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ZIONIST ISRAEL AND THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE

JEWISH STATEHOOD AND THE HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT

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This book is dedicated to a dear friend and mentor
Professor Hans Mommsen (1930–2015)

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Introduction

Israel is a product of Zionism. The Jewish state originates in Jewish nationalism that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in Europe. In the course of the secularization and formation of national states that was taking place in Western Europe, the religiously hued, old Christian hatred towards Jews assumed racist features, turning into virulent anti-Semitism. At the same time, efforts to achieve real emancipation for European Jews were failing. Consequently, as new approaches to a resolution seemed to be called for, the Jewish people themselves took up the "Jewish question."

Theodor Herzl's 1896 pamphlet *The Jewish State* (*Der Judenstaat)* was followed in 1897 by the First Zionist Congress in Basel. With the founding of the World Zionist Organization the political goal was promptly proclaimed: the establishment of a Jewish state for the Jewish people outside of Europe. The hostility towards Jewish life in Europe turned into the Zionist principle of the "negation of the diaspora," with Zionist-motivated Jewish emigration starting as early as 1882, first from Eastern and later also from Western Europe. And it was the old-new land of Israel – *Eretz Israel* – that in the beginning of the twentieth century was chosen as the appropriate territory.

Half a century later – but only after millions of European Jews had been murdered by Germany's Nazi regime – the Jewish national movement won an important victory in the proclamation of the Jewish state. Apart from 1945, the year 1948 represents the decisive turning point in contemporary Jewish history. With the founding of Israel so soon after the Shoah, the Zionist project in *Eretz Israel* appeared to be a matter of bitter urgency. More than anything else, the extermination of the intended citizens of the to-be-founded Jewish state solidified Zionism as the ultimate answer to the "Jewish question," not only among Jews but also on the international political-diplomatic stage.

These two historical momentums set into motion a historic process, namely the nationalization of the Jews in the second half of the twentieth century. Jewish national statehood was established as a manifest way of life, with political sovereignty and military strength becoming the cornerstones of the new Jewish-Israeli self-image. To wit, in the Zionist understanding of history, national statehood is seen as the normal state of the to-be-nationalized Jewish people – a state that needs to be actively fought for. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the Jewish self-concept has a markedly Zionist orientation: *Eretz Israel* is in Jewish hands, the majority of the Jewish people live in the old-new country, and the Jewish nation state is the *reason d'être* of Israeli polity.

But Zionist Israel is neither a self-evident nor a natural state of affairs. Israel does not have an internationally accepted state territory, a large part of the coun-

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try's population is made up of non-Jews, and above all it has been in nothing less than a permanent state of war from the very time of its proclamation. The conflict over Palestine and its escalation into an irresolvable regional problem has deeply impacted Israeli nationalism. The fight for national statehood is *de facto* still continuing, thus dominating the policy, society, military and political culture of Israel. And so "security" has become a key code of Israeli society.

The history of Israel may be mapped in terms of this tension between, on the one hand, the perception of national statehood as a Jewish way of life to which there is really no alternative and, on the other hand, the given conditions for the realization of the Zionist project. The history of the Zionist undertaking is characterized by the conflict between Zionist self-image in *Eretz Israel* and the reality in Palestine, the place where that self-image is lived. This is where the key to understanding Israel's history and the Middle East conflict may be found.

In this book, I am addressing the following questions: How did Zionist Israel come into existence? What does the Zionist ideology, which forms the basis for the Israeli state, actually imply, and what does it mean for the realization of Zionism in a *de facto* bi-national Palestine? What kind of political order has emerged over the years in the face of this discrepancy between the prevailing notion of the state and the demographic and geopolitical reality? And also: How can political culture, the relationship between the state, politics, military and society in Israel, be characterized?

This book comprises five thematic clusters, in the first of which I discuss the origin and ideology of Zionism. From there, in the second section, I go on to examine the view of the enemy that has emerged in the course of Israeli history, taking a closer look at the way the opponent, who is identified as nemesis, is treated. A third chapter addresses Israeli democracy, and especially the dichotomy present in the self-imposed standard according to which the Israeli state can be not only "Jewish" but also "democratic." The subject matter of my account is the demographical contradiction between a Jewish state in *Eretz Israel* and the bi-national reality in Palestine. As well it covers the meaning for Israeli democracy of a political culture that has been so strongly shaped by security-political aspects in the course of its historical development. The key question is whether Israeli democracy can be sustained in the face of a permanent state of war.

The subsequent fourth part explores the role and significance of war in the creation and consolidation of Jewish national statehood. Here, the reasons for and also the form and understanding of military action as an indispensable instrument for ensuring the security and national statehood of Israel are investigated with a view to their consequences. And finally, the fifth chapter deals with the question of whether a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict is compatible with Israel's reason of state. In other words, is Zionist Israel actually capable of reconciling with its neighbors?

For it is especially with regard to the old-Zionist question of Palestine – which is, however, still being denied in the political culture of the country – that today's political Israel stands with its back against the wall. As the pressure from the international community to resolve the problems of state and international law by political means is dramatically increasing, the country is poised in its traditional position of obstinate defiance. This "destructive" ethos calls for an explanation. It may be found in the history of Zionist Israel that is related in this book – in a way that is critical without being accusing, differentiated without seeking to expose, and sober without being detached.

The present volume is a translation of a research book that was published in 2012 with the German Publisher Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn. The strong responses and excellent reviews it received in the academic world as well as from the general public suggested its great interest also for an international audience, and thus the present translation now makes it accessible to the global readership.

My very special thanks go to the remarkable devoted translators and editors of this volume: Olga Thierbach-McLean, Ph.D. and Aram McLean.

1 Zionism and the Ideology of the Jewish State

The Jewish Diaspora and its Negation

Zionism emerged in Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century with the defined goal of terminating the “abnormal” political situation of the Jewish diaspora, that is, statelessness of the Jews, and of creating a mode of collective life based on a national state. Arising from the emergency situation posed by an increasingly rampant racist anti-Semitism in Europe, Jewish nationalism was funneled into a movement, with the “negation of the diaspora” forming the core of its ideology and the starting point of its politics. Thus, Shimon Peres (1923–2016), a Zionist statesman and Israeli politician of many years who himself was born in an Eastern European shtetl and emigrated to Palestine as an adolescent, described the Jewish diaspora from the vantage point of an already achieved national statehood:

> [...], a famous Jewish philosopher by the name of Yankelewitz said once that Jewish life in the diaspora was similar to a voyage in a subway – you travel underground, you don’t see the scenery, and nobody sees you in the train. It’s only now, in modern times, that Jewish life is being conducted as if it were a voyage in a bus; you can see from within the outside scenery, and you can see from the outside that people are sitting in the bus. A *shtetl* in many ways was the subway of Jewish life; it was totally disconnected from the outside world. Let’s have a good look at it – I mean, in a way, it was a dream and in a way it was a pleasure. It was a pleasure because it was disconnected from the rest of life. It wasn’t a normal place to live. And a dream because we weren’t living there mentally. Our hearts were in Israel. The *shtetl* was like a passing station.[1]

Two thousand years of Jewish diaspora as a historical transitional phase to the long awaited “normal” form of the national state? Apart from this Zionist one, there are various other Jewish interpretations of the diaspora. For instance, in his 1931 essay *Diaspora,* the Jewish historian Simon Dubnow (1860–1941) points out that from the *religious* perspective, the diaspora is considered to be *God’s punishment*: “The hope for a return to Zion and for the coming of the Messiah has always remained alive in the hearts of Orthodox Jews and has constituted one of the thirteen tenets of Jewish religion as formulated by Maimonides.” In response to the resignation that was setting in after more than two thousand years of futile waiting for the return to Zion, Jews “have found solace in the idea that the diaspora was not God’s curse, but rather His blessing [of the Jewish people].” In this

1 Peres and Littell 1998: 3–4.

context, Dubnow quotes an explanation put forward by the medieval Torah commentator Rashi who argues that the diaspora is a blessing in consideration of the fact that a scattered people cannot be completely exterminated at the same time. At least under the religious aspect, a universally beneficent effect is ascribed to the Jews' way of life as a "scattered people": "God did not 'scatter' the Jews, but sowed them among the peoples like seeds from which the true world religion of monotheism would grow."[2]

The diverging perspectives on life in the diaspora have all found their way into Jewish political movements. The modern Jewish reform movement or religious liberalism accepts assimilation, i.e., the absorption into the majority population, as something to which there is no alternative, thus embracing life in exile as a kind of universal task. Then there were the so-called diaspora nationalists who held that neither the assimilation nor the categorical rejection of the diaspora offered a solution. As they saw it, Jewish identity and national autonomy were being preserved just as well in the diaspora, namely by their own cultural institutions and organized communities on the one hand and assimilation to the new political and cultural environment on the other. By contrast, the Zionists deemed the diaspora a way of life that is dangerous for Jews and Jewish identity, since they saw assimilation and the consequential deracination as the inevitable result of the ever-present fierce anti-Semitism. By taking the political approach of radically rejecting the diaspora, Zionists brought to life "the messianic teachings in a modernized political form."[3] On this point, the Israeli historian Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin (1958–) offers the observation that

> 'negation of exile' refers to the consciousness that deems the present Jewish settlement in, and sovereignty over, Palestine as the 'return' of the Jews to the land believed to be their home, and imagined, prior to its 'redemption,' as empty. The negation of exile appeared to be the 'fulfillment' of Jewish history and the realization of Jewish prayers and messianic expectations. According to this perspective, the cultural framework that the Zionists wished to actualize and uncover was the 'authentic,' original Jewish culture, as opposed to the exilic culture, described in blatant orientalist terms as stagnant, unproductive, and irrational.[4]

Further, Raz-Krakotzkin points out that Zionist-Israeli historians such as Yitzhak Baer (1888–1980), Chaim Hillel Ben-Sasson (1914–1977), Gershom Scholem (1897–1982), Ben-Zion Dinur (1884–1973) – all of whom played a central role in the cre-

2 Dubnow 1931/2003: 176–177.

3 Ibid.

4 Raz-Krakotzkin 2005: 167.

ation and shaping of a Zionist national history –, although they do expound the problems of the complex national and territorial definition of the Jewish collective in the Zionist historical narrative, still maintain that not only did the general "negation of exile" not call into question Zionist historiography, but that it actually firmly embedded it in Zionist culture as its very basis. In doing so, the Israeli present is interpreted as the "fulfillment of Jewish history": Jewish exile culture is seen as the reflection of the "spirit of the nation" and the history of exile as an integral part of a specifically Jewish national and territorial master narrative.

As is also noted by the American sociologist Rogers Brubaker (1956–), "nearly every nationalist historiography is of a teleological nature: History is read in terms of its outcome, it culminates in the nation state independence. This redemptive point of culmination can either be projected into the future – as a state that has to be fought for – or can be celebrated as something that has already become reality."[5]

According to the Zionist-Israeli political scientist Shlomo Avineri (1933–), for example, the Zionist way of life represents a "progression." To him, the Jewish national statehood has a moral-normative significance. Israel epitomizes the "public of the Jewish people" by taking over the role of the traditional religious-communal diaspora centers that used to be responsible for the preservation of "collective Judaism." In the face of modernization and secularization processes, and hence the increasing assimilation of Jews into their respective society, the Jewish state is attributed a normative function, namely the preservation of the "collective existence of the Jewish people." Avineri stresses that the state is not to be seen as a substitute for Jewish religion, since the latter already has a deeply collectively-existentialist meaning for the faithful. Rather, it represents an adequate response to the danger posed by the assimilation that is brought in the wake of the increasing secularization of Jewish life: "Only the Jewish state, and not religion, can serve as a common denominator [...] for all the heterogeneous factors of Jewish existence."[6]

This approach, in which the core of Jewish identity is shifted from religion towards nationalism, is naturally rejected by the Jewish orthodoxy. From the very beginning, the majority in the orthodox camp staunchly opposed Zionism and the idea that any "redemption of the Jews" can be brought about by the efforts of men. A radical religious anti-Zionist movement, the *Neturei Karta*, which champions the dissolution of the State of Israel, dismisses Theodor Herzl's idea of the termination of the diaspora as a violation of divine law. The Torah

5 Brubaker 2002: 218–219.
6 Avineri 1999: 251–252.

> forbids [the Jews] to leave the diaspora of their own accord and found a state before God brings final salvation to His people and to the entire world [...]. 2,000 years ago, God sent the Jewish people into exile (diaspora), and it is also by God that they will be redeemed from it. Until then, they must be patient, faithful and loyal to their host peoples, wherever divine fate has cast them. This also extends to the Palestinians who live in the Holy Land of Palestine according to divine will. This is unambiguously recorded in written form in the Torah and by the prophets.[7]

Here, the categorical rejection of a Jewish state and of a cessation of the diaspora is derived from an orthodox interpretation of Jewish religion. In a stance that is in opposition to the religiously motivated anti-Zionist Judaism, the anti-religious movement of the *Canaanites* proposes a new concept of a Hebrew state. This movement, which was founded by Yonatan Ratosh (1908–1981) and was active in the founding period, first and foremost aspired to the integration of the new state into the culture of the Middle East, which would entail the total separation of the Jews living in Palestine from Jewish history and thus from the diaspora Jews.[8]

But also the less radical, not necessarily anti-Zionist religious Jews were occupied by the question as to what extent Israel as the Jewish state can really draw on Jewish tradition and religion, or in how far Israel can represent the Jewish people in the way envisioned by Avineri. The orthodox Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–1994), a resolute advocate of the separation of state and religion, aims his criticism not so much at the existence of the Jewish state but rather at the usurpation of the Jewish people and the instrumentalization of Jewish religion and tradition for Zionist purposes. As Leibowitz wrote in 1954:

> The State of Israel does not dare disclose the true nature of its spirit, which is a rebellion against the religious tradition of the Jewish nation. It cannot afford to be sincere because the atheistic state at present does not know any other origin or any other source other than the historic Jewish nation on which it could draw. The only way for the state to justify its existence and create an ideological fundament is by falling back on Jewish history and tradition. For this reason, this secular state is constantly forced to use symbols and terms of traditional Judaism – in education as well as in propaganda, internally and externally – although the meaning and content of these symbols and terms is of a religious nature. [...] The effects on public morality are fatal: By utilizing wordings, names and symbols depleted of their religious meaning, all values are destroyed and hypocrisy, cynicism and nihilism are promoted.[9]

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7 http://www.nkusa.org/Foreign_Language/German/062504ViennaGerman.cfm.
8 Brenner 2002: 90.
9 Leibowitz 1954/1997: 39.

There is a current in Jewish thought, however, which is positioned between secular Zionism and religious a-Zionism or anti-Zionism in which the two momentums – the religious and the national one – are not only considered not contradictory, but even jointly form the bedrock for the movement's agitation. That is religious Zionism, which shares the same basic idea with secular Zionism: namely the negation of the diaspora and the assumption that the creation of a Jewish national state is the only sustainable way of Jewish life. In contrast to the Orthodox Jews, the early religious Zionists did not construe secular Zionism and its goal of settling the Holy Land to be blasphemous in any way. Rather, they effectively reconciled Jewish religion and national statehood by bringing questions of culture and education center stage in their movement while shifting the more controversial messianic dimension of Jewish Orthodoxy into the background.

Initially, the establishment of a religious state in keeping with the Jewish *Halacha* law did not constitute a stated goal of religious Zionism. Only later, influenced in the 1920s by the Jewish mystic Abraham Isaac Kook HaCohen (1865–1935), did religious Zionism take on messianic features. These became manifest after the Six-Day War of 1967, and formed the ideological basis for the national-religious settlement movement *Gush Emunim* (Hebrew for "block of the faithful") that was founded in 1974. It considered the creation of a secular Jewish state an indispensable step on the way to "messianic redemption." Especially following the events of 1967, *Gush Emunim* and its advocates in the Knesset knew how to effectively rope in the state apparatus for their goal of promoting Jewish settlement in the Holy Land.[10] It has to be stressed here, however, that when it comes to the ideology of the "Judaization of the land of the forefathers," there is barely any difference between religious and secular Zionism. This may explain the settlement policies adopted over the years by the various Zionist-oriented Israeli governments. The implementation of the Zionist project in *Eretz Israel* is the work of Zionist Israel, with Jewish nationalism asserting itself in the course of the second half of the twentieth century as the central Jewish line of thought.

On Nationalism

Emerging as a reaction to anti-Semitism and the persecution of Jews in Europe, Zionism was ultimately inspired by European nationalism. Nationalism – and hence conceptions of nation, nationality and sense of national identity – has occupied thinkers of Romanticism since the middle of the nineteenth century.

