coping with uncertainty and risk, however, are a comprehensive system of security arrangements and U.S. political, economic, and military guarantees. Israeli leaders have insisted on strict security arrangements that include demilitarization of evacuated areas, buffer zones, zones of limited armaments, deployment of third-party peacekeeping forces, verification systems, and early warning devices. All or most of these means were first employed in the two disengagement agreements with Egypt and in the disengagement agreement with Syria. This became a model for the peace agreement with Egypt, and Israel will probably also demand to apply it to a future agreement with Syria. Such a model was not, however, applied to the peace agreement with Jordan. Because of the informal security regime established between the two sides after September 1970, and the trust that developed between the two countries' leaders, Israeli decisionmakers did not see a need to use such a model in its peace agreement with Jordan. Some of these means were applied, however, to the Israeli-Palestinian interim agreements and will probably be employed more comprehensively in the final agreement.

No less important for minimizing uncertainty and risk was the bringing of the United States into the negotiations, and the making it a full partner to the agreements with its own responsibilities concerning implementation. In addition, through bilateral agreements (most of them secret) the United States committed itself to Israel's security in case of violation of peace agreements, and agreed to provide massive military and economic assistance to compensate Israel for its territorial concessions (Kissinger, 1982: 836–841, 1250–1251; Rabin, 1979: 253–275).

Conclusions

The problems of uncertainty and risk pose serious dilemmas for peace-makers, especially when they must make tangible concessions for the sake of peace. These problems may create barriers to reaching peace agreements. Although not all uncertainty situations necessarily include risk, peacemaking that requires tangible concessions and especially territorial ones, such as in Israel's case, entails uncertainty and risk.

When a window of opportunity opens, the main dilemma concerns what risks to take in order to reach peace agreements without endangering one's existence or security, especially when there is still much uncertainty about the outcomes of peace relations. Although the manner of framing risks/opportunities or losses/gains is crucial for making the necessary concessions, viable risk-management strategies may be essential for convincing a side to take the necessary risks. Among the various risk-management strategies, comprehensive security arrangements and external guarantees are probably, as in the Israeli case, the most significant. These can minimize not only uncertainty and risk but also costs in case the other side violates the agreement.

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