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# The Israeli–Palestinian Peace Process and Its Vicissitudes

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## *Insights From Attitude Theory*

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*The vicissitudes of the Israeli–Palestinian peace process since 1967 are analyzed using attitudes and related concepts where relevant. The 1967 war returned the two peoples' zero-sum conflict around national identity to its origin as a conflict within the land both peoples claim. Gradually, new attitudes evolved regarding the necessity and possibility of negotiations toward a two-state solution based on mutual recognition, which became the building stones of the 1993 Oslo agreement. Lacking a commitment to a final outcome, the Oslo-based peace process was hampered by reserve options, which increased avoidance at the expense of approach tendencies as the parties moved toward a final agreement. The resulting breakdown of the process in 2000 produced clashing narratives, reflecting different anchors for judgment and classical mirror images. Public support for violence increased, even as public opinion continued to favor a negotiated two-state solution. Reviving the peace process requires mutual reassurance about the availability of a partner for negotiating a principled peace based on a historic compromise that meets the basic needs and validates the identities of both peoples.*

**Keywords:** Israeli–Palestinian peace process, attitude change, approach–avoidance dynamics, clashing narratives, negotiating identity

**T**he Israeli–Palestinian peace process that began with the Oslo accord in 1993 broke down with the failure of the Camp David summit in the summer of 2000 and the onset of the second *intifada* in the fall of that year. Relationships between the two communities have deteriorated steadily over the ensuing years and have often been marked by high levels of violence on both sides. As of August 2006 (when this article was written), the halting efforts to return to the negotiating table have been undermined by the election of a Hamas-led government in the Palestinian Authority and by the pursuit of unilateralist options by the Israeli government. These efforts have been even further marginalized by the war between Israel and the Hezbollah forces in Lebanon.

What happened in and to the Israeli–Palestinian peace process in these recent years? Where did a process that seemed to be so promising when it began with the Oslo accord in 1993 go wrong, and what factors contributed to

its ultimate breakdown? Where do things stand today? What can and needs to be done to revive the peace process? These are the questions this article seeks to address.

I approach these questions from the perspective of a long-time student of the social–psychological dimensions of international relations (see, e.g., Kelman, 1965, 1997c). Apart from social–psychological theory, a major input into my thinking—and the richest source of my observations—has been my work as a scholar–practitioner in conflict resolution. Over many years, my colleagues and I have developed an unofficial, third-party approach to the resolution of international and intercommunal conflicts, for which I have used the term *interactive problem solving* (Kelman, 1986, 1996, 2002). The approach derives from the pioneering work of John Burton (1969, 1979, 1984; see also Kelman, 1972). It has been applied in a number of different conflict situations, but my own work for more than three decades has focused in particular on the Israeli–Palestinian case (Kelman, 1979, 1995, 1997a, 1998b, 2005).

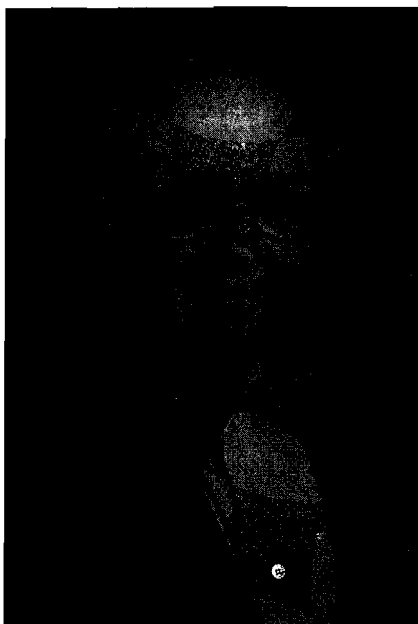
The primary (though not exclusive) tool in the practice of interactive problem solving is the problem-solving workshop. A set of social–psychological assumptions underlie the structure, the process, and the substantive content of workshops (Kelman, 2002; see also Kelman, 1997a). In the spirit of action research, the relationship between theory and practice works in both directions: Not only does social–psychological theory inform practice, but the practice is a rich source of insights about the dynamics of the particular conflict at issue, about international conflict in general, and indeed about a variety of social–psychological processes—including attitude formation and change, group and intergroup processes, and social identity (Kelman, 2000).

Starting in 1977, I have presented—in talks, in op-ed columns, in journal articles (e.g., Kelman, 1978, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1992, 1997d, 1998a)—my particular version of policy analysis: analysis of recent developments in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the reasons behind

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those developments, and their policy implications. My analysis draws, above all, on what I am able to learn from the intensive interactions between the two parties in the course of workshops. In addition, I stay in close touch with the situation through travel in the region, participation in meetings and conferences, personal conversations with significant actors in and analysts of the conflict, and close readings of the press and relevant professional literature. All of the observations I am able to make by these various means are placed within my social-psychological framework for conceptualizing international conflict.

It should be stressed that, in developing my analysis, I never deliberately ask myself what can be learned from attitude theory or other social-psychological approaches that would help people understand and deal with the events. Rather, I simply ask myself how to best understand what is happening and how to deal with the situation constructively. Inevitably, the ideas that come to my mind as I try to grapple with these questions draw heavily on social-psychological concepts and principles, because these are the terms in which I think—both about social and political issues in general and, specifically, about international conflict. I assign an important role to the social-psychological dimensions of international conflict, although I make it very clear that “a social-psychological approach is primarily designed to complement other approaches rather than substitute for them. It focuses on only some of the dimensions of what is clearly a larger, multidimensional landscape” (Kelman, 1997c, p. 192).

The present article is written in precisely the spirit I have described. My plan is to present an analysis of the ups and downs in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In my attempt to answer the questions raised at the beginning of the article, I introduce some ideas drawn from attitude

theory and some other social-psychological concepts as they become relevant to the story that I am trying to tell, rather than building my story around a particular theoretical model. My primary purpose is to present an analysis that helps to explain the Israeli-Palestinian peace process and its vicissitudes. A secondary purpose is to demonstrate that concepts drawn from attitude theory are potentially useful tools in this analysis.

### **The Concept of Attitude: A Preliminary Note**

My view of the concept of attitude (cf. Kelman, 1974, 1980)—and the reason I consider it so useful for the present analysis—centers on four important attributes of attitudes:

- Attitudes inextricably combine the affective and cognitive dimensions of our relationships to social objects.
- Attitudes are shared within a group, organization, or society and constitute properties of both the individual and the collectivity within which these attitudes are shared.
- Attitudes emerge and constantly evolve and change in a context of action and interaction.
- An attitude represents a range of potential commitment to the object (or a range of relationships to or actions toward the object that the person finds acceptable)—at times extending from approach to avoidance, from support to opposition—rather than a single point on a bipolar scale.

It should also be noted that, in speaking of attitude theory, I refer to a family of concepts that includes not only attitudes per se, but also beliefs, images, identities, cognitions, and sentiments.

### **The Nature of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be described as an existential conflict between two peoples—two identity groups—each of which claims the same territory for its national homeland and political state (see Tessler, 1994, for a comprehensive history of the conflict, or see Mendelsohn, 1989, and Gerner, 1991, for briefer accounts). In such a conflict, the identity and the very existence of the other represent a threat to each group's own identity and existence. “The other's identity and its associated narrative challenge the group's claims to ownership—at least to exclusive ownership—of the land and its resources” (Kelman, 2001, p. 192). These dynamics have led to a view of the conflict in zero-sum terms, not only with respect to territory, but also with respect to national identity and existence. Acknowledging the other's identity has been seen as tantamount to jeopardizing one's own identity and existence. Each side has espoused “the view that only one can be a nation: Either we are a nation or they are. *They* can acquire national identity and rights only at the expense of *our* identity and rights” (Kelman, 1987, p. 354). Thus, over the course of the conflict, each side has made systematic

efforts to deny the other's identity as a national group, the authenticity of its links to the land, and the legitimacy of its claims to national rights (Kelman, 1978, 1982). Indeed, each has incorporated negation of the other's identity in its own national narrative (Kelman, 1999). This zero-sum view of the conflict is held to different degrees by different individuals and groups within each society and, indeed, by the same individuals and groups at different times. Moreover, it has undergone changes over the years, in response to the various developments that I describe. However, it remains a powerful dynamic in the conflict: Significant elements in each society continue to subscribe to it with ideological fervor, and their influence grows under conditions of increasing threat, mutual distrust, and despair.

The perception of the conflict in existential and zero-sum terms has direct consequences for internal (intragroup) processes within each society. On the one hand, it invariably sets off a sharp intragroup conflict whenever the possibility of a compromise with the other side arises. The conflict reflects the division within each group between the maximalist or rejectionist elements, who—for religious or ultranationalist reasons—want to hold out for total victory, and the more moderate elements, who are willing to consider compromises for the sake of peace, as long as their group's national existence is assured. The intragroup conflict resulting from this division plays a significant role in exacerbating and perpetuating the intergroup conflict—in making it intractable. On the other hand, the existential nature of the conflict also creates a powerful intragroup consensus. Thus, when members of the society perceive a threat to the core of their group identity and to their national existence, there is a strong tendency to soften internal divisions and to close ranks in the common cause of group survival.

The nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—and other conflicts between identity groups—and the resulting intragroup dynamics condition public reactions to any effort to set a peace process into motion. I propose that movement toward peace creates an approach-avoidance conflict at two levels within each society. At the *societal* level, both the dovish and the hawkish elements are activated by the prospects of a peace process. The doves are likely to embrace the process with enthusiasm and hope; the hawks—particularly the maximalists and rejectionists, whose hawkishness is ideologically based—are likely to feel threatened by the process and to react with fear and despair. With the mobilization of these two sectors, both approach and avoidance tendencies are likely to rise within the society and to come into conflict with each other.

At the *individual* level, movement toward peace is likely to raise the levels of both approach and avoidance tendencies even among the dovish elements of the society: to create a conflict between positive expectations and existential fears. Though individuals may react to the prospects of peace with hope and anticipation, they may also consider the process dangerous. It arouses the fear that the concessions necessitated by peace negotiations might land their people on a slippery slope—at a point of no return, which could spell the end of their nation's existence.

I return to the impact of approach-avoidance conflicts in my discussion of the ups and downs of the peace process that followed the Oslo accord of 1993. First, however, I review the developments over the course of more than a quarter century that made the accord possible.

## **The 1967 War and the Palestinianization of the Arab-Israeli Conflict**

In November 1947, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly voted to end (as of May 15, 1948) the British mandate over Palestine, which had been established after World War I, and to partition the land into a Jewish state and an Arab state. The Zionist leadership accepted the partition plan, with reservations, but the Arab leadership—both within Palestine and in the neighboring states—rejected it. Fighting broke out between the two communities, which turned into an all-out war after May 15, 1948, when the British forces withdrew, the Jewish leadership in Palestine declared the independent state of Israel, and regular armies from the neighboring Arab states joined the fray. An armistice agreement was signed in July 1949. The armistice lines became the official borders of the State of Israel, which included larger portions of Palestine than the UN partition plan had originally allotted to the Jewish state. Two parts of mandatory Palestine remained under Arab control: the West Bank, which was eventually annexed by Jordan, and the Gaza Strip, which came under Egyptian administration. The idea of establishing a Palestinian state in these territories was not considered in those years and was indeed taboo in the eyes of Palestinians and other Arabs. They considered the establishment of a Jewish state in any part of Palestine illegitimate, and their political goal was the elimination of the State of Israel and the establishment of an Arab state in the entire area of mandatory Palestine.

The Arab-Israeli War of 1967 radically changed the 1949 map and, along with it, the political atmosphere in the Middle East. By the end of this six-day war, Israel was left in control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and Syria's Golan Heights. The new geopolitical and strategic situation created by the war led to what I have called the Palestinianization of the Arab-Israeli conflict, bringing it back to its origins as a conflict between two peoples over—and increasingly within—the land they both claimed (Kelman, 1988). Once again, the Palestine problem returned to the center of the political agenda.

Prior to 1967, the Palestinian issue was not very much on the international or even the regional agenda. Between 1949 and 1967, the Palestinian cause was mostly in the hands of the Arab states. As a consequence of the war, however, Israel's neighboring states gradually withdrew from the military struggle against Israel (though not before another major war in 1973), leaving it, essentially, to the Palestinians themselves. The disengagement of the Arab states became dramatically clear with the visit of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem in 1977, which even-

tually led to the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty of 1979. The Palestinians, on their part, took repossession of their own struggle. An independent Palestinian movement emerged, which eventually—under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, as the head of Fatah—took over the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from the Arab League, which had originally created it.

The Arab–Israeli conflict became Palestinianized (or re-Palestinianized) not only for the Palestinians and the Arab states, but also for Israel. Between 1949 and 1967, it was largely an interstate conflict. With the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, however, it was internalized by Israel—transformed into a continuous confrontation with a resentful Palestinian population, living under occupation within Israel's post-1967 border. The onset of the first *intifada*—the uprising in Gaza and the West Bank—in December 1987 made the occupied territories the focal point of the Israeli–Palestinian struggle.

The changes in the political environment in the Middle East and the evolving interests of the relevant parties over the years following the 1967 war also helped to create new possibilities for resolving the conflict. Gradually, the concept of a two-state solution began to take hold. The Palestinian movement began to shift its emphasis from the liberation of all of Palestine through armed struggle to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza through largely political means. The *intifada* of the late 1980s was carried out under the political slogan of ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state alongside of Israel, which in effect became official PLO policy at the emergency meeting of the Palestine National Council in Algiers in November 1988. For many Israelis, in turn, the *intifada* contributed significantly to changes in their political thinking, by persuading them that continuing occupation was not tenable and that the Palestinians were indeed a people whose national movement had to find some political expression if there was to be a peaceful accommodation between the two sides (Kelman, 1997d). The concept of a two-state solution gained further strength from the fact that it was endorsed by a growing international consensus.

Although the 1967 war created the conditions for resolving the conflict by a two-state formula, it took a quarter of a century and many intervening events—including the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty, the Israeli settlement project in the occupied territories, the Lebanon War of 1982, the *intifada* of the late 1980s, and the first Gulf War—before serious Israeli–Palestinian negotiations pointing to the possibility of a two-state solution began and ultimately led to what I still consider an important breakthrough: the Oslo agreement, signed in Washington, DC, in September 1993.

## The Building Stones of the Oslo Agreement

By the end of the 1980s, there was a strong interest on all sides in finding a peaceful accommodation and an increasing, if often implicit, recognition that some version of a

two-state solution would provide the best formula for a broadly acceptable compromise. The political obstacles to such a solution, however, remained severe. A number of strategic and micropolitical considerations—traceable, in particular, to the end of the Cold War and the aftermath of the Gulf War—eventually brought the two sides to the negotiating table at the Madrid Conference in 1991 and at the subsequent talks in Washington, DC (see Kelman, 1997d). These talks, however, never developed momentum. After Yitzhak Rabin came into power in Israel in 1992, at the head of a government led by the Labor Party, he gradually (and reluctantly) came to the conclusion that Israel would have to deal directly with the PLO leadership to move the negotiations forward. He therefore supported the secret Oslo talks, which culminated in the exchange of letters of mutual recognition between the PLO and the State of Israel and the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, adopted in September 1993.

The Oslo breakthrough occurred because, gradually and slowly, major sectors of both societies were persuaded that their long-term interests and shorter-term domestic concerns required significant changes in their attitudes toward accommodation with the other side. The new thinking was encouraged by historical events, developments on the ground, intervention by outside powers, and direct interaction between the parties. A variety of unofficial contacts among political elites on the two sides, including the workshops organized by my colleagues and myself, contributed to this process (Kelman, 1995, 2005).

The attitude changes that unfolded over the quarter century following the 1967 war took the form of evolution and diffusion of certain key ideas about what was necessary and what was possible for the process and outcome of peace negotiations. These ideas, summarized in Table 1, served as the building stones of the Oslo agreement. The top row of the table refers to the key ideas about what was necessary to negotiate a resolution of the conflict. For the various reasons already indicated, leaders on both sides had been persuaded of the necessity of reaching an agreement. What they gradually came to learn was that meaningful negotiations toward such an agreement can be carried out only by legitimate representatives of the two national groups and that negotiations must be directed toward mutual recognition of each other's national identity and national rights. Both of these ideas, although they may appear obvious, were met with great resistance over the years because of the perception of the conflict in zero-sum terms with respect to national existence and the resulting systematic efforts to deny the other's identity and legitimacy.

For many years, each side studiously avoided legitimate national representatives of the other side as potential negotiating partners. They did not seek out, formally or informally, people who were accepted by their own constituencies as appropriate spokespersons for their national government or their national movement. To do so would have meant recognizing the other—the Israeli government or the PLO, respectively—as a legitimate national actor. Instead, each side searched for alternative interlocutors more congenial to its own point of view, but with little or

**Table 1**

*Evolving Ideas for Resolving the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict (1967–1993): The Building Stones of the Oslo Agreement*

Focus of the ideas	Target of the ideas	
	Negotiation process	Negotiation outcome
What is necessary	Negotiations between legitimate national representatives	Mutual recognition of national identity and rights
What is possible	Availability of a negotiating partner	The two-state solution

Note. From *Paving the Way: Contributions of Interactive Conflict Resolution to Peacemaking* (p. 53), by R. J. Fisher (Ed.), 2005, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. Copyright 2005 by Lexington Books. Reprinted with permission.

no legitimacy in their own community. Thus, in the 1970s and 1980s, even Israelis who were prepared to give up the West Bank (or at least part of it) looked to Jordan as the negotiating partner; the Israeli government also made some efforts to cultivate an alternative local Palestinian leadership (the Village Leagues) independent of the PLO. When the PLO leadership, on its part, began seeking out contacts with Israelis in the late 1970s, it first turned to anti-Zionist fringe elements and later to elements on the Israeli left that were well ahead of the political mainstream.