10 Zertal and Eldar 2004; Hagemann 2010.

From the early 1980s on, the so-called "premoderns" dominated scientific understanding of nations and nationalism. They perceived nations as quasi-natural units which have been developing since the Middle Ages, so that the first nations were able to "blossom and fully unfold in an organic growth process."[11]

The second assumption relates to the right of a nation to its own state. It is from this premise that the right of self-determination of peoples, as evoked by Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924) and Vladimir I. Lenin (1870–1924), was derived after the First World War. Thirdly, it was assumed that each nation has its own system of ideas and values which justifies the respective nation's existence and which can be referred to as national consciousness, patriotism or national sentiment. And fourthly, this understanding of the nation infers the existence of a predefined political and linguistic "national foundation" that provides an ideational "superstructure" in the form of nationalism.[12]

More recent studies on nationalism distance themselves from these fundamental assumptions. Instead, they draw on the constructivist idea according to which historical phenomena can be interpreted as constructs of the human mind.[13] Max Weber (1864–1920) was the first scholar to understand nationalism as a historic-ideological phenomenon with a clearly definable beginning as well as a possible end. Weber radically contested the basic attitudes towards nationalism and nations that were prevailing in his own time. In doing so, he opened up the possibilities of new, modern research on nationalism that is based on the understanding of a nation as a utopian concept or "imagined order."[14]

In the words of the sociologist Ernest Gellner (1925–1995): "It is nationalism which engenders nations, and not the other way around."[15] For the British historian Eric J. Hobsbawm (1917–2012) "no serious historian [...] can be a committed political nationalist [...] Nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so. [...] Historians are professionally obliged not to get it [history] wrong, or at least to make an effort not to."[16]

But how is this comment to be understood? Does it mean that nationalism does not really exist? Here one should keep in mind that just like "other people" historians, too, are "trapped" inside their specific historical epochs and perform their work within specific social, political and cultural structures. Accordingly,

11 Wehler 2007: 7.

12 Ibid. 8.

13 Cf. i.a. Gellner 1983; Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm,1983; id. 1992.

14 Wehler 2007: 9.

15 Quoted from Wehler 2007: 9.

16 Hobsbawm 1992: 12–13.

societies shaped by nationalism tend to "produce" nationalistically oriented historians. This is also true for other great ideologies. When it comes to Jewish nationalism, Israel and the Jewish-Israeli society are steeped in Zionism, just as are most of its historians. They write their history from their own, that is, *authentic*, perspective. This fact has to be acknowledged, even if the approaches they take may not appeal to non-Zionist or anti-Zionist readers, or are even completely misunderstood by them. A historian cannot ignore the ideological constellation of the figures he or she researches and seeks to understand, even if not sharing their ideology.

As for Hobsbawm, he enquires into the attraction that nationalism exerts on the population at large. Why is it that nationalism enjoyed and continues to enjoy such an enormous degree of popularity? Where does the actual source for this responsiveness to national ideas reside? For herein lies the weakness of the constructivist view; it barely offers any answers to the question regarding the ready absorption of nationalism by the broad population, which in turn allows the inference that nationalism is not a completely foreign, "constructed" element and hence not something that is entirely "invented." Instead, it has to be a phenomenon that is fed from an already existing reservoir of cultural and political perceptions and notions.

It is this idea that the British sociologist Anthony D. Smith (1939–) focuses on in his studies of nationalism. Smith is the main proponent of the older conventional approach, which is highly significant for Zionist historiography. According to Smith, nationalism appeals to a deeply ingrained human need to belong to a group. The term "ethnic groups" plays a central role here, as it takes on the function of an essential unit. The nation, notes Smith, has endured across all historic, economic and social developments since archaic times. Smith provides several criteria for identifying ethnic groups: the name of the group, the common myth of its origins, the actual common history and obviously a common culture, the connection to a commonly shared territory as well as the existence of a feeling of solidarity towards the group.[17]

Viewed in this light, nationalism is explained as a survival strategy of the ethnic group against the threats that are posed to the group's continued existence by the oncoming modern era. As Smith sees it, although processes of the ethnic group's politization and secularization, of territorialization and of the appearance of modern elites play an important role in all nationalisms, the ethnic roots are not to be neglected in a historical analysis of nationalism. According to him, this historic development of nationalism was based on the fact of a commonly

17 Smith 1991: 170; id. 1986.

shared past, even if the nations' historical narrative may be subject to manipulation or may be re-interpreted in a more flattering manner in the process.[18]

Thinkers and Critics of Zionism

Already early on, the initial, decidedly secular and assimilated thinkers of Zionism such as Moshe Hess (1812–1875) and Theodor Herzl (1860–1904) recognized the necessity of a "secular religion" for the Jews. When faced with a growing racist anti-Semitism, these thinkers realized that the legal emancipation and assimilation of Western European Jews as initiated in the nineteenth century had failed. The Hungarian Jew Theodor Herzl referred to this problem in his work *The Jewish State,* which was published 1896:

> The Jewish question still exists. It would be foolish to deny it. It is a remnant of the Middle Ages, which civilized nations do not even yet seem able to shake off, try as they will. They certainly showed a generous desire to do so when they emancipated us. The Jewish question exists wherever Jews live in perceptible numbers. Where it does not exist, it is carried by Jews in the course of their migrations[19]

Disappointed by unsuccessful attempts at assimilation and in a fatalistic state of mind, Herzl developed a new understanding of the "Jewish question":

> I think the Jewish question is no more a social than a religious one, notwithstanding that it sometimes takes these and other forms. It is a national question, which can only be solved by making it a political world-question to be discussed and settled by the civilized nations of the world in council. We are a people – one *people*.[20]

Herzl's main idea was to remedy the precarious situation of European Jews that resulted from racist anti-Semitism by creating a politically sovereign state outside of Europe. What was eventually aimed for was a complete termination of life in the diaspora through a massive emigration of European Jews to their new national "homestead." What essentially distinguished Zionism from other national mindscapes of its time was the fact its definition of the nation was neither connected to a unified territory nor to a common language. Rather, by the end of the nineteenth

18 Wehler 2007: 36–37.
19 Herzl 1896; http://www.math.ias.edu/~boaz/JewishState/herzl1.html: Translated from the German by Sylvie D'Avigdor. This edition was published in 1946 by the American Zionist Emergency Council.
20 Ibid.

century, the integration factor for the Jewish national movement consisted in the sense of being under threat and of sharing a religious background.

But Herzl's postulate of the radical cessation of life in the diaspora by means of a politically-nationalistically hued Zionism encountered a competitor from another Zionist school of thought. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Achad Ha'am (1856–1927), who was from Odessa, the metropole of an enlightened and secular Eastern European Judaism, voiced his skepticism with regard to the goal defined by Herzl in his Political Zionism. He harbored doubts over whether a categorical negation of the diaspora was right or, for that matter, even practicable. In his view, the creation of a Jewish state could neither solve the Jewish question nor put an end to life in the diaspora.

What was possible in Achad Ha'am's opinion, though, was a gradual settlement by a small part of the Jewish people who would build up the national basis and "national culture." This, thought Ha'am, would be the proper preparation for the "return of Judaism into history." Committed to the historical-cultural spirit of nineteenth century Romanticism in which the nation state was understood to be the pinnacle in the historical development of a nation's cultural resources, Achad Ha'am saw the revitalization and the unfolding of Hebrew national culture in *Eretz Israel* as a necessary preliminary stage on the path to statehood:

> It needs not an independent State, but only the creation in its native land of conditions favourable to its development: a good-sized settlement of Jews working *without hindrance* in every branch of culture, from agriculture and handicrafts to science and literature. This Jewish settlement, which will be a gradual growth, will become in course of time the centre of the nation, wherein its spirit will find pure expression and develop in all its aspects up to the highest degree of perfection of which it is capable. Then from this centre the spirit of Judaism will go forth to the great circumference, to all the communities of the Diaspora, and will breathe new life into them and preserve their unity; and when our national culture in Palestine has attained that level, we may be confident that it will produce men in the country who will be able, on a favourable opportunity, to establish a State which will be a Jewish State, and not merely a State of Jews.[21]

Achad Ha'am left a lasting mark on Cultural Zionism that primarily consisted in reviving the *volksgeist*, the "spirit of Judaism" and creating a Hebrew culture. The creation of a state was intended to be a long-term "natural" development that was not to be forced. Ha'am's main criticism of Herzl's Zionism was aimed at the issue of the "Jewishness" of the Jewish state that was to be brought into being by means of diplomatic efforts with the Great Powers.

21 Quoted from Avineri 1999: 135.

As Achad Ha'am, who wrote in Hebrew, asked himself: In how far can one speak of a national Hebrew culture if, as Herzl had expounded in what would be referred to as the "cosmopolitan national concept"[22] contained in *The Old New Land* (*Altneuland,* 1902), Jews would speak the language of their countries of origin, found a German theater, or build an Italian opera in their utopian state in *Eretz Israel*? The goal of Cultural Zionism was a spiritual and cultural Renaissance of Judaism, which gave rise to the question as to what the contents of the finally-to-be-founded Jewish state, and also the role of and the relationship to diaspora Judaism, should be. As for the latter, it was to be inspired in its Jewish identity through a cultural Renaissance in *Eretz Israel* and at the same time be strengthened in its Jewish existence. Cultural Zionism saw the strength of a Jewish state as residing in Hebrew culture, which means that statehood as an end in itself would ultimately be a threat to the Jewish state.[23]

Whether their Zionism took on a political or a spiritual-cultural form, both Zionist thinkers based their definition of the Jewish people on a secular conception of the nation. The Jewish people were perceived to be secular-national subjects in the context of a secular undertaking. Jewish religion as a confession played only a subordinate role in these Zionist utopias and notions as they appeared in the heterogeneous currents of the Zionist movement (revisionist, democratic, liberal, Marxist or socialist). In fact, the Jewish national movement originated in an anti-religious tradition that was carried by the spirit of the socialist and progressive influences of the nineteenth century. In certain phases it even took a decidedly hostile stance towards religion. The Zionist ideology, based on the negation of the diaspora, rejected the traditional-religious way of life of the Torah schools.

In turn, the religious orthodoxy subsequently opposed Zionist-activist aspiration to a Jewish state in the strongest terms from the very beginning; it adhered to the axiom that redemption is to be granted by God, not to be brought about by men. But in how far can Zionism be understood as a *secular* national movement? What is meant by the "Hebrew national culture" in the context of Judaism? Which role does the Jewish religion ultimately play in the Zionist national idea?

According to the Israeli-Marxist historian Moshe Zuckermann (1949–), a religious momentum was inherent in the Zionist nation-state movement from the outset. In contrast to the Western formation of national states, "Zionism […] in its very origins unfolded not in practice, but basically as an idea of a national state constituted within the context of a superstructure. The idea of a Jewish state existed before there was a territory for this Jewish state. The idea of a Jewish state

22 Brenner 2002: 49; Brenner 2016.

23 Avineri 1999: 131–144.

existed before the population who was supposed to inhabit that territory objectively existed as such."[24]

According to Zuckermann, all the ideological building blocks of Zionism – the negation of the diaspora, the creation of a "new Jew," the assembly of all diaspora communities on a territory that had to be conquered and cultivated, and the mixing of all these diaspora communities, so that the "new Jew" may arise from their midst as the future Israeli – are, in the final analysis, all based on a religious momentum. After all, the selection of *Eretz Israel* – in itself an appellation of the diaspora Jews that is charged with religious connotations – was a significant contradiction to the secular aspirations of Zionism from the start, considering the fact "that the formation of a nation state that was pre-shaped in a European-style, modern and therefore secular cast was based on a deeply religious momentum."[25]

After all, the ideological premise of the unpopulated territory stood in total contrast to the objective situation in Palestine. It was home to another collective, with whom Zionism and later also Israel had to fight for the land. This fight is ultimately justified on religious grounds: "Zionism laid claim to a modern national home, but what was invoked as the underlying ideological rationale was that historically it was Jewish land, land promised to the Jews."[26]

Thus, the national movement that is at bottom political in nature depends on the religious justification basis of a divine promise. Zuckermann also draws attention to another contradiction in Zionism, namely that the religious momentum functions as the only connective link between the different segments of the potential population of the to-be-constructed state nation, "for on closer consideration there is no connection whatsoever between the Baghdad merchant, the Polish carter, the German-Jewish Grunewald professor and the Yemeni cobbler."[27] They all have nothing in common besides their religion, whether they actually practice it or not.

Jewish religion constitutes the core of Israeli nationalism, which finds expression in the Israeli right of return for all Jews. This is true despite the fact that this basis does not have a superstructure that includes all Jews. That is to say, for the time being the Jews of Arab countries do not exist in the perspective of this Western-modernist Zionism, just as they fail to make an appearance in Herzl's vision. Neither the Baghdad merchant nor the Yemeni shoemaker is envisioned as a pillar of this new nation.

24 Zuckermann 2002: 37.
25 Ibid. 37.
26 Ibid. 40.
27 Ibid. 37.

Nevertheless, ethnicity is defined in religious terms in the realization of the Zionist project and determines the national self-image correspondingly. Seen from this angle, Zionism as a Western-secular "project of modernity" contains within itself a dialectic aspect: "Zionism is a project which on the one hand has considered the national state to be a constituent of the liberation of a people, but on the other hand has introduced into this very same constituent an element that is adverse to the concept of a civic nation."[28]

As a "project of modernity," Zionism, too, has the goal of liberating the Jewish people by means of national state formation, but in the course of this process the collective which is already present on the to-be-conquered and to-be-cultivated territory is simultaneously cast as "the other," the "enemy." In this way it is excluded from the national project, even as it is officially naturalized, albeit only partly and under restrictions. Being based on ethnically-religious aspects, the political-nationalist Zionism that ultimately carried the day ensured that Israeli nationalism developed a self-image based not on citizenship but on ethnicity. This tendency was also observed by the German-Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906–1975). As early as 1945 she detected the emerging apolitical and supra-historical conception of the Zionist community in Palestine that was informed by Herzl's Political Zionism:

> It is nothing else than the uncritical acceptance of German-inspired nationalism. This holds a nation to be an eternal organic body, the product of inevitable natural growth of inherent qualities; and it explains peoples, not in terms of political organizations, but in terms of biological superhuman personalities. In this conception European history is split up into the stories of unrelated organic bodies, and the grand French idea of the sovereignty of the people is perverted into the nationalist claims to autarchical existence. Zionism, closely tied up with that tradition of nationalist thinking, never bothered much about sovereignty of the people, which is the prerequisite for the formation of a nation, but wanted from the beginning that utopian nationalist independence.[29]

Arendt also pointed out the ideologically-utopian dimension in Herzl's *The Jewish State* which was fed by the desire to separate Jews from non-Jews as a response to a perpetual and fateful anti-Semitism, and which was also being projected on the situation in Palestine. According to Arendt, this separation principle defines the self-image and the practice of Zionism. In her opinion, this ahistorical or apolitical perception is as unrealistic as it is detrimental. To her, Herzl's vision of a radical withdrawal of the Jews from a world perceived to be hostile, and the flight

28 Ibid. 36.
29 Arendt 1945/1970: 241.

to a "land without a people" where Jews would be able to thrive as a closed-off national-ethnic group, safe from their persecutors, seemed unworldly and naive.

Arendt's point was not only that such an empty land does not actually exist. She also maintained that the political philosophy of Jewish isolationism is misguidedly apolitical in a world characterized by complex mutual dependencies between different nations and states. In her assessment, Jewish nationalism, which she termed "pan-Semitism"[30] in reference to anti-Semitism, meant nothing less than a withdrawal of the Jews from the world in the politically-pragmatic shape of founding a Jewish state. She could neither see a guaranty for taming anti-Semitism nor for the rescue of the Jews from the "outside world" in this course.[31]

For Arendt, in 1945, Jewish reclusiveness and withdrawal were illusionary, utopian. For Israel of the early twenty-first century, it is an already realized fact. Half a century after the state's founding, the outbreak of the Second Intifada in October 2000 and the failure of political attempts to resolve the conflict over Palestine are indicative of a historically grown, insidious alienation of Zionist Israel from "the world." This process is closely connected to the inability of Israeli politics to grapple with the discrepancy between a longed-for Zionist vision and the bi-national reality in Palestine *by political means*. What is meant here by the Zionist vision is the Israeli reason or definition of state which has been invoked since the state's founding, namely the notion of a Jewish and democratic state for the Jewish people in *Eretz Israel*. Since approximately half of the population living on this territory is non-Jewish, Israel's concept of state remains a myth. Yet the Zionist utopia continues to be imagined and strived for.

In his book *The Imaginary Voyage: With Theodor Herzl in Israel* (2000), Shimon Peres takes the founder of Political Zionism on an imaginary excursion through the country he had been envisioning, at the same time taking stock of the accomplishments and shortcomings of the Jewish state that has been in existence for five decades. In his closing paragraph, Peres describes in a rather poetic tone the Zionist vision of the reunification of the "lost people" from all parts of the world in a Jewish nation state, just as Herzl had dreamed of a century earlier:

> As night fell, a numberless crowd converged upon the shores of the lake. Joining us were the millions and millions who over the course of centuries have made up the Jewish people – generation upon generation upon generation. A nation is composed not only of those living in the present, but of those past and to come. In the crowd are the Zealots who lived in Palestine under Roman rule, the Essenes emerging from their sanctuary at Qumran, and the Sadducees allied with Rome; joining us are Flavius Joseph, the historian who won

30 Ibid. 236.
31 Ibid. 230–236.

> over Titus, and Rabbi Akiba ben Joseph, the bard of the Insurrection of 135; and the partisan of the Kahena, the Judeo-Berber queen of the Aurès, and the Marranos, who secretly celebrated Judaism in Quinto or in Buenos Aires; and the proud Champenois rabbis of the eleventh century, and the poets from the Spain of three religions; and the Jews from distant China, and those from Vichneva; and the *hāsīdh* disciples of Ba'al Shem Tov and the clever *mitnagdim* and the believers in neo-orthodox Samson Raphael Hirsch; and the inhabitants of the shtetlachs of Eastern Europe, the *mellahs* of Morocco, and the *harats* of Tunisia; and the proud aristocratic owners of private residences in Paris, London, Vienna, or Berlin; and the partisans for world revolution, and believers in assimilation; and the believers and the nonbelievers and the agnostics; those who proclaim their Judaism, and those who have forgotten their origins; and the survivors of the massacres of Worms, Trèves, Fez, and Sijilmassa during the Middle Ages, or the Warsaw ghetto in the modern age; and the uncountable victims of pogroms and of the Shoah; and the pious rabbis commenting forever on the Talmudic texts, and intellectuals absorbed by modernity and by new ideas.[32]

What becomes apparent here is that Peres' ethnicity-based understanding of the state in keeping with Israeli nationalism and the invocation of a strong feeling of belonging to a group – in the sense proposed by Smith – form the basis of his Zionism. Interestingly, Peres also counts potential and declared opponents of Jewish nationalism among those agents who have contributed to the historic path he delineates here. The criterion for belonging to the Jewish nation is defined in the ethnic-biological sense; it is something that is determined at birth.

For, it "matters little who they are and what they think," which is why Peres includes a range of widely different groups and historic constructs: "They were all gathered at this vesperal hour to listen to Herzl recite this passage from the Bible: 'If I forget you Jerusalem, may my right hand be severed'." Hence, the relationship of the Jewish people as a group to Jerusalem, to Zion, is evidently ahistorical as well as apolitical in nature. It is not relevant what kind of religious understanding or which political orientation these people have adopted; it hardly matters what kind of personal experiences or inclinations they have, or what *zeitgeist* the respective epoch was dominated by.

Instead, all of them form, be it consciously or unconsciously, the limbs of one single organism that is directed toward Zion and can experience its redemption only there: "For one timeless moment the world was still, suspended between the past, the present, and eternity. In the grace of that moment, all was finally order, calm, harmony, peace, prosperity, and happiness."[33]

32 Peres 2000: 197–198.

33 Ibid. 198.

2 Zionist Israel and its Enemies

Tranquility, harmony, peace, prosperity and happiness are hardly the attributes that spring to mind when it comes to Israel's political reality. So what or who is it that stands in the way of the Zionist vision? How does Israel define its opponents and how does it act towards them? From its very beginning, Jewish nationalism has had to grapple with the fact that the territory which it cast as the "land of the forefathers" was already settled by another collective; one that was granted no room at all in the Zionist vision. Instead, over time the "Arabs of *Eretz Israel*," as the non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine are referred to in Zionist jargon, turned out to be the true Achilles' heel of Zionist Israel. The so-called "Arab question" has been progressively shifting into the main focus of the Zionist movement since the beginning of the Zionist-motivated settlement of Palestine in the late nineteenth century.[1]

So in what manner did the *Yishuv* – the Jewish-Zionist community in Palestine prior to the founding of the state – treat the "Arabs of *Eretz Israel*"? What political stance toward the Palestinian collective did they deem to be most instrumental for their Zionist goals? The Zionist discourse in the *Yishuv* concerning this point was characterized by a wide gulf between the objective demographical situation as it existed up to the state's establishment, and the political goal of a state with a Jewish majority as it was championed by most Zionist parties.

With the establishment of the state and following the disastrous demographical and political consequences of the First Arab-Israeli War of 1948 – which resulted in the Palestinian Catastrophe (*Nakba* in Arabic) as well as the seizure of 78% of the territory of Palestine/*Eretz Israel* – the Arab question was eventually also extended to the neighboring Arab states. As five Arab armies intervened in the battle over Palestine in May of 1948 with the goal of thwarting the establishment of a Jewish state in the interests of the Palestinians, the local Palestine question turned into a regional conflict.

Then the Six-Day War of 1967 led to Israel seizing Palestinian territories, among other things, and marked a turning point in the conflicts' history. From the Israeli point of view, the Arab question, which had pertained to the entire region, now went back to being a local "Palestinian question," strictly limited to the occupied territories.

1 Gorny 1986.

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The Perception of the Orient by “Modern Western Israel”

Although the ideological roots of Zionism lie in Europe and its nationalistic and colonialist tradition, its actual realization took place in the Orient. The question of the relationship between the Arab-Palestinian and the Jewish collective is closely entwined with the tradition-steeped intellectual issues of the relations between Orient and Occident, Islam and Christianity. According to the historian Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, the orientalism thesis developed by the Palestinian-American literary scholar Edward W. Said (1935–2003) is indispensable for understanding the modern discourse of and about the Jewish people. One of Raz-Krakotzkin’s own studies on the Zionist discourse is based on this insight. In the “secularization” of the Jewish discourse as an aspect of the nationalization of Jewish life, he discerns a distancing from the old, religiously motivated Christian-Jewish polemics and, ensuing from there, a reformulation of the modern Jewish discourse in orientalist terms.[2] What Said had defined as orientalism is

> a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’ Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny, and so on.[3]

Said points out the historical rivalry between the two big religions, wherein a centuries-old image of Islam and the Arabs as “fanatical, violent, lecherous, irrational” is reinforced. Another aspect of this perception was the Western desire to exert political control over the Orient. Said speaks of a “polemical character of the knowledge about Islam and the Arabs, which developed in colonial times and led to what I refer to as Orientalism, a form of knowledge in which the study of the Other is strongly connected to the control and dominance of Europe and the West in general over the Islamic world.”[4]

In Raz-Krakotzkin’s view, the Zionist discourse was based on an orientalist conception from its very outset. He explains this by the historic process of Jewish nationalization:

2 Raz-Krakotzkin 2005: 162–163.
3 Said 1978/2009: 11.
4 Said and Barsamian 2003/2006: 111.

> Despite the Zionist rejection of 'assimilationist trends,' it can be read as an extreme expression of the desire to assimilate the Jews into the Western narrative of enlightenment and redemption. [...] Generally, Zionist thought, in spite of very important differences from assimilationist ideologies, did not challenge the dichotomy between Europe and the Orient; rather, it was based on the desire to assimilate into the West. [...] Zionists developed a range of attitudes toward the Orient and toward the Arabs, from romantic desire to a total denial; but all of them remained within the framework of orientalist dichotomy, and served to create the 'new Jew,' whom Zionism wished to define as a new European, and not an oriental.[5]

Consequently, an orientalist element is firmly established within the Zionist discourse. The "negation of exile" contained in itself the impulse of negating the "exile Jew," as he was understood in orientalist terms. According to this perception, the negation of the diaspora involved the abrogation of everything that was considered "oriental" by the Jews, whilst at the same time expressing the wish of the Jews to return into Western history: "The act of immigration was perceived as the transformation and regeneration of the Jew; that is, the overcoming of oriental elements."[6] Zionism as it has been asserted in Israel is orientated towards the West, fully distancing itself from its immediate environment. The Zionist perceives the Orient as "the other" to such an extent that Zionist Israel feels almost eerily out of place in the region.

Zionist Thinkers and the "Arab Question"

When pondering the question of territory in *The Jewish State*, Herzl barely gave any consideration to the population living in Palestine, or to how they may react to this Jewish-European colonization. Instead, his focus was on the dominant powers that needed to be coerced into giving Palestine to the Jews. While Herzl offered the Ottoman sultan "financial services" for the settlement of his empire's financial matters, he proposed the following return service to the West: "We should there form a portion of a rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization as opposed to barbarism."[7]

What is so remarkable about this often quoted sentence, and also the further remarks concerning a "return service" being offered by the Jews, is that Herzl does not actually specify what or who he is referring to when he uses the expression "barbarism." He reverts to "Asia" and "barbarism" as a contrastive pairing to

5 Raz-Krakotzkin 2005: 166.

6 Ibid. 166–167.

7 Herzl 1896/1997: 41; https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/herzl2.html.

"Europe" and "culture," but does not outline the "great other." It remains utterly faceless. And although there is further mention of a "guard of honor around the holy sites of Christianity" in Palestine to be warranted by the Jews, the other great religion of the Muslims from which Christianity and its sites are to be protected does not make an appearance here, with no mention of terms such as "Islam," "Arabs," or even "Orient."[8]

In the utopian novel *The Old New Land* (*Altneuland*, 1902), in which Herzl sketched his ideas of the new Jewish society in *Eretz Israel*, the author does dedicate several pages to the Arabs who are already living in that region. But the main viewing direction of these passages remains fixated on the firm belief in the positive effects that a Jewish settlement would have on the development of the country, and thus presents a fixed conception that the Jewish presence would elevate the living standard of the Arab population.

As such, Herzl thought that they would be grateful to Zionism. The novel is written from the perspective of the Jews as Europeans or European modernizers, bringing culture and progress to the underdeveloped *terra incognita* that was still lingering in a state of barbarism. It is the very notion of a "Europe in the Orient" that is the focal point of *The Old New Land*. As Herzl perceived it, the integration of Arab Palestinians into the new society depended on their ability to adapt to Western civilization.[9] Likewise, Herzl's fellow campaigner Max Nordau (1849–1923) advocated the concept of the Jewish nation as a part of Western civilization.

Retorting to Achad Ha'am's criticism of *The Old New Land*, which was aimed at the fact there were no Jewish but rather just European elements in Herzl's new society, Nordau offered the following argument: "*The Old New Land* is indeed supposed to be a European unit in the Orient. [...] We wish that the Jewish people continue being a cultural nation after their liberation [from Europe] and unification [in the Orient]." He further emphasized his position by stressing: "We would never allow that the return of the Jewish people to their homeland is accompanied by a relapse into barbarism [...] The Jewish people shall unfold their intrinsic characteristics within the framework of Western culture, just like all other civilized peoples, and not outside of it in a feral, uncultured Asianism of the kind that Achad Ha'am seems to desire."[10]

At the World Zionist Congress of 1907, Nordau gave a speech in which he confirmed his perception of the Zionist vision and agitation as a purely Western-inspired phenomenon, and stressed his wish that Zionism would continue

8 Ibid. 41.
9 Gorny 1986: 36–38; Herzl 1902.
10 Gorny 1986: 38.

to be informed by European ideas. He also cleared up any concerns regarding a possible "Asianization of the Jews": "We will endeavor to accomplish in the Middle East what the English have done in India: We will come to *Eretz Israel* as the missionaries of culture and extend the moral borders of Europe all the way to the Euphrates."[11]

The Zionist-Israeli historian Yosef Gorny (1933–) clearly identified Nordau as a representative of the group that intended to solve the ongoing Arab question – as it had been arising repeatedly in the Jewish *Yishuv* and in the Zionist discourse since the beginning of the Zionist settlement and increasingly in the wake of the First World War – by means of a nationalist-separatist approach. This school of thought rejected any attempts to integrate Jewish society into the oriental region, striving instead for an unchallenged hegemony over *Eretz Israel*. In the light of this predominant attitude towards the Orient that was characterized by contempt, a total separation of the two societies was aspired to. And so a national confrontation seemed inevitable.[12]

The alternative approach to the Arab question was what Gorny calls the "altruistic-integrationist" one. Here, the realization of Zionism is predicated upon the Jewish capacity to integrate into the Orient. Yitzhak Epstein (1863–1943) is regarded as a major proponent of this position. In 1907, he published an essay entitled "The Hidden Question," in which he addressed what he saw as the crucial problem of Zionism, namely whether it was able or willing to integrate into the region. He criticized the prevalent Zionist approach of blocking out the Arab question and advocated instead for its active integration into Zionism.

Epstein believed this to be the right course for the Zionist objective, from the moral as well as the realpolitik point of view. A favorable reception of the Jews by the Palestinians would benefit both. It would mean progress for the latter while the Jews would be given a homeland. He saw the shared Semitic origins of both peoples as a basis for such cooperation and actually considered it counterproductive to Zionist goals that the new immigrants to Palestine take a colonialist or repressive stance. Furthermore, Epstein didn't think that the Arab nationalism of the early twentieth century was necessarily an adversary of Jewish nationalism. Rather, he endorsed a policy geared towards balance and compromise with the objective of advancing the national development of the Arabs, which would be in the interests of Zionism as well.[13]

11 Ibid. 39.
12 Ibid. 56–57.
13 Ibid. 47–55.

The first half of the twentieth century also saw socialist-influenced concepts for a solution being advocated by Eastern European Zionists. The proponents of such approaches belonged mainly to the labor movement or the party “Workers of Zion” (*Achdut Haavoda*, 1919–1930). But this model was characterized by tensions from the outset, namely between the underlying universalistic-socialist elements versus the particularistic-national, if not even nationalistic ones. In 1910, David Ben-Gurion (1886–1973), at that time the coeditor of the “Workers of Zion” newspaper *Ichud* (“unity” in Hebrew), pointed out the dangers which arise for the Zionist cause by linking class conflict to nationalism. Rather than making sense of the hostility that the country’s Arabs felt towards the Jews in the context of a class struggle, he tied it to a national context.[14]

As a result, the notion became increasingly prevalent in labor movement circles that class-conflict solidarity in its conventional socialist sense was not conducive to Zionist goals in *Eretz Israel*. The integration of Palestinians into the new settlements was seen as having an adverse effect on the Zionist cause. Eventually, the labor movement even adopted a guideline under the slogan “Fight for Hebrew Work,” which excluded Palestinians from entering the labor market that was being created in the *Yishuv* at that time.

So the separation of both markets – and thus the creation of an independent national market for the Jews – was already in place long before the actual founding of Israel occurred. The segregation policy in the *Yishuv*, and later in Israel, was understood to be an inevitable measure in establishing the necessary political and economic power basis for the Jewish people in the country. This basis was in turn seen as a precondition for the future coexistence of both peoples. Given that at the time of the *Yishuv* the objective power relations were clearly in favor of the Arab Palestinians, especially with regard to demographics, the realization of Zionism was to guarantee future peace.

Jewish nation statehood should come first, and only after that might follow a possible reconciliation. In contemporary Israeli jargon, this formula has come to be referred to as “Security and Peace.” According to this view, a basis for negotiations can only advance after the balance of power has fundamentally shifted in favor of the Jewish people in Palestine, or after Zionist ideology has achieved an appropriately stable power base. Seen from this vantage point, the possible coexistence of both peoples depends on a socio-economic separation policy, which in turn continues to intensify the tensions in Palestine.[15]

14 Ibid. 80–81.
15 Ibid. 91.

Berl Katznelson (1887–1944) ranks among the leading ideologists of the Jewish labor movement, and he influenced an entire generation through his opinion-forming function as editor-in-chief of the union newspaper *Davar*; a position he held from the paper's founding in 1925 until his death in 1944. The said generation also included Shimon Peres who emigrated as a boy from Belarus to Palestine in 1935, to later become a prominent Labor Party politician and, once the state had been established, a realizer of Political Zionism.

Katznelson's grappling with the Arab question had a lasting influence on Israel's founding generation in the formative years of the pre-statehood period. His take on the problem, according to his biographer Anita Shapira (1940–), can be identified as exclusively Zionist, with his stance towards the new "Arab goy" being informed by his deep-seated distrust in general of non-Jewish people that originated in his background experience of the traditionally hostile relations between Russia and its Jews.

Mixed tactics of stalling and blanking out characterized Katznelson's approach to the demographic question, the main obstacle standing in the way of Zionism. Faced with the factual demographical situation and proceeding from the vantage point of "maximalist Zionism" – Shapira's term for Katznelson's claim to the territory of Palestine –, Katznelson adopted a stance according to which "the focus [of the Zionist discourse] should not be on the 'Arab question,' but rather on the Jewish cause." The Zionist policy of the *Yishuv,* represented by the three maxims of immigration, land acquisition and settlement, was to be moved to the center of the debate. In this way Katznelson sought to provide a long-term solution to the Arab question.[16]

In line with "constructive Zionism" (Gorny), Katznelson as well considered the creation of an economic, political and social power basis to be the answer to the burning Arab conundrum, which was conceived of as a purely demographic problem. The decisive aspect here was not so much that a socio-political regulation was sought, but rather the fact that Katznelson chose to see the solution of the Arab question as a long-term process based on "the change of the (demographical) situation in *Eretz Israel.*"

In keeping with this approach, the strategy that had to be adopted under the objectively given current circumstances was to employ stalling techniques towards the Palestinians, or to blank out the entire Arab question altogether. Yet when it came to explaining why the actual reality was a far cry from this pretense, Katznelson found himself in a difficult situation to be still backing the central goal of a Jewish homestead in the "land of the forefathers." Although he did not

16 Shapira 1980/1983: 307–308.

explicitly deny the Palestinians' right to the land they were settled on, he did affirm that they "have no right to keep the Jews from re-shaping *Eretz Israel*. They may still be the majority in the country, but that can be changed in the long run through immigration, land acquisition and settlements."[17]

What is significant here is the "blank space" created by the gap between aspiration and reality, which the local population is left to "fill out." While Katznelson conceded these people a right to the land they settled on – after all, they were *de facto* living there – and thus adopted a realpolitik position, his Zionism nevertheless kept aspiring to change this very situation to the disadvantage of the native population who had "no right to keep the Jews from re-shaping *Eretz Israel*." In other words, reality had to be subordinated in favor of the aspiration. Not only is it presupposed here that the Palestinians would have to acquiesce to the "re-shaping of *Eretz Israel*" – in the form as Katznelson imagined it mind you – it is also assumed that any rebellion against this form of Zionism is illegitimate. It is not least such maximalist-Zionist notions by which the ongoing relocation of Palestinians into regions outside of Palestine is actively encouraged.