The idea of mutual recognition of the other's identity and rights (see Table 1), of course, ran directly counter to the zero-sum view of the conflict. Recognizing the other's identity was seen (and is still seen by many) as jeopardizing one's own national identity and existence, because the two identities were commonly considered mutually exclusive, as I elaborated earlier. Gradually, however, this idea was introduced into the political discourse by mainstream members of both communities and explored in encounters between them (see, e.g., Harkabi, 1988; Khalidi, 1978; and the two op-ed articles published side by side by Sarid & Khalidi, 1984). It finally found expression—albeit at a rather narrow, political level—in the letters of recognition exchanged between Arafat and Rabin in 1993. I consider these letters to be the most important achievement of the Oslo agreement and, in effect, rudimentary steps toward reconciliation, because they recognize each other's right to a political existence.

With increasing acceptance of the ideas about what is *necessary* for the process and outcome of serious negotiations, the parties had to face the question of whether it is *possible* to mount such negotiations. Gradually, over the years, significant elements in both societies became persuaded that legitimate national representatives on the other side were indeed available as partners in serious negotiations and that they might well be able to agree on a formula for a two-state solution that would give political expression to the national identities of the two peoples and fulfill their respective rights to national self-determination (see the second row in Table 1). In the 1980s, some Israeli peace activists who had been meeting with PLO-affiliated Palestinians summed up this conclusion with the slogan “there is

someone to talk to and something to talk about” on the other side. Direct interaction between the two sides—at the unofficial and eventually at the official level—contributed significantly to persuading the parties of the availability of a credible negotiating partner on the other side with whom they could agree on a mutually acceptable formula for a two-state solution. I have proposed that the most important contribution of the work that my colleagues and I carried out in the two decades prior to the Oslo agreement was precisely at this level (i.e., a contribution to the evolution and diffusion of ideas about the *possibility* of negotiating an agreement that would meet the fundamental needs and safeguard the vital interests of both parties; Kelman, 2005).

The four ideas summarized in Table 1 served as the building stones of the Oslo agreement. Together, they helped to persuade the two leaderships that a negotiated peace agreement based on mutual recognition was not only necessary, in light of their changing realities and evolving interests, but also possible. In the terms of Pruitt's goal/expectation theory of cooperation, the sense of necessity provided the motivation to end the conflict, while the sense of possibility provided the optimism about the other side's reciprocation required if the motivation was to be translated into behavior (Pruitt, 1997, 2005).

The attitude change represented by these ideas and embodied in the Oslo agreement had some important limitations that also marked the agreement itself. Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe the new political thinking that led up to Oslo as attitude *formation*, rather than change. The parties developed new positive attitudes toward each other, reflecting the new relationship that evolved over the years and that was cemented by the Oslo accord. This was a highly significant development, because it produced a readiness to recognize each other and accept one another's legitimacy, a measure of working trust between the parties, and an openness to cooperation.

These new attitudes and the relationship in which they were embedded did not, however, entirely replace the old attitudes, characterized by fear and distrust of the other and negation of the other's identity. Rather, they developed alongside of the existing attitudes, with only limited confrontation between the new and old attitudes and reorgani-

zation of the attitude framework. In terms of the processes of social influence distinguished in my earlier work (Kelman, 1961), the change took the form of identification, rather than internalization: It was anchored in the new relationship but was not accompanied by substantial adjustments in the parties' values and identities. At the collective level, it reflected a process of conflict resolution rather than reconciliation (Kelman, 2004, 2006).

The step toward conflict resolution represented by the Oslo accord was a historic achievement for such a protracted, deep-rooted conflict, but the limitations of the accord must be noted to understand the subsequent events. In effect, the conclusion of the Oslo accord left the parties with a situation in which a set of new, positive attitudes coexisted with the old, negative attitudes—clearly, an unstable situation in which changing circumstances and glitches in the relationship could bring the old attitudes into salience and cause them to reemerge in full force. This is precisely the kind of situation in which great analytic leverage can be gained from separating the positive and negative evaluations of the attitude object (cf. Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994), rather than thinking about an attitude as a single point on a bipolar scale.

## The Limitations of the Oslo Agreement

The major structural limitation of the Oslo agreement, which put the new relationship to a severe test, was its lack of an explicit commitment to a two-state solution as the endpoint of negotiations. I argued earlier that one of the building stones of the Oslo agreement was the idea that there is a mutually acceptable formula for a two-state solution that meets both sides' needs and that could be successfully negotiated. Indeed, it was generally understood that the logic of the Oslo agreement called for a two-state solution, as a historic compromise that would put an end to the conflict. Yet the parties were not ready to make an explicit commitment to that endpoint and hence to the finality of the agreement. Instead, they left the final decision to be taken after the end of an interim period, during which Palestinian control over the occupied territories would gradually be extended and final-status negotiations would be undertaken.

In my view, this was the best outcome that the Oslo talks could have achieved at that point. I believe that both the Israeli prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, and the chairman of the PLO, Yasser Arafat, had made a strategic decision to end the conflict with a two-state solution. Rabin, however, was not ready to commit to that solution. He wanted an interim period, both to mobilize public support for the major concessions that a two-state solution would require and to assure himself that an independent Palestinian state would not threaten Israel's security. It should be noted that Rabin had previously been a proponent of the Jordanian option: He was quite prepared to withdraw from the occupied territories but wanted to return the West Bank to Jordan, because he viewed a Palestinian state in that area as a security threat.

In the absence of a firm Israeli commitment to a Palestinian state as the endpoint of the negotiations, Arafat, on his part, was not prepared to commit to the finality of an agreement whose terms remained unknown. However, he too, in my assessment, had made a strategic decision to end the conflict with a two-state solution. Moreover, he probably saw the interim period as an opportunity to improve the realities on the ground and thereby gain public support for the concessions that would have to be made in the final-status negotiations.

Under the circumstances, given the lack of an explicit commitment to an outcome, it is not unlikely that the two leaders withheld a final psychological commitment to the two-state solution. Political leaders (and others) often avoid final commitments until they absolutely have to make them. But I do not agree with the cynical view that either Rabin or Arafat entered into the process and signed the agreement with the intention of subverting it. On the other hand, both Rabin and Arafat did maintain reserve options as fallback positions, in the event the arrangements and negotiations stipulated for the interim period did not work out as they had hoped. On the Israeli side, the reserve option was to resume control over the Palestinian territories; on the Palestinian side, it was to resume the armed struggle.

The maintenance of these reserve options is consistent with the nature of the attitude change, described earlier, that made the Oslo talks and their outcome possible: the development of new, positive attitudes, *alongside* of the old, negative attitudes, rather than in place of the old attitudes. In this vein, Rabin and Arafat did indeed develop new attitudes toward each other, attitudes conducive to a personal relationship between the two leaders characterized by significant elements of partnership and working trust. However, in the absence of a firm commitment to the endpoint of the negotiations, the fear and distrust of the other side's ultimate intentions made it necessary for them to maintain reserve options as fallback positions if, in the end, the other side failed to live up to its promises.

Unfortunately, these fallback positions were not just passive mental reservations; they led to policy choices and actions with serious, damaging consequences for the peace process. To maintain the viability of the reserve options, both sides took actions on the ground that undermined the peace process and poisoned the atmosphere for negotiations, and both sides failed to take actions that could have advanced the process and improved the atmosphere. Thus, Israel continued to consolidate its control over the territories through border closings, expansion of settlements, confiscation of land, building of access roads for exclusive Israeli use, and maintaining a military presence. The Palestinian Authority (PA), on its part, built up military capacity—both troops and weapons—beyond the levels stipulated in the Oslo agreement, and continued to keep the struggle alive through vilification and delegitimization of Israel in the schools and the media. These actions contributed to a decline in mutual trust, rather than the gradual increase in trust that was part of the logic of the interim agreement.

The lack of an explicit commitment to a two-state solution or the end of the conflict and the resulting maintenance of reserve options also had damaging consequences at the level of public education. The leaders spoke about their commitment to peace in vague, general terms. Being unprepared, however, to commit concretely to the intended outcome of the negotiations, they failed to offer a positive vision of the future based on a historic compromise between the two peoples and acknowledgment of each other's nationhood and humanity. They failed to educate the publics about the costs and benefits of the two-state solution. Thus, they did not spell out for their respective publics that, for example, the Israeli project of building and expanding settlements in the occupied territories or the Palestinian expectation of large-scale return of refugees to their original homes inside Israel were inconsistent with the logic of the two-state solution.