In the assessment of his biographer Shapira, Katznelson supported the separation principle for two reasons, one of which was pragmatic. Put simply, a political cooperation based on the demographic conditions of that time would have given the Palestinians a considerable advantage over the Jews. The rules of democracy would not have served the interests of the Jewish minority because they would have reaffirmed the *status quo*, which is why Katznelson decidedly rejected any political-constitutional regulation. The other reason for Katznelson's insistence on a strict separation of both peoples and his rejection of any kind of political integration, according to Shapira, was fed by his orientalist worldview. Based on his conviction that Arab culture and society was downright backward, technologically as well as socially speaking, he opposed any attempt at integration as an obstacle to his own society's advancement.[18]

Accordingly, the "others" with their "peculiar" traits are given hardly any attention. Rather, Katznelson's main focus was on the "Jewish question," which was to be solved by creating two units in Palestine which should be "completely separated from each other, not influencing each other, each respectively developing according their requirements and their own rhythm."[19]

Shortly before his death in 1944, Katznelson did admit that problems were arising for the native population as a result of the Zionists' ambitions. As he

17 Ibid. 306.
18 Ibid. 307; Gorny 1986: 287.
19 Shapira1980/1983: 306.

remarked, it was hard to reconcile the Zionist objective with a "formal morality," but he saw it as compatible with what he called an "actual, real morality." For just as a poor person has no less right to acquire possessions than a rich person, "a people without country and without land have the right" to soil and territory just like all other peoples of the world – even if Zionism had to fight its way against the current and reach its goals even in defiance of the will of the majority or the course of history, and therefore it was subject to "other standards" than "formal morality."[20]

Insofar the existence of a national state of one's own hinges upon the ability to act according to "one's own rules," to comply with self-imposed moral standards. This form of existence, worded in the ideological language of maximalist Zionism, could ultimately only be brought about by displacing the other collective – indeed not only from the country, but also from one's consciousness. This notion translates into relocation as it was anticipated by Katznelson, which seemed like a feasible option during the Second World War.[21]

Torn between his own maximalist-Zionist aspirations and his understanding of Zionism as a moral movement with apodictic moral goals, Katznelson found himself in a trying dilemma when confronted with the very real, but consistently suppressed Arab question. This is what led him to make contradictory statements. Shortly before his death, he said: "In the Jewish state, the Arabs will have equal rights and no Arab will be expropriated, expelled or deported. Should they wish to emigrate, however, we will not stand in their way. We will even help them do it."[22]

More than half a century later, Shimon Peres, who had been Berl Katznelson's student in the 1940s, regarded the Palestinian question at a time when it was actually being acknowledged by Israeli politics. The Jewish state had already been established, and Israel had seized the whole country in two wars of conquest (1948 and 1967). The new state had put the "Arabs of *Eretz Israel*" *mutatis mutandis* under the control of the military, so that the Zionist project within the meaning of maximalist Zionism had largely been realized.

In late 1996, Peres offered his view of the "other collective" from the winner's perspective, so to speak. At this point, the Labor Party government had entered into talks with the PLO as a legitimate political representative of the Palestinian people, and had made some concessions in the course of the two Oslo Accords (1993 and 1995). Being the minister of foreign affairs at the time (1992–1995), Peres

20 Gorny 1986: 382.
21 Ibid. 383.
22 Ibid. 382.

figured as a co-initiator of the Oslo Peace Process that was set in motion in 1993. Asked to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the Palestinian people, the then president of the Labor Party gave this reply:

> Undoubtedly they [the Palestinians] are a talented people, and under the right circumstances they can become a modern people – as modern as any other people in the world. They have several shortcomings. One is that they have never been a people – there never was a Palestinian people until very recently. They have never experienced the taste of statehood – there never was a Palestinian state. And they were eaten up by violence and terror, as well as tribal and family divisions, which makes it very hard for them to unite. But then I think they are fast learners – they can be quite ingenious. I mean, they could excel in all walks of life if they were to come to normalcy. They are on their way to normalcy. To compare them with the Jewish people would be apt if you remember that the Jewish people didn't have normalcy either. By normal, I mean running a state and becoming responsible. Another shortcoming is their sensitivity to respect and honor. They are very sensitive to their self-respect. This is [for them] almost consideration number one. But having land is their highest priority. This in an age in which science is more important than land, which is something they haven't grasped yet.[23]

In order to better understand such an irritating statement by a leading Israeli politician, one has to be aware not only of Katznelson's take on the Arab question, but also of what the historian Raz-Krakotzkin understands to be a basic characteristic of Israeli political culture: its fundamental tendency to separate the two histories. As a consequence, the history of the Zionist settlement is explained apart from the history of the conflict or the history of the Palestinians. In this context, Raz-Krakotzkin indicates the division of labor of Israeli historians, as it is referred to by the Israeli sociologist Gershon Shafir (1947–), namely between those who address the history of Zionism, the Jewish people, and the Jewish settlement in Palestine, and the so-called "orientalists" who study the "Arabs" and the "Orient."[24]

What is striking about Peres' description of the Palestinians and their history is that he blocks out the history of Zionism and the Jewish settlement, outlining Palestinian history with an omission of the Zionist-Israeli connection. Even as Peres compares the nonexistent nation statehood of the Jews prior to the founding of State of Israel to the present situation of the Palestinians, the actual Zionist-Israeli context is by and large left out. It is therefore impossible to gather from his remark just who the opponent of this "talented people" could possibly be, or in which concrete historic context they were not able to unfold their talents.

23 Peres and Littell 1998: 79–80.
24 Raz-Krakotzkin 2000.

When, in the very same interview, Peres' attention was called to the fact that Israel also values land as a precious commodity and that all the different governments have in fact supported the settler movement, his brief response was that the settlers were also in the wrong. He then immediately returned to talking about Palestinian history, which he explained as being separate from the Israeli-Zionist one.[25] Regardless of in what form Peres may express criticism of the Jewish settler movement, for him it always falls under the category of the "holy history" of Zionism, and as such cannot have any contact points with the history of the Palestinians.

In the Peres quote cited above, orientalist tendencies are palpable. A key feature of this attitude is the paternalistic stance towards the Palestinians. In a seemingly benevolent tone that strikes one as colonialist, they are ascribed a number of positive traits. They are called "a talented people" who "under the right circumstances" could have become "a modern people." Even though they "have several shortcomings" when it comes to a couple of things, they "are fast learners." They are described as "ingenious" and as having the potential to "excel in all walks of life." If only it wasn't for the one obstacle to all of this, namely the lacking nation statehood.

After all, deliberates Peres, "if they were to come to normalcy," they would be able to live under the "normal" conditions of nation statehood. This is the point where the train of thought on Palestinian history abruptly ends, because it threatens to come into contact with the history of Israel. It is here that the conciliatory language is aborted and the attempt to explain the lacking nation statehood of the Palestinians begins – completely detached from Israeli history, mind you. What is created here is, in Raz-Krakotzkin's words, a "distorted historical picture." By blocking out a rather important perspective of Palestinian history, Peres falls into line with a historical understanding that yields only a fragmented picture also with regard to one's own history.[26]

After all, Peres explains the Palestinians' lack of nation statehood as being based exclusively on their "intrinsic traits": First of all, they are a young nation as "there never was a Palestinian people until very recently." What remains unclear is at what point in their history the Palestinians can actually be considered a "people." Peres rates the traditional way of life practiced by the Palestinians as a "test of statehood." But they are also described as being still consumed "by violence and terror" and separated by "tribal and family divisions," which are "hard [...] to unite." What is more, they are extremely sensitive when it comes to

25 Peres and Littell 1998: 80.
26 Raz-Krakotzkin 2000: 187.

"respect and honor" and "very sensitive to their self-respect." It is of particular significance here that Peres reduces the question of territory, mentioned at the end of the passage, to merely "having land."

Of all things, Peres chooses to take out of context in a rather baffling manner the very territory that has been at the center of the hundred-year-long conflict. He labels the desire to own land a specifically Palestinian problem, denouncing it as an anachronistic intrinsic trait. By doing this he not only omits the very thing that connects the two histories, but he uses the reference to the special relationship of the Palestinians to the contested land to corroborate his assumption that the Palestinian people live in a pre-modern age. What they "haven't grasped yet" is that we live in "an age in which science is more important than land." Because "having land is their highest priority," Palestinians are still trapped in an allegedly backward state.

A rather remarkable feature of this text from 1996 is the separate understanding of history and, explicit therein, the rejection of any responsibility for the fate of the Palestinians on the part of Zionism. The "traits" of the Palestinian people that are listed here and that supposedly represent the sole defining factors of their destiny are conceived entirely independently of Israeli history, which is also why they seemingly cannot pose any risk to its continuation.

Even at the end of 1996, a politician of many years from the midst of Israeli society does nothing less here than blatantly contend that Israel has virtually no share in the current situation of the Palestinians, so that it really is "none of its concern." But how is it possible to profess such a casual lack of concern in view of the Zionist-Arab confrontation over Palestine/*Eretz Israel*? Are the Palestinian people the unadmitted archenemy of Zionist Israel? Or are they a defeated or smashed enemy here, one that is very unlikely to endanger Israel's existence?

Since its initial founding, Israel has been looking at the "Arab enemy" and the Arab-Israeli conflict within two contexts. On the one hand, it is perceived in the domestic-local, Palestinian context; hence as the old Arab question. On the other hand, the larger context of a regional pan-Arab-Israeli conflict is invoked. Although Israel does not see these two conflict spheres as completely separate – after all, the "Arabs of *Eretz Israel*" are considered a part of the "Arab world" –, the danger that is emanating for Zionist Israel from these two conflict spheres has been respectively viewed and evaluated in quite a different manner over the course of the Arab-Israeli and the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts.

All in all, this phenomenon can be outlined as follows: In the first three decades it was primarily the "Arab world" or Arab nationalism that was cast as the dangerous enemy by Israel. The unification of the Arab armies with the goal of "annihilating the Zionist project" posed the greatest challenge to the country's security-political leadership. Historic examples for this danger are the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948, Arab nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s under the leadership of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918–1970), and the Egyptian-Syrian attack on the Jewish Day of Atonement *Yom Kippur* in 1973.

In this period, the problem of the "Arabs of *Eretz Israel*" more or less receded into the background. After all, following Israel's victory of 1948 with its demographic and geopolitical significance for Zionism, it initially appeared as if the Palestinians would be controllable by military means. This became even more the case when another territorial victory over the Palestinians followed in 1967. Thus, from the security-political perspective, up until the late 1970s Israel's attention was drawn to the larger regional conflict with the world of Arab states.

Only in the course of the 1980s, as the tensions of the regional conflict decreased to a more reasonable degree as a result of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty of 1979, did the old Arab question inevitably shift back into the focus of Israeli politics in the form of the Palestinian question. And due to the following chain of events, namely the failure to achieve an autonomy for the Palestinians according to the Camp David Accord of 1979, followed by Israel's fight against the PLO in Lebanon in 1982 with the exact goal of obstructing the realization of this very same autonomy, among other things, followed by the First Palestinian Intifada against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories (1987–1992), the ensuing 1990s peace process with the Palestinians and its ongoing failure, and finally the outbreak of the Second Intifada (2000–2004), it continues to dominate Israeli security policy to this day.

As such, the Palestinian question inevitably made its way into the politics and collective consciousness of Israel, increasingly becoming the weak point of Zionist Israel. At the very latest since 2000, following the ultimate failure of the only attempt from 1993 to 2000 to solve the Palestinian question by political means, it has proven to be an unsolvable problem for Israel.

The term "Palestinian question" is true to the Israeli understanding of this question actually being about Palestine, since *Eretz Israel* represents a territorial unit for Zionist Israel, the basis of the Zionist project. The "Judaization" of the country was and remains a basic principle of Israeli politics, before and after 1967. This is why, according to the official Israeli reading, Palestinians are not understood to be a national collective but rather individuals who have different statuses under Israeli supremacy. The Zionist-Israeli term of the "Arabs of *Eretz Israel*" (referring to the inhabitants of Palestine up to the establishment of the state, as well as to the naturalized Palestinians of Israel after 1948) has an exemplary significance here. The next section explores how the Israeli perspective on the "internal enemies" has developed over the course of the years.

Israel and the "Palestinian Question"

In 1948, the Zionist movement succeeded in dramatically shifting the geopolitical and demographical relationship between the two collectives in Palestine through war. This was a significant step along the path to realizing the Zionist goal of a Jewish state in *Eretz Israel*. After all, during the British mandatory period (1917–1947) and up to the first Arab-Israeli armed encounter (1948), roughly half a century after the First Zionist Congress (1897), the Zionist movement had managed to acquire little more than six percent of Palestine's land area, mainly by means of land acquisition.[27]

Then, in the course of the war of 1948, the Israeli armed forces occupied seventy-eight percent of the total territory, and in the armistice talks of 1949 in Rhodes between Israel and the neighboring states involved in the war the so-called armistice borders were determined. The remaining twenty-two percent of the land area passed to Jordan (West Bank) and Egypt (Gaza Strip), before they were finally captured by Israel in the Six-Day War. It should be pointed out here that the UN Resolution 181 of November 29, 1947 actually stipulated a division of Palestine in which fifty-five percent of the land was allotted to the Jewish and forty-five percent to the Arab state.

Apart from this geopolitical shift, 1948 also saw a demographic one in the relationship between Jews and Palestinians. During British rule, the Jewish share in Palestine's population increased from ten percent in 1900, sixteen percent in 1929, i.e., 156,000, to a third of the total population in 1947, amounting to about two million people.[28] The most drastic demographic transformation took place during the war of 1948–1949 when approximately 750,000 Palestinians left the territory on which the State of Israel would finally be created in a mass exodus, and as a massive Jewish immigration from European and Arab states occurred before and after the founding of Israel.

While approximately 160,000 Palestinians remained in the heartland of Israel, a majority of the refugees found refuge in the former mandated territory of Palestine; that is, in the Gaza Strip that was occupied by Egypt and in the West Bank controlled by Jordan. Accordingly, 1.4 million Jews and approximately 1.2 million Palestinians were living throughout the entire territory of Palestine in 1952.[29] Over the course of the Six-Day War another exodus of approximately 200,000 Palestinians from the West Bank into Jordan took place. So in 1967 an

27 Wasserstein 2003: 45.
28 Ibid. 12, 18, 26.
29 Ibid. 26.

overall number of 1.2 million Palestinians remained in the territories now occupied by Israel, with Jews making up two-thirds of the total population. In 2003, 3.3 million Palestinians were living in the occupied territories and 1.3 million Israeli Palestinians were settled in the heartland of Israel, while the number of Jews rose to 5.1 million.[30] As of 2015, 6.4 million Jews and 2.0 million naturalized and over 4.0 million non-naturalized Palestinians are living in the territory of *Eretz Israel*/Palestine.[31]

And so the Palestinian question is something that Israel constantly has to deal with, even as its Political Zionism has been realized. By pursuing the Zionist goal of nationalizing the Jewish people by means of land seizures and Jewish settlements, Israel since its very founding has been pursuing a policy of de-nationalization and fragmentation of Palestinians. Already shortly after the war of 1948, a Palestinian state in accordance with the UN Partition Resolution 181 of 1947 became a taboo topic. Accordingly, in 1949 Israel was confronted in the main by three distinct groups of Palestinians: refugees, returnees – called “intruders” in Israeli jargon – and Palestinians who had remained in the country after 1948 and were naturalized by Israel in 1949.

From its very beginning, Israel’s policy has been determined by three factors: the goal of a Jewish state, the claim of representing a democratic political system, and the intention of coming to grips with the permanently simmering Arab-Israeli conflict.[32] The state’s Jewish character is fostered by population-political means through a prohibition of return for the Palestinian refugees while at the same time supporting Jewish immigration. In July 1950, the *Knesset* enacted the “Law of Return.” In its first paragraph, the new state grants every Jewish person the right to an Israeli citizenship.[33] In parallel, a legally institutionalized, insidious expropriation of Palestinians who have either fled or stayed is pursued.[34] Besides this, the educational system of those Palestinians who have remained in the country is controlled as an instrument for excluding them from all centers of power; that is, for marginalizing them politically and economically.[35]

The legal basis for confiscating Palestinian land and property after the establishment of the state is based on a series of Israeli laws. According to “The Law of Fallow Land” of 1948, land that has not been cultivated for over a year

30 Ibid. 27.
31 http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4066153,00.html.
32 Ozacky-Lazar 1998: 349.
33 http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/heb/chok_hashvut.htm.
34 Ozacky-Lazar 1998: 356–357; Golan 1995: 403–440.
35 Ozacky-Lazar 1998: 349–350; Cohen 2006.

is transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture in order to guarantee its proper use. According to the “Absentees Property Law” issued in 1950, the entire property of Palestinian refugees (who are referred to as “absentees” here) is assigned to a state custodian. The category of “absentees” includes all people who have left their house or land since the beginning of the war on November 29, 1947, and comprises Palestinian refugees living outside as well as inside (so-called “present absentees”) Israeli state territory.

The “Land Acquisitions Law” of 1953 regulates the lawful transfer of the confiscated land into state ownership, including the land of those Palestinian citizens of Israel who have been declared “present-absent,” wherein their legal claims to compensation are also specified in that law. Above all, the still applicable emergency laws give Israeli authorities considerable leeway when it comes to declaring particular areas “protected” and confiscating them for “security reasons.”

Israel’s claim of being a democratic state entailed that Palestinians living on Israeli state territory should receive Israeli citizenship as well as voting, social and educational rights.[36] And shortly after the fighting ceased in 1949 Israel did naturalize approximately 160,000 Palestinians. This was done in connection with the new state’s admission to the United Nations on May 11, 1949. Nevertheless, these “Israeli Arabs” as they are called in Israeli jargon were subjected to a strict military government that was only lifted in December 1966.

Its primary purpose was, for one thing, to secure access to the country’s resources for the Zionist project, and, for another, to ensure the political-social control of the Palestinian population. The goal was to prevent any cooperation between Israeli Arabs and the neighboring Arab states,[37] with the military government being authorized to administrate the territories inhabited by the Palestinians in the heartland of Israel. This included, among other things, the issuing of work, building and entry permits. Another objective was to limit the freedom of movement as well as the settlement possibilities available to the Palestinians within the country. Moreover, the military government enforced a curfew of nine p.m.

Initially, the legal basis for the military government was provided by emergency and defense decrees (“Defence Regulations Emergency”) of the British mandate administration of 1945, being adopted first by the provisional and later by the elected Israeli governments. According to these laws, the military, authorized by the minister of defense, may exert legislative, judicial and executive

36 Ozacky-Lazar 1998: 361.
37 Ibid. 349–355.

power over certain areas of the population's life. This regulation is founded on the conviction that the country is in a continuous state of defense, rendering extreme measures necessary. This means that a military commander has the legal power to, for example, initiate legal seizures, conduct house searches without search warrants, order the destruction of buildings, or impose arbitrary curfews.[38]

The military government that ruled from 1949 to 1966 has almost been extinguished from the collective historical awareness of Jewish Israelis. One reason for this may be the incapability to deal with the humanitarianly and politically aggravating question of the military occupation of the Palestinian territories *since* 1967, which is still on the political agenda.[39] Faced with the more acute problems of this ongoing occupation, the chapter concerning the nineteen-year-long military governance over Israeli Palestinians is allowed to fade into the background of political and historical perception. This blanking out of the "first experience with occupation" may further be interpreted as a denial of the salient fact that the State of Israel has *de facto* never really experienced any other situation than that of military rule over the Palestinians. This is in turn is taken as a clear sign they are indeed the antagonists of Zionist Israel and must be fought against, kept in check.

While the naturalized Palestinians were thus kept under control, the Palestinian refugees of 1948 were completely banned from Israel's consciousness by means of enacting a strict prohibition to return.[40] When the war of 1967 came along, however, the Arab question was once again on the Israeli agenda, and the conquest of Palestinian territories in the Six-Day War turned the old Arab question into the "Palestinian question." Yet the claim that *Eretz Israel* was the possession of the Jewish people and thus a Zionist tenet remained unshaken. Instead, the issue that was seen as being in need of clarification was what status the Palestinians living on this territory were to be given in the expanded Jewish state.

After the Six-Day War, Israel unleashed the apparatus of military government into the newly gained territories and considered them "occupied" for the time being. In practice, though, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula were treated as "liberated" Jewish territories. This is why Jews settled them, and especially the Palestinian population was affected by this slowly advancing Israeli occupation. While the population of the Golan Heights could flee or was expelled to Syria, and that of Sinai to Egypt, the majority of the Palestinian population remained in the Palestinian territories taken over by

38 Hofnung 1996: 50; Benziman and Mansour 1992: 33.
39 Azoulay and Ophir 2008.
40 Morris 1996: 136–151.

the Israeli military – referred to as "Judea, Samaria and Gaza" in Israeli-Zionist jargon.

No longer on the agenda after 1967 was the naturalization of the "new Palestinians." After all, the integration of several millions of non-Jews into the Israeli state corpus would inevitably run counter to the Zionist goal of a Jewish state. From 1967 on, the Palestinian question remained an open dilemma that consistently dominated security policy and politics in Israel.

After the Six-Day War, it took only a decade until the question of the Palestinian territories conquered in 1967 was brought back to the political agenda in earnest in connection to the Camp David peace negotiations with Egypt of 1977 and 1978. The main question was how Israel was to proceed with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. For the first time, an autonomy solution for the Palestinians was negotiated. Yet, even as in the late 1970s and early 1980s the government headed by Menachem Begin (1913–1992) did succeed in reaching a peace treaty with Egypt under the leadership of Muhammad Anwar el-Sadat (1918–1981) – namely at the cost of returning to Egypt the Sinai Peninsula conquered in 1967 – Israel still failed to realize the agreed upon autonomy for Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

In the early 1980s, political Israel was simply not willing to lose its power status in the Palestinian territories and instead gave the highest priority to consolidating the Jewish presence. In that decade, more precisely from 1984 to 1990, Israel was governed by a grand coalition of two big Zionist camps: the *Likud* and Labor Party. One way of securing the Jewish presence was through the massive settlement of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, but the constant fight against the Palestinian national movement and its representatives served the same purpose.

Shortly after the implementation of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty stipulating Israel's pullout from Sinai, the Israeli leadership under Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon (1928–2014) sent military into Lebanon. June 1982 saw the beginning of a war that was also supported by the Labor Party, – then constituting the opposition – and that had as its proclaimed goal the righteous fight against Lebanon-based PLO terrorism. The true objective of the war, however, was to shape a new geopolitical order in the Middle East, one in which Israel would be able to preserve its strategic interests.

Above all, the motivation was to avert the autonomy of the Palestinians in the occupied territories since that would challenge the Israeli claim to parts of *Eretz Israel*. Minister of Defense and war initiator Ariel Sharon tried to convince PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat (1929–2004) to create a Palestinian state in Jordan, which would entail the fall of the Kingdom of Jordan. Arafat declined this suggestion. At that, Israel forcibly expelled the PLO leadership as well as hundreds of Palestinian activists from Lebanon in the summer of 1982.

In any case, by thus removing the Palestinian leadership from the neighboring country, Israel only managed to buy a couple of years before the Palestinian question was back on the table. In December 1987, the first so-called "Intifada of Stones" broke out when the civilian population of Palestine rose up; brandishing the most primitive of weapons against an occupying force equipped with highly sophisticated arms. But political and military Israel was confronted with a new kind of situation when the images of their military oppression of the civilian uprising went all around the world. More and more, Israel was being perceived as "Goliath" in this conflict, while the Palestinians gained the attention and respect of large swaths of the world's public for being the oppressed "David."

After the East-West break of 1989 and the Second Gulf War of 1991 – a traumatic event for Israel[41] – the international community under US leadership finally pressed for the Madrid Conference that took place in October 1991. Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians were brought to the negotiating table in order to try and jointly settle the Middle East conflict with international support. The Palestinian question was at the center of the talks, which is why the Zionist Right government headed (from 1990 to 1992) by *Likud* party leader Yitzhak Shamir (1915–2012) took part in the conference only very reluctantly. As was to be expected, this peace summit failed to achieve any results.

Only after a changeover of power had occurred in Jerusalem could a noteworthy breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian relations be achieved. As the Labor Party took over power in 1992, a peace process with the Palestinians was set in motion. In the so-called Oslo Peace Process of 1993, Israel recognized the rights of the Palestinian people for the first time in history, and accepted the PLO headed by Yasser Arafat as its legitimate leadership and Israel's dialogue partner.

The Palestinian Authority (PA) was established in two treaties (1993, 1995), and with this framework in place it was assumed that the basic conditions for a permanent solution of the Palestine question had been created. This gave rise to the hope that Israel might now be actually willing to put *Eretz Israel* up for political debate, and to divide the country between both peoples. Furthermore, it seemed that Israel had come to accept that the two-state solution would be in the best interests of Zionism. (The Oslo Peace Process and its failure will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5).

There are several reasons why the first serious attempt to end the century-long conflict over Palestine failed. Taking into account the broad historic context, I would like to offer the following explanatory approach: By the end of the 1990s, Israel is in a precarious political situation, if not a total dead end. On

41 Zuckermann 1993.

the one hand, Israel is unable to carry through with the division of the country due to ongoing domestic political reasons and due to its reason of state. Such an action continues to be regarded as blasphemous not only by the Zionist Right and by religious Zionism who have fought and will continue to fight such a measure by all available means, but to no lesser extent also by the Zionist Left, commonly referred to as the Israeli "peace camp," that principally refuses to share sovereignty over the country with the Palestinians.

After all, the camp of the Zionist Left equally embraces the Zionist principle that *Eretz Israel* is the land of the Jewish people. This remains true even as the Zionist Left attempts to respond to the dilemma of the so-called demographic question, meaning the bi-national reality in Palestine, with the rhetoric of a two-state solution. The unshakable fact is that all Zionist parties have been actively taking part in the implementation of the Zionist project in *Eretz Israel* for a long time, and they have done so from a position of firm conviction that Zionism is the ultimate answer to the so-called "Jewish question."

This is linked to another key aspect, namely Israel's Orientalist attitude towards the "Arab" and consequently towards the regional Arab-Israeli conflict. This kind of perspective forms the historically grown basis for the civilian-military dominated Israeli order. An important consideration with regard to the failed Israeli-Palestinian peace process of the 1990s discussed herein is the fact that political Israel is simply not up to the task of dividing the country owing to domestic-political and ideological reasons. And what is more, Israeli politics is extremely skeptical when it comes to the question of whether a resolution of the local Palestine question would indeed result in regional peace. In the following, it will be scrutinized how political or Zionist Israel perceives the Arab environment in which it is inescapably located.

Israel and its View of the Arab World

Examining the texts of an establishment man such as Shimon Peres from the first three decades of Israel's existence, one can detect in them a marked Orientalist image of the enemy that is closely connected to the central topos of these texts, namely the security question or the Arab-Israeli conflict. In those years, Peres (Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Defense from 1953 to 1965, and Minister of Defense from 1974 to 1977, among other offices) showed a tendency of referring to those he identified as enemies of the Jewish state by the generalized terms “Arab world” and “the Arabs.” In some instances he even talks of a conflict between “the Arab and the Jewish people.”[42]

Peres perceives the Arab-Israeli conflict in the context of the long historic tradition of the persecution of Jews. As he said in 1965: “We are a people under constant threat and siege.”[43] Elsewhere he stresses, “Israel is a state under siege, with nothing less than its naked existence being at stake.”[44]

The motif of being “alone amongst the peoples” (*Am levadad Ischkun*) is equally applied to the situation in the Middle East. Similarly, the metaphor of a “giant banana” that Peres uses to illustrate the difference in size between the small Jewish state and the dangerous and malicious enemies it is surrounded by – “Syria in the northern corner, Egypt in the south, threatening to suffocate it”[45] – reflects the Israeli sense of being threatened and isolated in that region. A key text with regard to Peres’ enemy image is the opening chapter of his book *David’s Sling* published in 1970, entitled “Conflict at the Abyss.”

Two things are relevant here. Firstly, the time when this text was written was right after the great victory of Israel over three Arab armies in the Six-Day War. Secondly, it should be kept in mind that the deliberations expounded in the book could – apart from their immediate ideological-political intentions in view of the new geopolitical situation – also be regarded as a résumé of Peres’ conflict or security concepts after serving more than a decade in the Ministry of Defense (1953–1965). As he himself has stated, Peres wrote this book after resigning from that ministry. Accordingly, his statements may be understood as reflections on the formative years of Israeli sovereignty:

> Israel’s security problem is unique. It is compounded of several ingredients, all of them unusual. Its prime feature is the totality of Arab hostility. This is both publicly proclaimed and actively practiced, prevails in the entire Arab area, embraces the bulk of its inhabitants, is conducted in the military, political and economic fields, and is unceasing.
>
> Except for its sea coast on the west, Israel is surrounded by Arab States: Lebanon and Syria, and beyond them, Iraq, in the north; Jordan in the east; Egypt, Yemen and Saudi Arabia in the south, Enmity towards Israel is the official and operative policy of all these States, and it is all-embracing. It includes economic boycott and blockade; political pressure and propaganda; closed frontiers and passage; military attack by regular units and official encouragement to sabotage and terror by irregular forces.

42 Peres 1978: 74.
43 Peres 1965: 88.
44 Ibid. 101.
45 Peres 1970: 143; Peres 1965: 65.

The aims of this policy are not confined to one particular area of Israel life or territory. The Arabs do not seek just one particular portion of Israel's land, sources of water, oil wells; they are not interested only in political advantage of economic domination. The Arab purpose is all-absorptive – the destruction of Israel and the annihilation or banishment of her inhabitants. [...]

The second special feature of the Arab-Israel conflict springs from the present mentality of the Arab world. Its source does not lie necessarily in the establishment and existence of the State of Israel. Soon after World War One, when the Zionist ideals began to be realized on a large scale, there were friendly and fruitful meetings between the leaders of the Jewish and the Arab peoples. In the Weizmann-Feisal Agreement signed in the Autumn of 1918, Article 4 stated that 'all means will be taken to encourage Jewish immigration to Palestine on a large scale'; and Article 7 recorded that 'the Zionist Movement proposes to send to Palestine a committee of experts to survey the economic possibilities of the country and to report on the most suitable means to develop it.'

The source of the conflict and of its widespread nature is to be sought not in issues between the Arabs and the Israelis, but in events and developments within the Arab States themselves. It is not so much that Israel-Arab relations are the fruits of misunderstandings, but that these misunderstandings are a reflection of the internal tensions which have struck the Arab world.

These tensions are expressed in a warlike mood which pervades the whole region. In their extreme from, they are expressed in full scale military action. In the last twenty years there have been seven wars in the Middle East, four of them among the Arabs themselves, and three between Israel and Egypt. [...]

The constant instability had its impact on life in the entire region and gave a special character to the social regimes in the Middle Eastern States. Of all the Arab States who border, or are close to, Israel, only one, Lebanon, has tasted democracy. All the others have been subjected throughout the entire period to a military or quasi-military regime.

The Arab States have in fact become a caricature of the slogan of Frederick the Great: they are not States who have armies but armies who have States. Military considerations are overriding in all their decisions affecting civilian life in these countries.

They have no system of 'checks and balances,' no institutions with the power to approve, restrain, or delay for further reflection items in the fashioning of policy. They have no free press, no independent political parties, no freely elected parliaments, no truly representative trade union movements. They lack a middle class which tends to recognize social obligations – their own and the regime's.

There is also something singular about Arab communication – the way they communicate with others and also among themselves. The Arab form of expression is given to using words in a decorative manner, with emotional connotations, rather than as precise instruments of exact meaning. This is reflected in vague formulations of obligations. Arab argument, instead of being fashioned with the ingredients of cogent and sober reasoning, tends to fit

> the mould of propaganda and incitement. Truth finds it difficult to wend its way through the thickets of Arab communication not only with the outside world but also within the Arab world itself.[46]

Thus, the two features of the Arab-Israeli conflict or the characteristics of the generalized image of the “Arab world” and the “Arab states” are, on the one hand, the “totality of Arab hostility” towards Israel and, on the other hand, the “present mentality of the Arab world.” In contrast to the statements Peres would make about the Palestinians in 1996, the above passages from 1970 contain a clear message of the acute peril for the Jewish state being posed by the Arab world. Peres’ unambiguous language, especially when referring to the all-engrossing Arab hostility, as well as the double emphasis of the “Arab purpose” of annihilating Israel being made already on the first page of his book, hardly leaves any doubt as to the significance which he ascribes to this danger.

Furthermore, the enumeration of the Arab states by name, even including those that are not direct neighbors of Israel and hence not involved in a direct conflict with it, and also the mention of a series of anti-Israeli measures, are all meant to support his theory of an archenemy alliance between the entire Arab world against Israel. The main message of this 1970 book is that there is no basis for negotiations whatsoever between Israel and its neighboring states, and a fact that is alluded to in a rather ostensible manner is that peace based on territorial concessions made by Israel cannot possibly be achieved in this particular historical phase.

An interesting contradiction comes to light when it becomes apparent that the chief characteristic of the “all-absorptive” hostility is rooted in the strong interconnection of the two histories; the Israeli-Zionist one and that of the other side. On the one hand, the “Arab world” as a clearly defined unit is fixated on the goal of “the destruction of Israel” and “the annihilation or banishment of her inhabitants.” This is pursued by very concrete political measures, namely through “economic boycott and blockade; political pressure and propaganda; closed frontiers and passage; military attack by regular units and official encouragement to sabotage and terror by irregular forces.”

On the other hand, the history of Israel is depicted as that of a victim of the malevolent intentions and policies of the Arab world, which is why Israel has no choice but to take security-political measures to ensure its own future existence. In this sense, it is clearly conveyed that the attribute of an all-encompassing hostility is rooted in a strong connection of both histories. In the last paragraph,

46 Peres 1970: 10–12.

however, Peres develops a reversed argumentative strategy that relies on the separation of both narratives. Thus he dehistoricizes and depoliticizes the conflict. As he goes on to explain: "The Arabs do not seek just one particular portion of Israel's land, sources of water, oil wells; they are not interested only in political advantage of economic domination. The Arab purpose is all-absorptive – the destruction of Israel and the annihilation or banishment of her inhabitants."

This kind of reasoning, aimed at excluding any option of negotiation, contains both momentums. On the one hand, there is the obviously conjunctive aspect, namely the intention of destruction that one side harbors against the other which is understood as an apodictic axiom not requiring any further explanation. On the other hand, there is a refusal to treat as an issue that which actually connects the two histories, namely the subject matter of the conflict – in this case particularly the territory – to which a solution may in fact be found together. The territory is quasi expunged from the conflict.

It has been argued that Peres *per se* denies that the territory is the central conflict issue. In reality, he is very much aware that the land is at the center of this clash. It is only that he chooses to put the accent on the fact that it is "all or nothing" when it comes to this conflict item. He sees this conflict as being governed by the logic of the zero-sum game – wherein it is alleged that the other side is not interested in any kind of compromise, whether concerning the land or other things – but wants nothing less than the whole territory, which means the annihilation of the Jewish state.

Even if the Palestinian question remains decidedly unmentioned, it always looms just below the surface in such contexts, especially by virtue of the fact that during the years in question Peres conceived of the "Arabs" or the "Arab world" as one entity, firmly unified in its hostility towards Israel. One may speak of a decoupling of both histories insofar as Peres grasps the conflict in the fundamental terms of "to be or not to be," which *a priori* prohibits concrete compromises over "just one particular portion of Israel's land" or "sources of water, oil wells." Rather, any such concessions appear pointless, even downright dangerous.