I see no reason to suggest that the actions on the ground and the failures in public education in the aftermath of the Oslo agreement were deliberately designed to undermine the agreement. Rather, they were the unintended consequences of the reserve options in action. The interim agreement with its accompanying reserve options was probably, as proposed above, the best that could be achieved in Oslo, because the parties were simply not ready to commit at that point to the two-state solution or the end of the conflict. Under the circumstances, their choice was between an interim agreement and no agreement at all. What is unfortunate is that there was insufficient awareness and analysis of the consequences of the failure to commit to an endpoint and hence little, if any, systematic effort to control and mitigate these consequences.

## The Dynamics of the Interim Period

I mentioned above that in an existential conflict between identity groups—such as the Israeli–Palestinian case—any peace process creates an approach–avoidance conflict at both the societal and the individual levels. The Oslo accord explicitly set a peace process into motion, calling for further negotiations of interim agreements to be followed by the negotiation of final-status issues and ultimately by a final agreement. The limitations of the Oslo agreement, epitomized by the reserve options, had a distinct effect on the way in which the approach–avoidance dynamics played themselves out in the interim period.

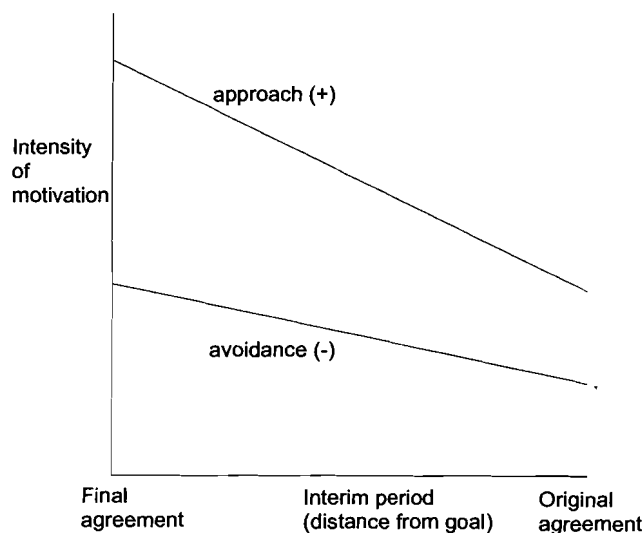
The stated goal of the interim period was the achievement of a final-status agreement. I propose that over the course of such a period, both the approach gradient and the avoidance gradient are likely to rise in the two societies as they move closer to the goal: At the societal level, the doves should become increasingly enthusiastic and the hawks increasingly desperate the closer the society gets to the final agreement; at the individual level, people are likely to become both increasingly enthusiastic in anticipation of the future prospects of peace and increasingly anxious as they move toward a point of no return. The critical issue for the success of the peace process is which gradient will be steeper—which will rise more sharply and

thus come to outweigh the other in determining the public mood.

The logic of the Oslo accord stipulated a best-case scenario, as depicted in Figure 1. The expectation was that over the course of the interim period, conditions on the ground would improve for both peoples, providing greater freedom, dignity, and economic well-being for Palestinians and greater security and international/regional legitimacy for Israel. Mutually beneficial relationships would develop, to which people would become increasingly committed. Mutual trust would grow; people would increasingly feel reassured that a final peace agreement would not jeopardize their national existence and would feel reluctant to give up the gains already achieved. The pro-peace elements would become relatively stronger within each society, and hope would tend to outweigh fear within each individual. All told, the approach gradient would rise more sharply than the avoidance gradient at both societal and individual levels, and there would be more widespread readiness within each society to make the compromises necessary for a final agreement.

Alas, in fact, what actually happened more closely resembled the worst-case scenario, as depicted in Figure 2. Even under the best of circumstances, movement toward a final-status agreement would have confronted powerful obstacles. The settlements in the occupied territories made it virtually impossible to create a viable Palestinian state without generating a massive internal conflict within Israeli society. The effort to shape mutually acceptable formulas for resolving the deeply emotional issues of the right of return of Palestinian refugees and sovereignty over Jerusalem—issues central to both sides' national narratives and issues that the Oslo accord left to the final-status negotia-

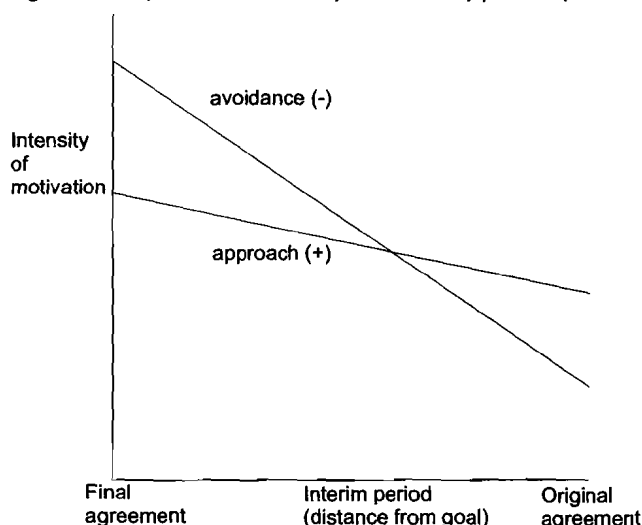
**Figure 1**  
*Best-Case Scenario for Movement to a Final-Status Agreement (Approach Steeper Than Avoidance)*





**Figure 2**

*Worst-Case Scenario for Movement to a Final-Status Agreement (Avoidance Steeper Than Approach)*



tions—would have aroused existential fears and popular resistance on both sides. The fanatical opponents of a compromise solution would have tried to derail the peace process through dramatic acts of violence—such as the Palestinian suicide bombings, the 1994 massacre of 29 Palestinians in Hebron, or the 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish extremist. But the limitations of the Oslo accord and the reserve options in action, as discussed in the preceding section, contributed to the relative strength and influence of the anti-peace elements.

As a consequence, the avoidance gradient rose more sharply than the approach gradient over the course of the interim period. Conditions on the ground worsened over time, with deterioration in internal security for Israelis and in economic well-being and freedom of movement for Palestinians. The level of mutual trust and hope for the future declined. The opponents of the Oslo accord were partly validated in the eyes of the two publics, and the extremist and maximalist elements on both sides gained strength. All told, the perceived cost of the concessions required for a final-status agreement and the fear of signing such an agreement when there was little trust in the ultimate intentions of the other side came to outweigh the hope that the Oslo process had initially instilled.

Although the limitations of the Oslo agreement and the dynamics of the interim period worked against the peace process from the start, there were serious efforts to fulfill the terms of the interim agreement and to move toward final-status negotiations. Overcoming the obstacles to the process was made more difficult by limited awareness of the approach-avoidance dynamics and by insufficiently creative and visionary leadership. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 was a major blow to

the process because he and Yasser Arafat—as already mentioned—had developed a personal partnership and working trust, which unfortunately was not transmitted to their populations. It is quite conceivable that had Rabin lived, he and Arafat might have succeeded in bringing the process to successful completion with a two-state agreement. As it happened, the process lingered on, gained some new momentum during the premiership of Ehud Barak (1999–2001), and finally collapsed with the failure of the Camp David summit and the onset of the second *intifada* in 2000. The breakdown of the negotiations brought out the reserve options in full force: In effect, the Palestinians resumed the armed struggle, and Israel resumed control in the occupied territories. The old negative attitudes, which, as I argued, had not been entirely replaced by the Oslo process, now reemerged and became salient.

## The Emergence of Clashing Narratives

The failure of the Camp David summit was not inevitable. Despite the deteriorating situation on the ground, many of the elements of a final-status agreement were beginning to fall into place. Each side has blamed the other for deliberately undermining the summit because it did not want a compromise solution, but the evidence shows that Israeli, Palestinian, as well as American misjudgments and mistakes all contributed to the collapse of the talks (see, e.g., Pressman, 2003b; S. Shamir & Maddy-Weitzman, 2005). Furthermore, negotiations continued after the failure at Camp David, and by January 2001, at the last negotiating session in Taba, Egypt, the gap between the two sides had narrowed considerably, and several of the issues that had led to the impasse at Camp David seemed close to resolution. By that time, however, the second *intifada* had broken out, Israel had responded harshly, and a process of escalating violence was well under way (Pressman, 2003a). Moreover, the U.S. administration had changed hands, and Israel was getting ready for new elections. There was no mood for continuing negotiations.

With the breakdown of negotiations and the escalation of violence, the lessons that had made the Oslo agreement possible were rapidly unlearned and replaced by clashing narratives on the two sides, with a powerful escalatory dynamic. According to the Israeli narrative, which is also widely shared among U.S. observers, the Camp David summit served to reveal the true intentions of Arafat and the Palestinians: Barak made a very generous offer at Camp David, giving Palestinians virtually everything they had asked for. Still, Arafat rejected it. He called for the right of return of Palestinian refugees to Israel, which would be tantamount to the destruction of Israel. Moreover, the narrative continues, he went back home to initiate the second *intifada*. Clearly, he did not want to compromise and never did. His goal remained the destruction of Israel. Under the circumstances, according to this narrative, to ensure its existence, Israel had no alternative but to respond with violent force—the only language “they” understand.

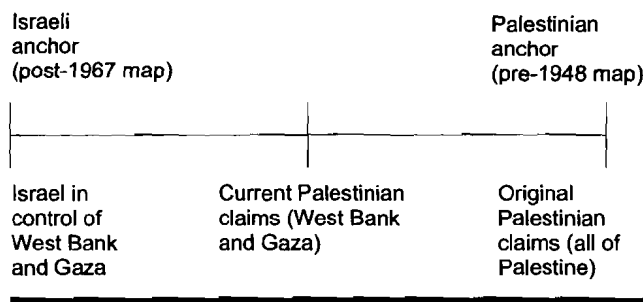


According to the Palestinian narrative, the Camp David summit served to confirm Israel's continuing intention to dominate the Palestinian people: The PLO, in the Oslo accord (and before that in the 1988 meeting of the Palestine National Council), had offered a historic compromise by accepting an independent state alongside of Israel, one comprising only 22% of pre-1948 mandatory Palestine, all of which Palestinians had claimed in the past. Israel, according to this narrative, used these Palestinian concessions to consolidate the occupation, and at Camp David, it tried to force Palestinians to legitimize the continuation of Israeli control. In effect, Israel was asking Palestinians to make further compromises on the major compromise that they had already made. Thus, Israel demonstrated that it does not want to compromise and never did. Under the circumstances, the narrative concludes, to achieve an independent state, Palestinians have no alternative but to use violent force—the only language “they” understand.

Although historically rooted, these clashing narratives also reflect the use of different anchors in judging each side's performance at Camp David. Thus, Israelis consider Barak's offer at Camp David to be generous because they compare it with prior Israeli offers (see Figure 3). Barak did, indeed, show considerable movement, offering more—particularly on the issue of Jerusalem—than any previous Israeli prime minister had offered to the Palestinians. Palestinians, by contrast, judge his offer by how close it came to Palestinians' minimal demands. From that perspective, Barak's offer was far from generous. Certainly, in their view, it did not give them virtually everything they had asked for—as was, indeed, confirmed by the fact that in the Taba negotiations, the Israeli offer moved considerably closer to meeting Palestinians' demands.

Similarly, the two narratives use different anchors in judging Palestinians' readiness to compromise (see Figure 4). From the Palestinian perspective, the demand for the entire West Bank and Gaza represents a highly significant compromise, when compared with the anchor they use in their judgment: Their starting point is their original claim to 100% of the territory of mandatory Palestine within its borders prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948. From that starting point, in their view, they have moved dramatically in accepting a state in the West Bank and Gaza,

**Figure 4**  
Anchors for Judging the Evidence of Palestinian Compromise



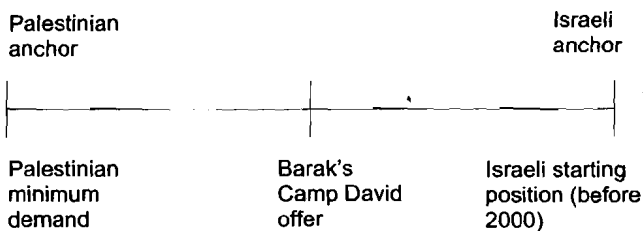
which constitutes a mere 22% of the land they originally claimed. From the Israeli perspective, by contrast, the negotiations are not about pre-1948 Palestine but are about the West Bank and Gaza, which have been under Israeli control since 1967. With that situation as their anchor, Israelis view Palestinians' claim to 100% of the West Bank and Gaza as unwillingness to compromise at all. Given these different anchors, the territorial compromises that Israelis expect from Palestinians as an indicator of negotiating in good faith are seen by Palestinians as a demand for compromising the compromise.

The two sides' clashing narratives constitute classical *mirror images* in their respective views of the enemy and the self (cf. Bronfenbrenner, 1961; White, 1965). In the wake of the failure of the Camp David summit and the outbreak of the *intifada*, each side has reverted to the old images of the inherently aggressive enemy and the righteous, conciliatory, and defensive self. The effect of this mirror image process is exacerbated by the historic view that the other is bent on annihilating one's own nation—politically, if not physically—and by the profound sense of existential threat that accompanies this view. The combination of aggressive enemy images and righteous self-images creates self-fulfilling prophecies with an escalatory dynamic (Kelman, 1997c).

The mirror images reflected in the clashing narratives play into the hands of those elements within the two societies that have opposed the peace process from the beginning and whose worldview now seems to be vindicated by the latest developments. What is observed is a merging of aggressive and defensive violence, which together contribute to steepening the avoidance gradient generated by movement toward a peace agreement (see the earlier discussion of the dynamics of the interim period). As in the earlier discussion of the approach-avoidance conflict that accompanies a peace process, the fusion of aggressive and defensive violence in response to a breakdown in the process can be observed at both the societal and the individual level.

At the societal level, one can distinguish—at the risk of oversimplification—between those elements in each so-

**Figure 3**  
Anchors for Judging the Significance of Ehud Barak's Offer at the Camp David Summit



ciety that are willing to use violent means to defeat the other (to the point of "transferring" Palestinians across the border or "driving Israelis into the sea") and those elements that are open to a peaceful accommodation but are prepared to use violence when they feel threatened by the other. A peace process is likely to increase both the aggressiveness of the extremists, for whom it represents a threat to their ultimate goal of prevailing in the conflict, and the defensiveness of the moderates, for whom it represents a calculated existential risk. With the failure of the peace process, the emergence of clashing narratives, and the re-emergence of the old mirror images, the moderates' defensiveness merges with the extremists' aggressiveness. Although the moderates do not necessarily accept the extremists' worldview (and public opinion data suggest they do not, as I argue later), they give active or tacit support to violent responses and often allow the extremists to control the political agenda.

At the individual level, one can see why the simple distinction between the aggressive extremists and the defensive moderates does not fully capture the complexity of a population's reaction to an existential threat. I propose that propensities for reacting to the other side both aggressively and defensively are present in both groups, although perhaps expressed to different degrees and in different forms. Key elements in the aggressiveness of the extremists are defensive: the feeling that their way of life is being threatened and the pervasive sense of victimization (which is not necessarily related to the current enemy). On the other hand, a key element in the defensiveness of the moderates is aggressive, in that they too find the existence of the other side at least inconvenient to their own national cause: In an existential conflict, by definition, the claims of the other to the same land complicate, attenuate, and threaten one's own claims, so that even moderates may harbor, at some level, the wish that the other did not exist. Moderates are prepared to accommodate to the existence and the claims of the other, but a situation of severe threat may activate the aggressive undertone. Thus, when circumstances bring the aggressive and defensive orientations together, as they did with the breakdown of the peace process, they reinforce each other and provide a powerful basis for violent response.

In short, the clashing narratives and associated mirror images that have come to dominate the Israeli-Palestinian relationship since the end of 2000 have had dangerous consequences. The reemergence on both sides of the conviction that the other is intent on destroying them and the reemergence of the historic sense of victimization provide self-righteous justifications for dehumanization of the other, extreme forms of violence, and gross violations of human rights. The increasing violence has confirmed and reinforced the negative attitudes of each side toward the other, which—as I have argued—were not displaced by the Oslo agreement and the peace process. The rupture in negotiations as of early 2001 further reduced the opportunities for changing the hostile attitudes, in keeping with the old autistic hostility hypothesis (Newcomb, 1947). According to this hypothesis, interpersonal hostility tends to be

self-reinforcing because people are inclined to avoid association and communication with people they dislike, and in consequence, they are deprived of the opportunity to acquire new information that might lead to revisions in the initial hostile attitudes. In this vein, the lack of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in recent years has greatly reduced the possibilities for change, because the give-and-take of negotiations can bring into play the motivational and informational processes capable of eliciting positive attitudes. As a result of this chain of events, the two societies lost hope in the possibilities of a peaceful solution, and the conflict reverted to its earlier state of seeming intractability.

## Public Opinion and the Availability of a Negotiating Partner

Not only have the dominant clashing narratives of the two sides and their associated mirror images had dangerous consequences, but they have also been deeply flawed in their description and assessment of reality. There are different perspectives on what went wrong, both between and within the two sides (S. Shamir & Maddy-Weitzman, 2005). Neither of the clashing narratives provides a complete and accurate picture of what actually happened at the Camp David summit and in the subsequent negotiations (see, e.g., Pressman, 2003b)—although in Pressman's (2003b) assessment, "the evidence suggests that the Palestinian narrative of the 2000–01 peace talks is significantly more accurate than the Israeli narrative" (p. 37). Similarly, neither narrative provides a complete and accurate account of the events that led up to the outbreak of the second *intifada* (Pressman, 2003a).