This discourse implies not only the historical but also the spacial severance of one's own history from that of the others. Consequently, based on the conflict feature of the all-encompassing hostility of the Arab world alone, Peres draws the following pessimistic conclusion:

> This comprehensive hostility has been maintained without pause since the day of Israel's establishment, and it has been kept at boiling point throughout. It is reflected in the condition of Israel. She has no powerful patrons who may, on the political plane, help to achieve a compromise which could prove an effective turning point. Her military victories are always overshadowed by the thought that they do not necessarily mark the end of warfare. Every success is countered in the Arab mind by the knowledge that they enjoy overwhelm-

> ing superiority in the numbers of their populations, the size of their territories, the scale of their armies, and by the belief in their historic capacity for the long pull.
>
> No compromise can satisfy them. It is the Arab goal to abolish Israel, not to change a political situation. Israel must surely be the only State since the Second World War which has had to face so stark a situation, with no alternative on the horizon.[47]

Even after such decisive military victories of the Israeli army (IDF: Israel Defense Forces) over the Arab armies like the one in 1967, Israel cannot heave a sigh of relief because – given the demographical superiority of the Arabs in a region being seen as threatening – the hazard is far from eliminated. After all: "No compromise can satisfy them." The reduction of the conflict to an all-encompassing Arab hostility towards Israel contains an irreconcilable contrast within itself.

While linking the narrative of the two collectives, where one respectively refuses to accept the other and thus banks on the disappearance of its opponent, this very connection is not addressed any further because the mutual hostility is absolutized. The "comprehensive hostility" of the Arabs towards Israel remains unsubstantiated and therefore becomes depoliticized and dehistoricized. Political events notwithstanding, it is perceived as a given, unchangeable and inevitable fact.

Peres follows this dehistoricization or depoliticization discourse by drawing on a separation rhetoric and blaming one particular Arab character trait for the Arab-Israeli conflict: namely the "present mentality of the Arab world." It is seen as a unique conflict feature and is of great importance for the enemy image that is being discussed here. The expression "present mentality" contains two contrary components. On the one hand, the term "mentality" points to something that is ingrained, constant, and hence hard to change. On the other hand, the reference to the "present" alludes to its transient character, thus qualifying it. By tracing "the source for the conflict" not to "issues between the Arabs and the Israelis," but to the *current* system of the Arab states themselves, Peres clearly continues to pursue his political argumentation according to which peace simply cannot be negotiated *at the present time*.

Two points are merged in this characterization of "Arab mentality," one being the Arabs' "warlike mood," the other the "backwardness of most Arab states." In her 2002 study on Peres' view of the Arab world, Israeli historian Yael Krispin states that what we have here before us is a rather obvious enemy image. Up until the late 1960s, Peres saw Arabs as "malicious, inferior, not willing to compromise" and prone "to twisting [the truth] and aggressive agitation." Also, they are

47 Ibid. 9–10.

"primitive and extremely concerned about their dignity, aggressive, uneducated and socially backward."[48]

That these two aspects of socio-cultural regression coupled with aggressive tendencies form the basis of Peres' Arab enemy image is also confirmed in the text of 1970. At its very beginning, the "internal tensions" that lie at the core of the Arab world as well as the combative tendency lingering therein is mentioned. Peres takes a descriptive approach here by elaborating in some detail on the numerous wars and military *coup d'états* in the region. He speaks of a resulting "constant instability" in these states, which are informed by the particular character of their dictatorial regimes, and refers to the Arab governments as "military" or "quasi-military regimes."

Peres fails to produce an explicit analysis of this inner instability, however. It is barely associated with the region's colonial history and its still perceivable impact. Instead, it is ascribed to a *characteristic trait* exhibited by Arab societies. For example, Peres links the militant tendency of Arab states – with the exception of Lebanon – to a lack of civil institutions in these countries. After all, they have "no free press, no independent political parties," and also "no freely elected parliaments, no truly representative trade union movements." Likewise, there is "no middle class which tends to recognize social obligations." To him, Arab states are "not States who have armies but armies who have States."[49]

To underline his hypothesis of the Arab world's regressive culture, Peres goes on to include the Arabic language in the overall picture. He, who has hardly any knowledge of Arabic, alleges that the enemy has insufficient communication skills, portraying Arabic as a reflection of a backward and bellicose culture. As he says, Arabic shows the tendency of "using words in a decorative manner, with emotional connotations." This implies that expressions are generally of a non-binding nature, and hence no great importance is attached to the word in Arab culture.

Not least, Peres charges the Arabic language with being violent in nature: "Arab argument, instead of being fashioned with the ingredients of cogent and sober reasoning, tends to fit the mold of propaganda and incitement." Here, Peres underpins his theory that peace is not negotiable by pointing out the inadequacy of the enemy's means of communication. Arabic is simply unsuitable for discerning truth, which is why "[t]ruth finds it difficult to wend its way through the thickets of Arab communication."

48 Krispin 2002: 196–197.

49 Peres 1970: 11.

As a result, any attempt at communication is doomed to failure. Peres stresses the fact that these communicational features not only impact foreign policy but also inform the inner-Arab relations. Put another way, even amongst themselves Arabs cannot help but communicate in a "peculiar" manner. This line of argument is not only aimed at confirming Peres' message that peace is out of reach at this point in time, it also implicitly locates the source of the conflict "on the other side."

True, after his harsh, curt judgment, Peres does goes on to soften his tone: "I do not cite this to draw a sweeping judgment of the character of the Arabs, or to claim that it is immutable, but simply to show how this character is used by the current regimes to which the Arabs are at present reconciled." But this relativization does little to mitigate the postulate of the "peculiar nature of the Arabs," as it still implies that it remains prey to easy manipulation by Arab regimes.

In Peres' estimation, it is these regimes that are to blame for taking advantage of this general mentality. He may express the future-oriented, optimistic position that the current situation can be altered, not least because "the Arabs have known more enlightened regimes in the past" and "far-reaching social change is already knocking on the historic door of the Arabs, and if indeed there is such change, the destiny of the region will be completely transformed." But despite this fact, in Peres' understanding the destiny of the region depends entirely *on the change of the political history of the Arabs*.[50]

The history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the topos Peres is addressing here, is explained based exclusively on Arab history, with the solution being hinged on an inner-Arab shift: "At all events, until there is change, Israel feels rather like a State planted in an international suburb which is torn by constant disturbances, a suburb in which neither law nor order, logic nor peace, plays any role in the life of its inhabitants."[51]

Here, Peres is projecting his Eastern European experience, his personal perspective, on the Middle Eastern context. In the original Hebrew version of the same text he even uses the term "pogrom"[52] to describe the Arab outbursts of violence, a term rooted in the history of the Jewish diaspora, highlighting his sense of a parallelism between the Arab-Israeli relations and the situation of the Jewish minority within an inimical Eastern European environment. With regard to the two other conflict features invoked by Peres, namely the "superiority in the numbers" of the Arabs over the Jews in the region and the frequency of violent

50 Ibid. 12.
51 Ibid. 12.
52 Peres 1970: 4. (Hebr.)

outbreaks, his explanations are restricted to quantitative aspects, referencing data, population size, territory and military power.[53]

The Arab world is an unknown territory to him; it inspires in him feelings of fear. Consequently, an integration of Israel into the Arab region is downright unimaginable in the years before 1970. As early as the mid-1950s, in his function as Deputy Director-General of the Ministry of Defense, Shimon Peres formulates the so-called "Periphery Doctrine," also known as the "Border State Doctrine." It is aimed at overcoming Israel's clearly felt and unsettling regional isolation by means of an Israeli alliance with non-Arab or non-Muslim states and minorities in the Middle East.

From the historical perspective, this line of thought constitutes the foundation for the mainly military forms of cooperation between Israel and states such as Iran, Ethiopia and Turkey, as well as with minorities like the Christians in Lebanon or the Kurds. As co-developer of this doctrine and also given his position in the Ministry of Defense, Peres had a key role in shaping Israeli relations with states in Africa and Asia that are subject to a high security rating and about which little is known due to their mostly military nature, including arms trade and military training.

The logic of the Periphery Doctrine, arising out of a deep sense of isolation, contains the "activistic" approach that consists in retorting to perceived rejection from the immediate environment by "activistically" shutting-off from it. An important aim of this doctrine, developed after the Suez War of 1956 in reaction to Israel's political defeat, was to counter the Arab nationalism lead by the Egyptian President Nasser. The Suez War boosted his position considerably as it was extremely alarming to Israel.

The fear of a spread of hostilities fostered by Arab nationalism – in particular the 1958 Syrian-Egyptian military unification into the United Arab Republic gave reason for concern – also finds expression in Peres' book of 1970. He underscores the necessity of putting a stop to the process in which Arab neighbor states are infecting the entire Arab world and the Muslim religious community with their enmity towards Israel, lest it grab hold of the whole region.[54]

Pursuant to the Periphery Doctrine, Israel was supposed to confront Arab nationalism, perceived to be the archenemy, by providing military support to non-Arab and non-Muslim forces within the region. The hope was to weaken Arab nationalism in this way, and hence its member states. This concept contributed to the establishment of the notion that one has no choice but to resign oneself

53 Peres 1970: 12–14.

54 Peres 1970, Chapter 13 "Israel and the Arab Word": 258–280.

to the existing regional situation of besiegement. And this view was ultimately solidified as the main focus was averted from the near environment – but only in a political-diplomatic, certainly not in a military and secret-military sense.

In 1958, Peres justifies this way of thinking as follows: “We are looking to draw nearer to an environment that will cooperate with us, and not one that is capable of exterminating us.”[55] Following this logic, the immediate neighbor states have to be partially ignored and removed from one’s consciousness, as they are obviously not adequate to the task of cooperation.

Arab Nationalism as Israel’s Archenemy

Egypt’s President Gamal Abdel Nasser was the enemy *par excellence* for Israel from 1952 until his death in 1970, particularly between the armed encounters of 1956 and Egypt’s defeat in 1967. This decade is considered to be a period of relative calm after the devastating years that followed the establishment of Israel right up until the Suez War in October 1956. From Israel’s point of view, however, the calm was pregnant with tension as Arab nationalism was at its peak during this time.

In these years, Arab nationalism, with the charismatic Egyptian president as its figurehead, was seen as a highly dangerous phenomenon for the young state. Following his military defeat in the Suez War, Nasser scored an important political victory when Israel was not able to celebrate its military success due to international pressure and was forced to withdraw from the conquered land, particularly the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, by March 1957.

At that time Arab nationalism gained new momentum through the broadening of support in the Arab world for a secular national movement of the Arab states as they were gradually being freed from imperialism. The unification of Syria and Egypt in 1958, the reinforcement of Palestinian forces in Jordan, the founding of the Palestinian organization “Fatah” in 1964 with Nasser’s help, and Nasser’s general support for the Palestinian cause – all contributed to the process in which Nasser was stylized as Israel’s nemesis.

In 1970, Shimon Peres analyzed Nasser as a person and as a politician, taking, as it were, a retrospective view of the Nasser era. He described Nasser’s dilemma as follows: “Nasser’s regime is also torn by two conflicting purposes. It would like to establish a reform movement which will grapple with the grim realities of

55 Peres 1965: 68.

Arab life; but it also wants it to be a messianic movement, pursuing mystical aims inspired by Arab history."[56]

Among Nasser's reform goals Peres lists the fight against the Muslim religious extremists such as the "Muslim Brotherhood," and the implementation of a socialist policy; even if the respective reforms in the fields of education, economy and lifestyle were mostly of a merely symbolic nature. The messianic aspect, comments Peres, drives Nasser to "create the kind of army which Egypt is incapable of establishing at present"[57]. Finally, Peres explicitly states what he sees as the actual conflict: namely the wish to become an "Egyptian Kemal Ataturk"[58], "securing a place in Arab history as the modern Saladin"[59] at the same time.[60]

Peres basically assumes that as a result of the ambivalence of the two ambitions – statesman and messiah – Nasser ultimately falls prey to the Arab salvation movement in the form of Arab nationalism. Especially following Nasser's promising rise to becoming the leader of the country on the Nile as it was being liberated from British imperialism, Peres sees him as "a grave disappointment – to the world, to Egypt itself, to the Arabs and to Israel."[61]

Arab nationalism, understood mainly as pressure to solve the Palestine question, caused Israel great anxiety between 1956 and 1967. In the years after the founding of the state up until the "liberating" Six-Day War, Israel relied on securing and consolidating the demographic and geopolitical successes of 1948–1949. The local border or retaliation wars of 1952–1956 and the regional armed encounters of 1956 and 1967 were an expression of these attempts to permanently preserve Israel's achievements of 1948. The fear of a powerful Arab nationalism can be clearly perceived between the lines of Peres' retrospective account of this time.

Such a movement would force Israel to solve the Palestine question in the interests of the "Arabs of *Eretz Israel*," which would pose a real threat for the Zionist project. Although Peres does address, even if only very sporadically and briefly, the interconnectedness of the Israeli-Palestinian and the pan-Arab-Israeli conflicts, the fear of consequences ultimately leaves him speechless. He briefly mentions the hope of the Arabs of *Eretz Israel*, inspired by the strengthening of the Egyptian president and his desire to become an Arab Saladin. But he does not fail to mention what a disaster Nasser has ultimately brought on the Palestinians

56 Peres 1970: 263.
57 Ibid. 263.
58 Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881–1938), founder of the modern state of Turkey.
59 Yusuf Ibn Ayyub (1138–1193), called Saladin, first sultan of the Ayyubid Dynasty. In 1187 he conquered Jerusalem, ending the 88 years of Christian rule for the time being.
60 Peres 1970: 263.
61 Ibid. 265.

through his policy of war, "a bigger catastrophe than they [the Palestinians] have experienced under King Farouk and the Mufti of Jerusalem put together."[62]

Even when looking at the Palestine question from this angle, Peres omits Israel and its role as if it was purely "an Arab affair." In order to understand how Zionist Israel perceives the "Arab environment," "the Arab world" or "the Arabs," it is useful to employ the separation discourse hypothesis according to which Israel's political culture has cultivated a discourse over the years that is drawing on an isolated perception of the two histories, with the Jewish-Zionist or Israeli on one side and that of "the Arabs" on the other.

Conclusion: Between Regional Conflict and the Question of Palestine

The implementation of Zionism in the Orient threw Israel into a clash with the "Arab enemy." Political Israel conceives of and deals with the so-called Middle East conflict on two different planes: on the one hand as a local Palestinian question, on the other as a regional conflict with the "Arab world." The traumatic invasion in May 1948 of five Arab armies into Palestine to fight against the creation of the Jewish state marked a turning point in the conflict history, as it meant the spacial expansion of the Arab question. From Israel's point of view, the "Arab world" and not only the Arab population of *Eretz Israel* had now become a dangerous adversary, and as Peres' texts reveal, even an archenemy. This enemy image of the Arab environment soon consolidated in Israel, and lastingly shaped the Israeli understanding of the conflict.

Numerous armed encounters with several neighboring states on different fronts – the so-called War of Independence in 1948, the Suez War in 1956, the Six-Day War in 1967, the War of Attrition in 1967–1969, the *Yom Kippur War* in 1973, the Lebanon War in 1982–2000, the Gulf War in 1991 and other military operations – all served to solidify this image. Up until the Egyptian-Israeli peace settlement of 1978, Egypt was considered the most dangerous antagonist. As the leading state of Arab nationalism and as the major opponent in the wars of 1948, 1956, 1967, and especially 1973, it had been the state most feared by Israel up to this point.

In the 1980s, the war theater shifted from the south to the north. As a civil war broke out in Lebanon in 1975, the country became increasingly attractive for interventions by neighboring states like Syria, with whom Israel has been engaged in a territorial conflict since 1967. Israel intervened in Lebanon as early as 1978 and

62 Peres 1970: 144. (Hebr.)

then again in 1982 to 2000, in order to shape the geopolitical order according to its own interests.

Tense relations with other Arab countries apart from Syria – such as Iraq (1991, 2003), Jordan (despite the peace treaty of 1994) and Iran (since 1979) – are still a part of political reality. Thus the regional constellation of the "all-absorptive hostility," as portrayed by Peres in 1970, seems to have been confirmed from the historic perspective.

But what is ultimately at the heart of these conflicts on different fronts is the shift of borders that occurred in 1948 and 1967, in other words, the Palestine question. This in turn is linked to other entanglements of the regional conflict and has profound historic reasons. Over the years, Israel's understanding of the Palestinian question has directly led to the impasse in which it currently finds itself locked. The fear of grappling with this question by political means is caused by the fact that this would mean calling into question a pillar of Zionism: *Eretz Israel* as the country of the Jewish people.

Since this myth is a constituent of the Israeli reason of state, there is no real dispute over Palestine in Israel's political discourse. It is not the *Palestine* question but rather the *Palestinian* question that is on Israel's agenda. This agenda has been discussed mainly in security-political and military terms (through the military government before 1967 and the military occupation afterwards), which has resulted in the depoliticization of the conflict. Ensuing from this, Israel has gradually developed an understanding of the conflict according to which the confrontation with the Palestinians or the neighboring Arab states is not really about the land or other material resources, but rather about a general aversion against the Jewish state as such – in other words about the "all-absorptive hostility" of the "new *Goyim*."

If one draws on Yosef Gorny's typology of the Zionist schools of thought that dedicated themselves to the Arab question during the time of the *Yishuv* before 1948, then historically Israel has been trying to realize the concept of a Political Zionism as it has been formulated by Theodor Herzl, or a Zionism of maximalist-separatist orientation as proposed by Berl Katznelson, with the main focus being on the establishment and preservation of a Jewish state for the Jewish people in *Eretz Israel*. This entailed displacing "the others," the Palestinians living in the area, not only physically (as soon as the opportunity arose) but also mentally. The Palestinians were forced into the role of an "out group" of the Zionist vision as they were *de facto* living on the "land without a people" that was understood to be the "promised land" meant "for a people without a land."