Beyond that, both narratives are flawed in their assessment of what the failure of the Camp David summit and the outbreak of the *intifada* signified and in the conclusions they draw from these events. Most important, the two narratives negate one of the key building stones of the Oslo agreement by concluding that there is no credible negotiating partner on the other side. According to the Israeli narrative, the events proved that the Palestinians, under the leadership of Arafat, were still committed to the ultimate destruction of Israel. According to the Palestinian narrative, the events proved that Israel was committed to maintaining permanent control over the West Bank and Gaza and was, in effect, asking the Palestinians to legitimize continuation of the occupation.

The evidence from the actions of important political figures and from public opinion surveys suggests that there were in fact (and continue to be) credible negotiating partners and a readiness to compromise on both sides. At the official level, as already noted, the negotiations continued for some months after the failure of the Camp David summit. Both sides offered significant compromises over the course of these negotiations. The wide gaps that divided them at the end of the Camp David summit had considerably narrowed by the end of the Taba negotiations in January 2001. At the level of civil society, two initiatives were launched in 2003 that effectively challenged the narratives claiming that there is no negotiating partner on the

other side ready to accept a mutually satisfactory two-state solution: The People's Voice initiative (Ayalon–Nusseibeh Statement of Principles, 2003) and the Geneva initiative (Geneva Accord, 2004). The latter was spearheaded by Yasser Abed Rabbo and Yossi Beilin, former ministers in the PA and the Israeli government, respectively, and leading participants in the negotiations that ended in Taba. These initiatives illustrate the possibility of formulating an agreement acceptable to influential members of the main-streams in both communities.

At the level of public opinion, surveys have consistently shown—ever since the breakdown of negotiations—that clear majorities on both sides support a negotiated two-state solution and are ready to make many of the compromises it would require (see, e.g., Shikaki, 2006b). A joint Israeli–Palestinian poll conducted in December 2004, one month after the death of Yasser Arafat, showed an increase in the size of the majorities supporting a two-state solution in both societies. Moreover, sizable majorities in this poll endorsed mutual recognition of the national identities of the two states after an agreement is reached: 70% of Israeli and 63% of Palestinian respondents accepted the concept of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and Palestine as the state of the Palestinian people (*Joint Palestinian–Israeli Public Opinion Poll*, 2005). These data show, incidentally, that there has been a significant shift away from the zero-sum view of identity and the systematic denial of the national identity of the other. As noted above, however, there are still powerful minorities within each society who hold on to this view, and even within the same individual, the degree of acceptance of the other's identity fluctuates as a function of changing circumstances.

Although public opinion data thus support the availability of a negotiating partner on both sides, they also reveal an interesting anomaly. Majorities of varying sizes over the years of the second *intifada* have supported acts of violence against the other side, including suicide attacks on the Palestinian side and violent repressive tactics (such as targeted assassinations) on the Israeli side. The anomaly is resolved when one considers the two sides' clashing narratives, with their mirror images of one's own side as wanting peace and ready to compromise and the other side as unwilling to accept a two-state solution. Indeed, J. Shamir and Shikaki (2005), who posed the same set of survey questions to Israeli and Palestinian samples, found that both sides, in mirror-image fashion, underestimated the extent of support for a two-state solution on the other side. They also found, incidentally, that both sets of respondents underestimated the extent of public support for a two-state solution on their own side—a classic example of pluralistic ignorance.

The support for violence by majorities in both publics thus seems to reflect the merging of aggressive and defensive violence discussed earlier in this article. Many of the supporters of violence are, indeed, as the dominant narratives maintain, in favor of negotiating a peaceful compromise. However, in the perceived absence of a negotiating partner on the other side, they have concluded that violence is the only alternative left to them in the face of an impla-

cable enemy—the only effective way to resist the Israeli occupation or to defend Israeli society against terrorist attacks. Thus, for example, three quarters of Palestinian survey respondents supported the suicide attacks of October 2003 and September 2004, and support for Islamic factions (particularly Hamas) doubled during the period of the second *intifada* (Shikaki, 2006b). On the Israeli side, Ariel Sharon was elected and re-elected during those years largely because he was seen as willing to respond aggressively to Palestinian violence, and indeed his aggressive responses received wide public support. However, support for violence in the years of the *intifada* did not necessarily coincide with opposition to a peace process. Many Israeli supporters of Sharon and Palestinian supporters of Hamas continued to favor a two-state solution and a return to negotiations—if a partner were to become available. In summary, the key to tapping each public's readiness to return to the negotiating table is to rebuild its trust in the availability of a credible negotiating partner on the other side.

## Recent Developments

Recent developments in Israel and the Palestinian territories confirm the duality and complexity of public opinion. The Palestinian presidential elections at the beginning of 2005, after the death of Arafat, handed a decisive victory to Mahmoud Abbas, who had been vocal in his criticism of violence and in his call for an end to the *intifada* and a return to the negotiating table. From all indications, a sizable majority voted for him in large part because they favored a return to negotiations and saw him as the candidate most ready and able to move in that direction. Unfortunately, over the course of the year following his electoral victory, he was not able to show the public much success on this or other counts. Conditions on the ground and the quality of life did not improve. The territories continued to be plagued by unemployment, poverty, corruption, and lawlessness. Israel did little to strengthen Abbas's hand by easing the checkpoints and other burdens of the occupation, by ending confiscation of Palestinian land, or by freeing Palestinian prisoners. Above all, Israel did not enter into negotiations with Abbas on the grounds that he had failed to take steps to disarm Hamas and other terrorist organizations. He probably failed to do so for a combination of reasons: a lack of the required military capacity, a reluctance to risk a civil war, and a preference for bringing Hamas into the political process. As a consequence, however, he received no credit from the Palestinian public for Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gaza in August 2005. Instead, more than two thirds of Palestinians viewed the disengagement as a victory for Hamas and armed resistance—although there was no corresponding increase in support for violence against Israeli civilians (see Shikaki, 2006b, p. 9).

What happened and failed to happen in 2005 no doubt played an important role in Hamas's victory in the parliamentary elections of January 2006, which further reduced the likelihood of an early return to final-status negotiations. It is important, however, to put this victory into perspec-

tive, particularly with regard to what it tells us about Palestinian public opinion. First, only some 40% of the electorate actually voted for Hamas and Hamas candidates, but this translated into 56% of the seats in parliament because half of the candidates were chosen from district lists, on which Hamas presented only a single candidate for each seat, whereas there were multiple Fatah and other non-Hamas candidates on each list who split the votes among them (Baskin, 2006). Second, votes for Hamas were largely based on issues other than the public's position on the peace process, particularly corruption and law and order—issues on which the public was highly critical of the performance of the Fatah-led PA (Shikaki, 2006a). Third, and most important for present purposes, polls showed that even among Hamas voters, a majority supported the peace process.

In the absence of a negotiating process and of prospects for the resumption of negotiations, a population that favored—and continues to favor—a negotiated two-state solution empowered a party that, as a matter of principle, opposes such a compromise. It should be noted, however, that the movement was in both directions, in that Hamas moderated its positions in a number of respects. It accepted a cease-fire early in 2005 and had, in fact, refrained from attacks against Israeli targets until the summer of 2006. It decided to participate in parliamentary elections, which it had rejected in the past because these elections and the PA itself are creatures of the Oslo accord, to which Hamas has been opposed. Some elements of Hamas's internal leadership (as distinguished from the leadership based in Damascus, Syria) have indicated a readiness to accept a long-term truce between Israel and a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza—without, however, recognizing Israel's right to exist and without agreeing to give up its long-term goal of an Islamic Palestinian state in the entire land or its right to engage in armed resistance. This formula is not acceptable to Israel—or indeed to the Palestinian majority, which prefers a negotiated end to the conflict—but it does represent a step toward moderation.

Similar dynamics can be observed on the Israeli side. Although a majority has consistently favored a negotiated two-state solution, it has also elected and supported Ariel Sharon, despite his opposition to negotiations and compromise. The majority elected Sharon because they became convinced that there was no negotiating partner on the other side and therefore preferred a leader who was tough-minded about national security and the fight against terrorism. However, in the Israeli case, as in the Palestinian case, there was movement in both directions. Sharon moved to the center in accepting the need to dismantle some settlements, to withdraw from some of the occupied territories, and to accept the concept of a Palestinian state—albeit a state that would fall considerably short of the minimal requirements of any Palestinian negotiators (cf. Shavit, 2006). In line with his new ideas, Sharon carried through the unilateral disengagement from Gaza, despite vehement opposition from many of his former allies in the settlement movement and on the Israeli right, including his own party,

the Likud. Ultimately, he left the Likud to form a new centrist party, Kadima.