Israel's view of the Palestinians, however, is highly ambivalent. On the one hand they appear as the beaten enemy given the devastating defeats they sustained in 1948 and 1967. Over the course of Zionism's dramatic victory, especially in geopolitical and demographic terms, the old Arab question came to seem less precarious than at the time of the *Yishuv*. Now it was thought to be either solvable by limited concessions, or controllable by military means. Indeed, the Palestinian "refugees" or "intruders" as well as the Palestinian "citizens" have been kept in check by the Israeli military since 1948. This is also true for the Palestinians who have been living under Israeli hegemony since 1967. And although the military rule over Israeli Palestinians was officially suspended in 1966, they factually remained under the observation of the domestic intelligence service, and they continued to be denied a truly equal status.

On the other hand, the Palestinians have slipped from total control. Because not only are they living on the territory of *Eretz Israel* and thus pose a permanent demographic and (security) political challenge for Zionist Israel, they also see themselves as a nation and claim nation statehood on the territory of Palestine. Still, Israel continues to fight their right to self-determination throughout and without compromise, all the while falling into a more and more difficult position on the global as well as on the regional stage. For by denying the Palestinians their right to autonomy and statehood, Israel is thrust into an ever-escalating conflict with the Arab world.

Israel has always been apprehensive of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict spreading into the entire Middle Eastern region, and the example of May 1948 when five Arab armies got involved in the conflict over Palestine, fighting together to bring down the new state, is seared into Israeli consciousness. The same is true for the war of 1973. A united "Arab nation" would essentially force Israel to bring the Palestine question to the negotiating table, among other things.

The pan-Arab backing of the Palestinians translates into a direct threat to Israel's state concept. The notion of an all-encompassing hostility emanating from the Arab world is closely connected to the Israeli view of the conflict over Palestine. Continuing to ignore the Palestinian enemy by excluding this problem complex from the political discourse for many years is an expression of this ongoing pushing-aside tactic. It is exactly because it is believed that the Palestinians are a defeated enemy that the Palestinian question has become depoliticized and delegated to the military. In this way, the issue disappeared from the Israeli public's general awareness for many years, until the First Intifada broke out in late 1987.

Only in the early 1990s did the willingness emerge in the Israeli Zionist Left to take on the Palestinian question by political means, and to accept the hated PLO as the political representative of the Palestinians. Negotiations with the PLO had been unthinkable in Israel up to the Oslo Peace Process in 1993, and as of 1985 the law had even prohibited them. It is precisely because the Palestinians had been systematically eliminated from the Israeli consciousness and made out to be nothing more than a defeated yet still dangerous "out-group" over time that the peace process of the 1990s could not lead to a true settlement.

For Israel kept insisting, even during the Oslo Peace Process, on its maxims of "military dominance," "Jewish freedom of settlement in *Eretz Israel*" and "open borders" throughout the region. This is why, despite the fact that the PLO has been officially recognized and negotiations with it – difficult to carry out and extremely controversial as they are in Israel – have been taken up, the core of the conflict, *Eretz Israel*, has remained untouchable through these years.

Israel's refusal to split the country is very closely related to the fear of questioning the Zionist reason of state. In view of the existing bi-national situation, Israel's understanding of the Zionist project as a Jewish state for the Jewish people in the land of the Jews will inescapably lead to an order of violence as it is inherent in the system itself. Indeed, the historically grown political order represents the "consequent" practice of Political Zionism because it ultimately makes the separation of both peoples in the Holy Land necessary.

Closely linked therewith is Israel's orientalist view of the "Arab world" as the great "Other." Just as with the entire "Arab world," the Palestinians are also alternately ascribed the role of archenemy and patient opponent, with whom negotiations are possible to a certain extent but by no means on a plane of equality. An honest rapprochement or a real integration into a "backward and violent" region is at no time even aspired to, which is why mechanisms of dissociation and exclusion have been established in the course of time.

This regional isolation, whether it is self-imposed or forced on the Jewish state from the outside, finally leads to the conflict being integrated into the political order; hence to an understanding of the conflict in which the state of strife is interpreted as a given, unchangeable fact and in which that conflict is ultimately depoliticized. What is meant by the depoliticization of the conflict is the refusal to locate its core within one's own politics, be it war, settlement or population policies. Rather, it is thought of as residing exclusively in the "universal hostility" that is an integral part of the "mentality of the others."

In the Israeli consciousness it is "the violence of the others" or the "Arab will to annihilation" that remain the pivotal factors for the emergence of Arab-Israeli animosities. Whether it is Egypt under Nasser in the 1950s and 1960s, or under Sadat in 1973, or fundamentalist Iran since the late 1970s supporting the religious Palestinian Hamas movement and Hezbollah in Lebanon since the mid-1980s – they all fall into the category of the relentless archenemy. This provides an explanation for the historically grown, depoliticized perception of the conflict, which in turn forms the basis of the political order and the political culture as well as the self-image of Zionist Israel. All three issues will be the subject matter of the next chapter.

3 Israeli Democracy and the Zionist Project

Given its Zionist self-conception as a Jewish state on the one hand and the bi-national reality in Palestine/*Eretz Israel* on the other, the question as to what form of government the Israeli state was to take arose from the very moment of its establishment. Israel defines itself as a "Jewish and democratic state." The tension immanent in a definition of state that contains both these aspects already becomes apparent in the founding document. Thus, the Declaration of Independence of May 14, 1948 states the following with regard to the purposes and principles of the Jewish state:

> The State of Israel will be open for Jewish immigration and for the Ingathering of the Exiles; it will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.[1]

This passage outlines the conflicting priorities of the task of *Eretz Israel's* "Judaization" as it is contained in the Zionist project *and* the aspiration of the new state to democratic and liberal values. The Declaration of Independence wishes to see universalist concepts such as "freedom, justice and peace" as compatible with the Jewish-national *raison d'état* of demographically reshaping the country. The Zionist project is supposed to be based on liberal principles, while at the same time drawing on biblical sources of the visions "of the prophets of Israel."

The Declaration of Independence is often seen as a liberal-democratic basis for the coexistence of Jewish and Palestinian citizens. But the "Jewish Code" – a term coined by Baruch Kimmerling (1939–2007) – still remains the main pillar of Jewish society and the Jewish state. Traditional Israeli social and political sciences invoke the Declaration of Independence when they label the Israeli political system a liberal democracy, even though they do not fail to stress the deficits which are attributable to its specific historical origins.

Israeli democracy is therefore defined in different ways. Some writers stress the "democratic" element in the self-conception of the "Jewish and democratic

1 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/declaration%20of%20establishment%20of%20state%20of%20israel.aspx.

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state," and refer to its constitution as a liberal[2] or constitutional democracy[3], but also as a concordance democracy[4] such as the ones of Switzerland or Belgium, where the aim is to include as many social agents as possible into the political process and to arrive at decisions by bringing about consensus.

Other voices underline the "Jewish-ethnic" aspect and conceive of Israel as an "ethnic democracy"[5], or even as a "Jewish democracy" or "theo-democracy"[6]. Basically, all these research opinions assume that the Israeli body politic is democratic in principle. This premise is also shared by relatively critical researchers who point out the considerable defects of this democracy, even as they make only the core country of Israel, i.e., the territory within the so-called armistice borders of 1949–1967, the object of their studies.

In contrast, other researchers insist that the entire area of Palestine/*Eretz Israel* is relevant when it comes to the question of the political constitution since the State of Israel has exerted almost continuous political-military and socio-economical hegemony over this territory from 1967 on. These writers arrive at the conclusion that the Israeli state can hardly be called a democracy in the light of these two considerations: Firstly, the country has declared the policy of "Judaization of the country" to be its reason of state. And secondly, this policy keeps restricting the living conditions of non-Jews, with the term "non-naturalized population" being used to refer to the occupied Palestinian territories. This line of research uses terms such as "apartheid"[7], "*herrenvolk* democracy"[8], "a hybrid of democracy and military occupation"[9], or "ethnocracy"[10] in reference to Israel.

If the term "liberal democracy" is taken in the meaning of the French Revolution, according to which the same civil rights are to be granted to all citizens regardless of them belonging to a particular social group, Israeli democracy hardly qualifies. After all, Jews are automatically guaranteed privileges as compared to non-Jewish citizens in consequence of the Israeli self-definition as a "Jewish" state. Here, the principle of civil rights collides with the *raison d'état* of a "state of the Jewish people," which by definition prefers Jews, whether they be Israeli citizens or not.

2 Neurberger 1998.
3 Eisenstadt 1985.
4 Horowitz and Lissak 1990.
5 Smooha 1996.
6 Kimmerling 1994.
7 Davis 2003.
8 Benvenisti 1987.
9 Azoulay and Ophir 2008.
10 Yiftachel 1999.

Israeli Democracy: "Ethnic Democracy" or "Ethnocracy"?

Two concepts of democracy that were being discussed in the Israel of the 1990s epitomize the tension between the antidemocratic policy and democratic self-conception that is contained in the Israeli self-definition as a "Jewish and democratic state." These were the hypotheses of the "ethnic democracy" developed by the Israeli political scientist Sammy Smooha (1941–), and the model of "ethnocracy" proposed by the Israeli geographer Oren Yiftachel (1956–). When Smooha applies the model of an ethnic democracy to Israel, this serves as an alternative concept to the national-state liberal democracy that is based on equal rights for all citizens.

Likewise, it creates an alternative to the concept of the concordance democracy that is based on the equal status of various ethnic-national and religious sections of the population.[11] The ethnic democracy describes states and societies that are characterized by pronounced ethnic-national divides while still having democratic organizational forms. In an ethnic democracy, the political power is not distributed between the pluralities of ethnicities living in the state territory. Rather, the state is dominated by only one of the hostile ethnic-national collectives, so that the interests of that single group are catered to as a matter of priority.

Based on this definition, Smooha identifies Israel as an ethnic democracy, in which the Jewish ethnic group has been able to preserve its group-related interests (national, demographic, economic, social and cultural) by appropriating the state apparatus. Although individual rights are granted to the ethnic democracy's non-Jewish, Palestinian citizens, they are subjected to the mechanisms of a structural group hierarchy.

According to Smooha, the ethnic democracy model applies to ethnically divided or hostile societies. Despite the fact that political and civil rights may be due to all citizens in a democracy thus constituted, the hegemony of the state's dominant ethnic group is ultimately institutionalized. In Israel, the refusal to recognize Israeli Palestinians as a national minority is justified by invoking the obligation to the Zionist master narrative. For Smooha, one motive for doing so is of a historic-legal nature, namely that the recognition of the national rights of Palestinians would undermine the exclusive right of the Jews to *Eretz Israel*.

Another reason is that a minority status would grant the Palestinians a claim to autonomy, and hence create the danger of territorial separation. As a third aspect, Smooha points out a security-political motive: "According to the opinion of many Jews, such a recognition of the Arabs in Israel as a Palestinian national minority could lead to them being defined as an enemy, so that the hostile relations between

11 Smooha 2002.

them and the Palestinian people [living in the territories occupied by Israel] would be quasi reinforced, thus encouraging the Palestinians to sabotage the state.”[12]

Given the structural discrimination against inferior groups in an ethnic democracy, this model is understood as a compromise concept in which the two contradicting elements of the Israeli definition of state, namely the “Jewish” and “democratic” aspects, can be more or less reconciled. However, on a subtextual level the term “ethnic democracy” – no less than the self-definition as “Jewish” and “democratic” – actually serves to deny the bi-national political reality, i.e., the presence of two ethnic groups and the discrimination of one by the other.

After all, what does this combination of “Jewish” and “democratic” mean if not the blocking out of the fact that the Israeli state not only exercises the hegemony over another, non-Jewish nationality, but also that an undemocratic situation arises, and indeed cannot but arise, in the course of this process, if what is aspired to is a Jewish state in *Eretz Israel*.

Having a “state of the Jewish people” as its reason of state, Israel traditionally opposes the model of a “state of all its citizens,” that is, the bi-national option as a solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As for an equal status within the meaning of a concordance democracy, that too is rejected in the ethnic democracy model. And as the national right to self-determination continues to be denied to Israel’s Palestinian minority, the distribution of public power resources is clearly unfolding to their disadvantage.

Considering all this, the problem of Smooha’s line of argument does not least lie in the fact that he wishes the ethnic democracy to be understood as a stable, sustainable model. He seeks to bridge the contradiction between a truly democratic status of equality and favoritism towards *one* ethic group contained in the term of the ethnic democracy by means of an intellectual balancing act; maintaining that the “dominance of the majority group” is made up for by “democratic terms” for all citizens.[13] Smooha’s criterion for the distinction between the different kinds of democracy is the c*onstitutional* relationship between the dominant ethnic group, the state and the ethnic minority groups.

In an ethnic democracy the “ethnic nation, not the citizenry, shapes the symbols, laws and policies of the state for the benefit of the majority. This ideology makes a crucial distinction between members and non-members of the ethnic nation.”[14] Thus, Smooha relies on the procedural or constitutional elements of

12 Smooha 1996: 296.

13 Ibid. 303.

14 Smooha 2002: 477; http://edoc.vifapol.de/opus/volltexte/2009/1893/pdf/working_paper_13.pdf, 39.

a democracy according to which the majority principle and the civil liberties of the individual must be respected. But the core question as to how much legal inequality an ethnic democracy is supposed to tolerate still remains unanswered. When it comes to this special type of democracy in a divided society, Smooha's goal here is to differentiate it from the model of a "*herrenvolk* democracy" at all costs.

He argues that the latter, unlike an ethnic democracy, grants "the dominated groups no democratic rights whatsoever," acts "against universal norms and the world public," and thus represents a "non-democratic, extreme, rare and unstable regime."[15] By contrast, the ethnic democracy is cast as a stable construct and therefore a success model. This stability is ascribed to the "democratic tradition of the Zionist movement and the *Yishuv*," the "pronounced Western orientation of the Jews in Israel," and the "external dependencies on the democratic-western world."

In stressing that the continual inclusion of the Palestinian minority in Israeli democracy is warranted by the democratic purpose of Israel as well as the democratic orientation of Zionism, Smooha asserts the democratic aspect of the ethnic democracy concept. Consequently, the ethnic democracy is seen as representing "a realistic compromise between ethnic national state and democratic regime."[16] When Smooha calls the ethnic democracy a "realistic compromise"[17], one reason for this is that its "ethnic" aspect is understood to be a mainstay of the Zionist self-conception. Another explanation is the fact that security-political considerations serve as a rational method to implement and preserve this self-conception. In other words, what we have here is a "realistic model" with regard to a state that is "Jewish" and "democratic."

While Smooha applies his model to the sovereign state territory of Israel within the pre-1967 borders, thus drawing a clear dividing line around the occupied – or "disputed," as they are termed in the jargon of the Zionist Left – territories, the geographer Oren Yiftachel bases his model of ethnocracy on a different area of research. In his analysis of the Israeli political constitution, conducted against the blueprint of a conception of democracy which properly also includes civil equality, civil rights and the protection of minorities, Yiftachel refers to all territories under Israeli control, that is, the entire area of Palestine/*Eretz Israel*. As Yiftachel observes, the power distribution in the region has remained unchanged even throughout the Oslo Peace Process that was set in motion in 1993, as in fact

15 Smooha 1996: 303.
16 Ibid. 303.
17 Ibid. 304.

the limited Palestinian autonomous areas are still being subjected to Israeli-military hegemony.[18]

Just as in the model of the ethnic democracy, in the ethnocracy model the “dominance of one ethic group” with respect to the other ethnic groups of the state serves as the basis for the body politic. In contrast to the ethnic democracy, however, the ethnocracy is judged to be undemocratic as by definition it puts the dominant ethnic group into the center of its contemplation. Its hegemony inevitably goes hand in hand with the control and supervision of other ethnic groups in the state. As Yiftachel goes on to explain:

> An Ethnocracy is a non-democratic regime which attempts to extend or preserve disproportional ethnic control over a contested multi-ethnic territory. Ethnocracy develops chiefly when control over territory is challenged, and when a dominant group is powerful enough to determine unilaterally the nature of the state. Ethnocracy is thus an unstable regime, with opposite forces of expansionism and resistance in constant conflict.[19]

When it comes to the conflicting priorities of a “Jewish and democratic state,” the ethnocracy makes the interests of the Jewish-ethnic elements its main priority. Yiftachel demonstrates this by referring to the *Knesset* legislation by which the Jewish character of the state is ensured, such as the right of return of 1950 and the citizenship law of 1952, both of which favor Jews over non-Jews when it comes to the entitlement to citizenship. Another reinforcement of the Jewish-ethnic element, says Yiftachel, is a 1964 ruling by the Israeli Supreme Court in which the “Jewish character of the State of Israel is constitutionally” prescribed, as well as in the amendment made to the Basic Law in 1985 according to which no party may be accepted into the *Knesset* that seeks to change Israel’s definition as a state of the Jewish people.[20]

But for Yiftachel, the main issue when it comes to defining Israeli democracy is not only a matter of the *legal* level. Rather, he stresses that the actual *state practice* should be examined. As he points out in this context, a double process has been underway ever since the establishment of the state: namely the “Judaization” of the land on the one hand and its “de-Arabization” on the other, meaning the expropriation and displacement of the Palestinians. These dynamics of the political geography have led to a radical demographic change, hence to the modification of the structures of ethnic-territorial control, the break-up of state

18 Yiftachel 1999: 369.
19 Ibid. 367–368.
20 Ibid. 370.

borders, the inclusion of the Jewish and exclusion of the Palestinian diaspora, and also to a close interlacing of religion, territory and ethnicity.[21]

According to Yiftachel, the main obstacle on the way to a true Israeli democracy is the non-existence of a clearly definable Israeli *demos*. What he alludes to here is the abstract definition of the "national population" that is indispensable for a democracy, in this case "the Jewish people." According to the "right of return," Jewish citizens of other states have more rights in the State of Israel than non-Jewish citizens born on Israeli territory.