The moderate majority in the Israeli public strongly supported the Gaza disengagement, not only because it was perceived as a move in the direction of ending the conflict, but also because it was a unilateral step. Sharon preferred a unilateral approach because he wanted to maintain control over the terms and process of the disengagement. For his moderate supporters, unilateralism was seen as a necessity because they did not believe that there was a credible negotiating partner on the Palestinian side. Although most Israelis believed that Abbas—in contrast to Arafat—had the will to negotiate a compromise, they did not believe that he had the capacity to do so. They also came to endorse Sharon's approach because "they wanted the inevitable withdrawal from the territories to be carried out with caution, moderation, and a sense of strength—without euphoria or illusions" (Shavit, 2006, p. 61). Sharon's unilateralism responded to both aspects of the public mood—the desire to solve the conflict and the distrust of the other side—by taking action that did not require trust. Kadima, Sharon's new party, quickly captured the center of the political spectrum in Israel.

Sharon's departure from the scene after his stroke and incapacitation has again changed the political landscape. The acting prime minister, Ehud Olmert, headed the Kadima ticket in the new elections at the end of March 2006 on a platform calling for unilateral disengagement from parts of the West Bank. The plan called for dismantlement of some of the Israeli settlements, completion of the separation barrier that Israel had been building in and around the West Bank, and ultimately drawing permanent borders—unilaterally, if necessary—between Israel and a Palestinian state. Kadima won a plurality of the votes in the elections and has governed since in coalition with the Labor Party and some smaller parties, leaving Likud and other right-wing parties in the opposition. The results of the election confirmed the Israeli public's readiness to pursue a two-state solution but skepticism about negotiations as a promising means to that end.

Subsequent statements by Olmert and his foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, suggest that they may be more open to negotiations and prepared to withdraw from larger portions of the West Bank than Sharon had been. Not surprisingly, however, they have made it clear that they will not negotiate with a Hamas-led government unless it recognizes Israel's right to exist and renounces violence. These conditions have been supported by a large majority of the Israeli population, as well as by the United States and other elements of the international community. It seems unlikely that Hamas will accept these conditions in the near term, because they are inconsistent with key tenets of its ideology. On the other hand, Hamas may be willing—perhaps even eager—to have Mahmoud Abbas negotiate in his capacity as president of the PA or chairman of the PLO, which actually signed the Oslo accords and is the negotiating partner designated in these accords. There are various scenarios under which negotiations might proceed even with the Palestinian government under Hamas control (see,

e.g., Segal, 2006, for an interesting proposal of a referendum-based peace process). In fact, in the spring and early summer of 2006, internal negotiations within the Palestinian leadership were actively seeking to develop a formula that would produce a Palestinian negotiating partner acceptable to Israel.

These potentially promising developments in an otherwise unpromising environment came to an abrupt (and probably intentional) halt with the escalation of violence, first on the border between Israel and Gaza at the end of June 2006 and then on the border between Israel and Lebanon. The brutal war between Hezbollah and Israeli forces virtually pushed the Israeli-Palestinian issue off the international agenda. Now (at the end of August 2006) that a tenuous cease-fire is in place, Israeli and Palestinian leaders—with the active engagement of the international community—will have to give renewed attention to the possibilities for resolving the conflict through negotiation. Life in Gaza and the West Bank has become increasingly intolerable; the sense of security of the Israeli public has strongly declined in the wake of the war with Hezbollah; and the ramifications of the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian (as well as Israeli-Syrian) conflict for regional stability have become ever more apparent.

Yet, an early return to the negotiating table seems even less likely now than before. Mahmoud Abbas has been weakened, while Hamas has been strengthened by recent events, which will probably reinforce the Israeli view that there is no negotiating partner on the Palestinian side. At the same time, Kadima's plan of unilateral disengagement, which contemplated withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlers from some 90% of the West Bank to the other side of the security barrier, is now off the public and political agenda in Israel—at least for the moment. In my view, there is no humanly and politically acceptable alternative now to renewed negotiations—if not permanent-status negotiations, then at least negotiation of immediate issues that would help to stop violence, prevent escalation, enhance the populations' security, improve the quality of their lives, and create the atmosphere and habits conducive to the negotiation of a final peace agreement.

## Reviving the Peace Process

Sharon's unilateralism, for the reasons indicated, captured the Israeli public mood. The Hamas electoral victory reinforced that mood. Hamas, in turn, has been committed to pursuing its own unilateralist track, though it might find it difficult to carry it through (Salem, 2006). Unilateralism, however, was never a viable option. The security barrier provides a good illustration of the limits and dangers of unilateralism. It has created humiliation and serious hardships for the Palestinian population and has signaled Israeli intentions to annex significant portions of the West Bank in its unilateral disengagement plan. The barrier did help prevent suicide attacks, although it could have served that purpose equally well if it had been built along the green line (i.e., the pre-1967 border between Israel and the West Bank, recognized by the United Nations). In any event, the

recent missile attacks in Israel's northern and southern regions serve as a reminder of the limits of walls and fences in providing for security.

All in all, unilateralism cannot achieve a stable, long-term peace between the two peoples in the small land within which they must ultimately learn to coexist. A negotiated solution has a far greater potential for producing a stable, mutually acceptable outcome because (a) it is more likely to address the needs and concerns of both parties, (b) it gives the parties a sense of ownership and thus creates greater commitment to the outcome, and (c) the negotiation process itself begins to build the new relationship on which a sustainable peace must rest. It is essential, therefore, to hold on to the goal of returning to the negotiating table, rather than reverting to a unilateralist policy, despite the low probability at the moment of an early resumption of permanent-status talks. The road to negotiation has to be kept open and elements of negotiation—even if they are only partial, rudimentary, or indirect—should be built into any ongoing process wherever possible.

If the idea of a negotiated two-state solution is to be kept alive and pursued in the present unfavorable climate, it will be necessary for the proponents of this view—within government as well as civil society—to mobilize public support for it. Such efforts have to take full account of the duality of public opinion discussed above. Majorities of both publics are well aware of the necessity of ending the conflict and have thus consistently supported a two-state solution. However, they are not convinced of the possibility of negotiating such a solution, given their distrust in the ultimate intentions of the other side and their lack of hope for achieving an acceptable outcome.

The civil-society initiatives launched in 2003 (Ayalon-Nusseibeh Statement of Principles, 2003; Geneva Accord, 2004) went a long way toward demonstrating the availability of potential negotiating partners and the possibility of developing a mutually acceptable formula for a two-state solution. Yet, even though majorities of the two publics accepted most of the terms of these initiatives, they did not embrace them wholeheartedly. Above all, large segments of the two publics rejected the proposed solutions to two key issues: the right of return of Palestinian refugees and sovereignty over Jerusalem's holy places. The pragmatic approach of these documents—which was essential and indeed made them possible—did not address the existential concerns of the two publics raised by these issues. People were asked to make painful concessions on emotion-laden issues, central to their national identities and narratives, at a time when they had serious doubts about the ultimate intentions of the other side. They were afraid that the compromises agreed to by the other side were just convenient temporary maneuvers in anticipation of resuming the quest for total victory at a later point.

In the case of the Geneva Accord (2004), these concerns were exacerbated by the way in which some of its proponents presented it to their respective publics. Understandably, each side emphasized to its own constituencies how favorable the accord was to their own interests and

how much the other side had conceded. But when these messages were heard on the other side, they reinforced the prevailing distrust. For example, when Israelis told their public that in signing the accord, Palestinians had in effect given up the right of return of refugees, and Palestinians told their public that they had not done so, both publics may have come to feel that this was a bad deal or, at least, that there was enough ambiguity to allow the other side to exploit the agreement to their own side's disadvantage.

What is needed at this juncture to garner widespread support for peace proposals and for the resumption of negotiations based on such proposals are messages that address the two publics' fears, sense of loss, and despair about the future—messages that reassure them and capture their imaginations. In terms of the approach–avoidance conflict that characterizes the peace process, such messages need to reverse the strength of approach and avoidance gradients—to lower and flatten the avoidance gradient and to raise and steepen the approach gradient—at the societal and individual levels on each side, without having the opposite effect on the other side's public. To that end, the messages need to be crafted jointly by members of the two communities, or at least in close coordination with one another. Together such messages could help to reduce fear and build mutual trust, to lessen the pain associated with concessions by stressing the fairness and mutual gains of the proposed peace agreement, and to replace uncertainty and suspicion with hope for a better common future.

The messages I envision here need to go beyond the terms of an agreement that is potentially acceptable to both sides. The broad outlines of these terms are by now well known: They follow, more or less, the lines of the Clinton points of December 2000 and the Geneva initiative of November 2003, although many of the details and the language in which solutions are formulated—particularly on the issues of refugees and Jerusalem—remain to be negotiated. Furthermore, majorities of both publics are prepared, with some reservations, to support an agreement along these lines—if they trusted the other side to live up to it. To reassure the publics and motivate them to support negotiations toward such an agreement requires a new framework for the peace process. Specifically, I propose that ideas for a peace agreement be framed in terms of a *principled peace*—a peace that represents not just the best available deal, but a *historic compromise* that meets the basic needs of both societies, validates the core of the national identity of each people, and conforms to the requirements of attainable justice. A peace agreement can be perceived and presented as principled insofar as it transcends the balance of power and seeks to balance the two sides' competing demands for justice. Common messages framing an agreement along these lines need to be jointly constructed and brought to both populations to ensure that proponents avoid working at cross-purposes as they seek to mobilize their own constituencies. Such a framework might feature three central elements (Kelman, 2005).

## **1. Acknowledgment of the Other's Nationhood and Humanity**

Acknowledging the other's nationhood requires explicit recognition of each people's right to national self-determination in a state of its own, acceptance of each other's authentic links to the land, and rejection of language that denies the other people's political legitimacy and historic authenticity. In essence, this amounts to an acknowledgment of the historical reality that the land—in its entirety—belongs to the two peoples.

Acknowledging the other's humanity requires words and actions demonstrating that the lives, welfare, and dignity of those on the other side are considered to be as valuable as one's own. In this spirit, it is necessary to reject acts of violence, especially against civilian populations; all forms of humiliation, harassment, destruction of property, confiscation of land, violation of rights, and dehumanizing treatment; and language of hate, denigration, and dehumanization. A corollary of such acknowledgments is willingness to take responsibility and express regret for the suffering the two peoples have caused and the harm they have done to each other in the pursuit of their national aspirations.

## **2. Affirmation of the Meaning and Logic of a Historic Compromise**

The agreement needs to be clearly framed as a commitment to ending the conflict by sharing the land to which both peoples are deeply attached through the establishment and peaceful coexistence of two states, in which the two peoples can (a) fulfill their respective rights to national self-determination, (b) give political expression to their national identities, and (c) pursue independent, secure, and prosperous national lives. The idea of a historic compromise flows from two realities: that both peoples make historic claims to the same land and have linked their national aspirations to it and that military means cannot solve the resulting conflict or achieve either people's long-term goals. In making exclusive claims and using military means, the two sides have succeeded only in imposing mutual pain on each other. The concept of a historic compromise is based on the proposition that both peoples must be enabled to fulfill their national aspirations in this land. It goes beyond a compromise achieved through power bargaining (even though the terms of a final agreement will not be entirely independent of the balance of power and will require some pragmatic give-and-take), because at its core it represents a principled peace, based on a fair solution that addresses the fundamental needs of both sides. A principled peace would not give either side all that it wishes, but it would be a peace that both sides could perceive as a positive outcome because it would provide the best balance between their competing legitimate claims.

The underlying logic of the historic compromise, which calls for two independent, viable states in which the two peoples can give expression to their respective national aspirations, has implications for the final agreement, which must be clearly spelled out in terms of its costs and bene-



fits. The logic of the historic compromise imposes significant, painful costs on each side—such as the removal of Israeli settlements from the Palestinian state, limitations on the return of Palestinian refugees to Israel, and the need for both sides to give up claims to exclusive sovereignty over Jerusalem or its holy places—in order to safeguard the identity, independence, and viability of both states. But these adjustments in the national narratives, which relate to some of the most sensitive existential issues, are not just painful concessions made to achieve a deal. They are necessary features of a historic compromise, which is of great value to both sides because it allows each people—through its independent state—to fulfill its national identity, to satisfy its fundamental needs, and to achieve a measure of justice in the shared land.

### **3. A Positive Vision of a Common Future for the Two Peoples in the Land to Which Both Are Attached and That They Have Agreed to Share**

Mutual commitment to a historic compromise offers the two peoples the opportunity and hope for a better future for the two states and societies. This opportunity is expressed in a vision that contemplates a secure and prosperous existence for each society, mutually beneficial cooperation in various spheres between the two societies, regional development, and stable peace and ultimate reconciliation. A vision drawn from a historic compromise can extend not only to each people in its own state, but also to the shared land in its entirety. Such a vision would be consistent with the historic links and emotional attachment of each people to the entire land, as well as with the inevitable interdependence of the two states and societies in the small geographical space they share. In articulating this vision, leaders could take pride in offering a model that could inspire future generations. Conceivably, over time the two peoples might develop a transcendent identity (alongside of their separate national identities), an identity based on the distinction between country and state: Each group could maintain an attachment to and identification with the entire country—as a geographical focus for both historic memory and current cooperative activity—while claiming ownership of and statehood in only part of that country.

In summary, a framework that features the three elements outlined here advocates a historic compromise as both a principled solution to the conflict and a vision of a better common future. This compromise presents the only fair solution under the conditions in which the two peoples find themselves and a basis for hope that they can create a peaceful and mutually enhancing relationship in the shared land. The three elements, independently and in combination, help to offer reassurance to both publics and hence build trust in the availability of a credible negotiating partner on the other side. In acknowledging each other's nationhood and humanity, affirming commitment to a historic compromise, and articulating a vision of a common future in the shared land—and in doing so openly and jointly—leaders on the two sides clearly demonstrate to

each other's public their commitment to negotiating a mutually acceptable agreement that would end the conflict.

A new framework for the peace process along the lines I have outlined may help to provide the breakthrough necessary to bring the parties back to the negotiating table in the current atmosphere of heightened grievance, mistrust, and hopelessness. Explicit acknowledgment of each other's national identity and aspirations would counter the fear that a negotiated compromise would be just a convenient temporary measure by the other side in anticipation of resuming the struggle for total victory at a later point. Moreover, the proposed formulation could provide a logic for the concessions each side would have to make in a final agreement—especially with respect to refugees, Jerusalem, and settlements—by showing that these concessions are necessary for a mutually beneficial historic compromise and are not just the result of power bargaining. Formulating an agreement in these terms would shift the focus from the painfulness of the concessions to the positive prospect of a fair and mutually satisfactory solution on which a vision of a better future for both peoples and the country they share can be built.

As I have stressed throughout, to be maximally effective, the content and wording of such a formulation must be worked out jointly by thoughtful, credible representatives of the two societies at the civil-society level initially and eventually at the official level. This requires an interactive process, such as the interactive problem solving facilitated in the problem-solving workshops organized by my colleagues and myself, to make sure that the formulation adequately addresses the needs and sensitivities of both sides and that features designed to reassure one side do not threaten the other. Choosing the right words that are fully responsive to both sides is a delicate task that can be pursued only in an interactive context.

The essence of the framework outlined here is mutual acknowledgment of the identity of the other and willingness to accommodate it. This amounts to some revision in both sides' national narratives—at least to the extent of eliminating from their own identities the negation of the other and the claim of exclusivity. In effect, it calls for a process of *negotiating identity* (Kelman, 1992, 1997b, 2001), which interactive problem solving can facilitate. The needed revisions in identity become possible only if “they leave the core of each group's identity and national narrative—its sense of peoplehood, its attachment to the land, its commitment to the national language, welfare, and way of life—intact” (Kelman, 2001, p. 210). Thus, the key to effective negotiation of identity is to find ways of accommodating the two groups' conflicting identities without jeopardizing the core of their separate identities. This can be accomplished only in a context of reciprocity, in which acceptance of the other occurs simultaneously with acceptance by the other. Change in a more peripheral element of identity thus becomes a vehicle for affirmation of the core of the identity. Through a process of interactive problem solving, the parties can shape the precise language of the new framework and its component elements to make sure



that it says what the other side needs to hear without threatening the core of each side's own identity.

At the microlevel, the formulation of a principled peace, underlying a historic compromise, can be seen as an effort to promote attitude change that moves beyond identification toward internalization (Kelman, 1961, 2006). It is designed not merely to develop new attitudes toward the other alongside of the old ones, but to encourage a restructuring of people's attitude framework in order to accommodate a new view of the other while maintaining the integrity of the original framework.

At the macrolevel, the ideas that such a formulation would inject into the political thinking of the societies can be seen as a step toward reconciliation (Kelman, 2004, 2006). Reconciliation, of course, is a process extending over a long period of time, much of which can take place only after a political agreement has been negotiated. Yet it is often the case that significant steps toward reconciliation must take place in order to enable the parties to conclude a political agreement. The Oslo agreement, by way of the two letters of mutual recognition, represented a rudimentary step toward reconciliation, in which the parties acknowledged each other's right to political existence. To move the process forward in the current phase of the conflict, it is necessary to take a further step toward reconciliation through mutual acknowledgment of the other's national identity and authentic links to the land. This can, of course, occur only in a fully reciprocal context, in which each side's own collective identity is affirmed as it, in turn, acknowledges the identity of the other.

The elements of a principled peace that I have outlined may help to provide the breakthrough needed at this time to reassure and energize the Israeli and Palestinian publics. Positive expectations for the future, built on mutual acknowledgment, could begin to compensate the two populations for the losses inevitably entailed by a historic compromise. The mutual acknowledgment might enable them to build toward a new, transcendent identity alongside of their national identities, such that *sharing* the land would not be perceived as *losing* the land. Now is the time when taking a step beyond pragmatism—by offering a principled peace, some movement toward reconciliation, and a vision of a better common future for the two peoples in the land they share—may well be the most realistic option available to the political leaderships.

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