Moreover, Yiftachel finds it problematic that exterritorial, non-civic Jewish organizations influence political decisions inside Israel. This includes exterritorial Jewish organizations and groups such as the "Jewish National Fund," the "Jewish Agency" and the "Zionist Federation," which, although not being elected by the Israeli people, have an effective political power in Israel. Yiftachel also mentions the extensive system of donations by wealthy Jews abroad, as well as lobbies of Jewish communities on the international stage. He perceives them as an integral part of the exercise of political power by exterritorial organizations.

From Yiftachel's point of view, it is not only the lack of a clearly defined distinction between the rulers and the ruled that is standing in the way of terming Israel a democracy, but also the hazy lines of demarcation of the Israeli state territory. Yiftachel's term of "geographic dynamics" is central here, alluding to the Israeli transgression of borders by promoting the settlement of Israeli-Jewish citizens outside the sovereign, internationally recognized state territory. In this geographic space of the occupied territories, Israel pursues an ethnic segregation between Jewish citizens and disenfranchised Palestinians by military means, which collides with democratic principles. Yiftachel draws the conclusion:

> 'Israel,' as a definable democratic-political entity, simply *does not exist*. The legal and political power of extraterritorial (Jewish) bodies and the breaching of state borders empty the notion of Israel from the broadly accepted meaning of a state as a territorial-legal institution. Hence, the unproblematic acceptance of 'Israel proper' in most social science writings [...] and in the public media has been based on a misnomer.[22]

From this consideration Yiftachel develops his main hypothesis according to which it is the Jewish *ethnos* as opposed to the Israeli *demos* that rules the Jewish state, so that the latter has to be defined not as a *democracy* but as an *ethnocracy*. In 2007, the Israeli political scientist Yoav Peled (1947–) argued that since the beginning of 2000, within its internationally recognized borders of 1949–1967,

21 Ibid. 371–373; Yiftachel 2006: 114.
22 Yiftachel 1999: 377.

Israel has been continuously developing from an ethnic democracy to a form of government which comes very close to an ethnocracy.

In this context, Peled points out two crucial processes in Israel’s relationship to its Palestinian citizens: for one thing, Israel’s “denial of the right to family reunification between Palestinians with Israeli citizenship and Palestinians from the occupied territories”; for another, he speaks of “the formulation of a plan to move westward the border between Israel and the West Bank in the so-called ‘Arab triangle’ of Galilee, whereby 150,000 to 200,000 Israeli Palestinians would lose their Israeli citizenship.”[23] Peled concludes:

> In the current context, the restriction of the Palestinians’ civil rights is not really a price that has to be paid to achieve other goals such as security, democracy or other things, regardless of whether this price is justified or not. The curtailment of rights is in itself *the actual* goal of the aforementioned measures. Denying the right to family reunification to the Palestinian citizens of Israel and stripping some of them of Israeli citizenship are partial measures on this path. [...] a course which implies a turn from an ethnic democracy into an ethnocracy.[24]

The “Jewish Code” and Israeli Democracy

In the two state models that have been discussed above, the primacy of the Jewish ethic group in the Israeli reason of state is not contested. Rather, the central point of dispute when it comes to labeling the Israeli form of government is the question as to what kind of relationship the two components of the definition of state, “Jewish” and “democratic,” have to each other in a bi-national political reality. The Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling investigates this matter in his essay, “Religion, Nationalism and Democracy in Israel.”[25] Therein, he develops the concept of a specifically Jewish cultural code, the “Jewish Code,” as a central pillar of the Israeli political and social order, i.e., Israeli democracy. His analysis of the relationship of the three factors of religion, nation and democracy provides an insight into the special features of the Israeli understanding of democracy.

Kimmerling’s central argument is the taken-for-granted equation of the religious and national aspect of Jewish identity that Zionist ideology is based on. Thus, in contrast to other Western democracies, Zionist Israel defines itself not as a “state of its citizens,” but as “state of the Jewish people.” This means that ethnicity and religion are the factors based on which state membership and rights

23 Peled 2007: 355.
24 Ibid. 362.
25 Kimmerling 1994.

are granted, so that although Israel may indeed function according to democratic principles and boast free elections, parties, a division of powers as well as a free press, these democratic institutions and processes are strictly limited to the framework that is prescribed by the Zionist hegemony, with privileges only being ensured to the Jewish ethic group. Therefore, Kimmerling calls Israeli democracy a "theo-democracy" or a "Jewish democracy."[26]

To explain the genesis of the Israeli body politic, Kimmerling turns first to the *Yishuv* time before the establishment of the state. As he observes, undemocratic developments were looming already at this early stage, even though the question of the political constitution was not yet on the table. It was of secondary importance prior to the founding of the state, in a time when a secular Jewish society was in the process of emerging and more important and pressing political, military, social and economic issues had to be solved. Moreover, the different Zionist orientations – liberal, socialist, nationalist and national-religious – held highly diverse ideas on the form of rule, so the intention was to avoid any intensification of the already existing tensions within the Jewish-Zionist collective.

In this situation, the "Jewish basis" seemed a promising fundament for a future society with a broad consensus. As for non-Jews, they were already perceived as an "out-group" anyway. The electoral system that was introduced in the *Yishuv* for the national or Jewish-Zionist institutions (such as the parties, the "Jewish Agency," the "National Committee" and the Jewish labor union apparatus *Histadrut*) served as a legitimizing factor towards justifying the rules of the game *within* the Jewish community.

These elections had at least some external features of a democracy, which Kimmerling refers to as "processual democracy," with a certain degree of social and individual autonomy still being guaranteed within the different socio-political groups and parties.[27] Thus, the *Yishuv* functioned on a Jewish-Zionist basis while representing the collective identity, and, among other things, providing the organizational principles for warranting legal protection to the individual community members. These rights were not universal in the civil sense, but were grounded on belonging to the Jewish community.[28]

With the establishment of the state, however, the question of the political constitution inescapably arose. The basis of the new state was the strong, inseparable connection between religious and national elements. Characteristic for this conjunction was the agreement reached on the eve of the state's establish-

26 Ibid.
27 Ibid. 116–119.
28 Ibid. 120–121.

ment between the Jewish Agency (the executive institution of the *Yishuv*) and the non-Zionist Orthodox Party *Agudat Israel*, in which the religious status quo was made the fundament of the future Israeli order. And although the *Halacha* (the Jewish-religious legislation) was not adopted in its entirety or as a legal basis of the state, *Shabbat* as a day of rest as well as the observance of kosher commandments were stipulated by law in all public and government institutions. Likewise, family law (marriage, birth and death) was to be determined according to Halakhic legislation.

Upon the founding of the state, it *de facto* withdrew from the realm of family legislation, devolving it to the religious administrative authorities by law. This legal situation represented an adoption of the legal framework in the *Yishuv* according to which the Jews as a "religious *millet*" (a religiously defined nation of believers in the Ottoman Empire) had submitted to religious jurisdiction (1922–1947). At the time it had been left up to the individual in the *Yishuv* whether or not they would submit themselves to civil law, a choice that was no longer available with the establishment of Israel. And finally, the agreement had conceded full autonomy to the various currents within the Jewish religion when it came to matters of education.[29]

Choosing the Western Model

The new state's directional decision for a Western-style democracy was by no means a matter of course in the founding period. After all, the dominant political and social powers defined themselves as socialist; some of them – like *Mapam* and the communist party *Maki* – even had a distinct Soviet orientation. What is more, in 1948 the Soviet Union advocated the founding of the State of Israel and also ensured important arms supplies via Eastern European countries when Israel faced an American weapons boycott.

According to Kimmerling, Israel ultimately orientated itself towards the West for the following reasons: Firstly, because organized American Judaism was considered a long-term political and economic supporter of Israel; secondly, due to David Ben-Gurion's growing admiration for the strength and diversity of American society; and thirdly, because the Israeli political state elites sought to distance themselves from the Middle East region which they considered "backward."

Especially in a situation where several hundreds of thousands of Jews from the Arab countries of the Middle East as well as from North Africa were being

29 Ibid. 121–123.

received into the country, the political leadership felt compelled to demonstrate and codify the Western-European orientation. Besides, there would have been no room for a genuinely religious Jewish self-conception in an Israel embracing an atheistic-communist orientation. And after all, it was Judaism in its religious sense that soon became indispensable for the ultimate legitimation of Zionism, which is why the religious camp had to be included in the national project. For it was by appealing to expressly religious symbols and values that the Zionist movement succeeded in winning the support of Jews as well as non-Jews.

The Israeli Declaration of Independence of 1948 reflects the problematic roots and the controversial legitimation of the new state, attesting to the linking and blending of religious and secular elements, and of religion and nation. Jewish history, which is described in detail and traced all the way back to the biblical epoch, as well as the mention of the UN Resolution 181 of November 29, 1947, are meant to underpin the "natural and historic right" of the Jewish people to their political sovereignty in *Eretz Israel*.

The new state was supposed to be based "on liberty, justice and peace," that is, on universal values, while also being grounded in the spirit of "the prophets of Israel." Moreover, a direct appeal is made to the Jewish people of the diaspora, "to rally around the Jews of *Eretz Israel* in the task of immigration and development." Simultaneously, the religiously connoted goal of "the redemption of Israel" is mentioned. According to the declaration, the state is supposed to "uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of race, creed or sex." All this is underscored by the addition of the religiously charged phrase of "our trust in the rock of Israel."

In 1949, David Ben-Gurion preferred the religiously oriented parties (*Hamisrachi* or *Hapoel Hamisrachi*) as coalition partners to the secular-socialist *Mapam* or the liberal "General Zionists." His goal was to vest the new society composed of immigrants and settlers with a kind of legitimation through the religiously oriented parties, groups and individuals.[30]

The Israeli philosopher Adi Ophir (1951–) also perceived the tension between religious and national-collective identity features present in the Israeli Declaration of Independence. Although the document is not of a legally binding nature, it does fulfill a symbolic or legitimation-like function for Israeli democracy that is not to be underestimated. Ophir points out the sometimes-contradictory legitimation patterns that the Declaration of Independence is based on.

On the one hand, it refers to a metaphysical, that is, ahistorical, relationship of the Jewish people to *Eretz Israel*. On the other hand, it points out the bitter

30 Ibid. 123.

experience of the Jews in Europe, that is, the Jewish history of suffering; at the same time asserting the Jewish right to self-determination on a universal basis and the aspiration to a normalized situation in the context of a Jewish national state. The political choice between the Jewish-particularist and the universalist path, in other words between adhering to the maxim of the uniqueness of the Jewish people and the Zionist aspiration to a "normalization" of the living conditions of Jews – meaning their reconciliation with the *Goyim* – is considered to be a matter still undecided.[31]

But in how far is there really a contrast between the Zionist Right and the Zionist Left with regard to this "open" question of the "Israeli path"? After all, it was no other than the "Father of the Nation" and leader of the Labor Party who shortly after the establishment of the state pushed through his opinion against a written constitution for Israel. The "Zionist Leftist" David Ben-Gurion mobilized his *Mapai* party against such a document, even though the opposition parties *Mapam*, the General Zionists, *Herut* and the communist party *Maki* advocated it. All of them argued in favor of a constitution and for civil rights with a view to warranting the protection of minorities and limiting the power of the ruling *Mapai* party.[32]

Ben-Gurion's reasons for opposing a constitution lie in the fact that, firstly, forming a coalition with the religious party block (*Agudat Israel*, *Poalei Agudat Israel*, *Hamisrachi* and *Hapoel Hamisrachi*), his favored option, would not have been politically viable because these parties would have rejected a secular political constitution from the outset. Secondly, such a constitution would have restricted the dominance of the *Mapai* party, and hence the leeway of the government or ruling party that held a majority in the *Knesset* together with its coalition partners. Ben-Gurion considered the majority principle combined with the principle of the rule of law to be sufficient for legitimizing the Western character of the Jewish state. And thirdly, Ben-Gurion saw a constitution as a substantial obstacle to nation building by means of immigration, settlement and the genesis of a people still in the process of emerging.

All things considered, the demographic and geopolitical projects pursued by the Israeli political and security-political establishment of these first years were not compatible with a written constitution. After all, in such a document the borders of Israel as well as the status of the Palestinian citizens – in other words the question of lawfulness of a military government in the state territory (1949–1966) – would have had to be clarified and determined.

31 Ophir 2001: 245–255.

32 Bechor 1996.

In January of 1949, Ben-Gurion presented before the *Knesset* his argument against a constitution: "Our state is the most dynamic in the world and is being reshaped daily. Every day new Jewish people come into the country and every day abandoned land is liberated. These dynamics cannot be submitted to a predefined frame or artificial bonds."[33]

During the same *Knesset* discussion about a constitution, another party member, David Bar-Rav-Hei (1894–1977), summed up the matter in a way that corroborates Yiftachel's hypothesis of the geographic dynamics: "A constitution [...] is not enacted at the beginning of a revolution, but at its end. Every constitution aims at codifying and perpetuating certain principles. Most of the constitutions formulated in the course of a revolution had to be modified or dismissed altogether. This is to say that it is necessary to reach a certain stability first."[34]

Shortly after the establishment of the state it was mainly by continuing to promote Jewish immigration and settlement that this "stability" was to be guaranteed. Religious coalition member Mordechai Nurok (1884–1962) stressed the vital importance of immigration for Israel. After all, only ten percent of Jewish people were living in Israel by 1949. With the majority of Jews still living in the diaspora and therefore not able to participate in the decision, at this point in time a fixed constitution was objected to as being undemocratic.[35] With this in mind, a constitution seemed to run counter to Zionist tasks and national values such as state building, Jewish immigration and territorial gains.

On June 13, 1950, the *Knesset* decided to commission the *Knesset Constitution, Law and Justice Committee* to prepare a constitution based on the basic law. They did not, however, determine a date for the conclusion of the procedure. Only as late as 1992 did the *Knesset* enact a basic law that honored human rights. This means that the basic law articles for human dignity and freedom and for freedom of employment were issued as much as forty-five years after the state had been established. Even more importantly, these and most other basic law articles have no constitutional status, which means they can be modified or even abolished by a simple majority in the *Knesset*.[36]

So a written constitution for Israel has been successfully averted and does not stand in the way of the Zionist project. The new state took up the dynamic concept of the country's "Judaization," with immigration, settlement and security becoming the leitmotifs of Israeli policy. Israel absorbed Jewish immigrants

33 Quoted from Bechor 1996: 39.
34 Ibid. 42.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid. 32, 45.

from European and Arab countries and provided for their settlement on Israeli state territory as it had been internationally recognized in 1949. In all of this, the military and the security apparatus played a central role. Conquering the country, securing its resources for the Jewish state, protecting the borders, and exerting control over the Palestinians living in the state – all these tasks fell under the scope of the military’s competence. As such, military and security forces were increasingly viewed as the guardians of the Zionist project.

Already in the ten years between 1948 and 1958, the Ministry of Defense rose to be the most powerful and politically significant department of the cabinet. To this day it holds a special status and an extremely strong position of power. Among other reasons this is due to the fact that the conflict with the Palestinians and the neighboring states kept on escalating over the course of the years. The evolution and establishment of an Israeli democracy with a specifically security-political orientation is the subject of the next chapter. What shape the political culture of the country is in will be explored by taking a look at two examples of historically significant security-political affairs.

Military and Politics in a “Jewish and Democratic” Israel

In his book *David’s Sling*, published in 1970, Shimon Peres, who very much contributed to shaping the Ministry of Defense in the years from 1953 to 1965, offered the following reasoning concerning the relationship of military and politics in Israel:

> Occasional observers have expressed surprise that the Israel Army has never at any time sought to weaken or challenge the democratic civilian processes of the State by direct or indirect intervention or by an outright coup d’état. The fact is that there is hardly a democracy in the world which is more secure. If the Israel democracy faced any danger at all, it would be from perverted civilians and not from a misguided soldiery. Israel’s troops – civilians temporarily in uniform and subject to military discipline – are as varied in their ideas and political allegiances as all other civilians. [...] The falsity of the analogy with Israel of the two historical examples – the Crusades and Sparta, is easily exposed. The idea of the army’s influencing the political life of Israel is purely fanciful. [...] As a nation, we tend to be extreme individualists, and we suffer from a chronic multiplicity of political views and parties. Army service educates us to a discipline which is foreign to our character and our experience.[37]

37 Peres 1970: 255.

With this statement, a man of the establishment explicitly propagates the compatibility of militarism and democracy, thus decidedly dismissing the possibility of a military coup. In keeping with the maxim of the "nation in arms," the notion of the indispensability of the military and the view of Israeli society as pluralist and democratic, Peres' confidence in the stability of Israeli democracy appears unshakeable. He fails to recognize any contradiction between the emergency-like situation in Israel and the aspiration to a pluralistically oriented, free society. But is Israel really so immune against a military coup?

Scholarship has attempted to explain the relationship between military and politics in two ways. A first approach, the paradigm of the interconnectedness of the civil and military spheres, assumes a fundamental dichotomy between these two areas. Consequently, military coups are interpreted as a result of some kind of "malfunction" within the political-civilian system or the various mechanisms of civic control of the military.[38]

Traditional Israeli sociology generally draws on this paradigm to describe the specific situation in Israel. In this, it follows the American sociologist Morris Janowitz (1919–1988) who sees the "civilianization of the military" and the elimination of the strict separation between the two areas as a safeguard against coup attempts.[39] The Israeli sociologists Dan Horowitz (1928–1991) and Moshe Lissak (1928–) argue that Israel resembles ancient Athens rather than Sparta, being as a balance between a partially militarized society and civilianized army characterized it. Because the army is strongly involved in matters that are originally non-military, such as nation-forming and modernization processes, a "reversal of roles" has occurred between the Israeli army and the civilian entities.[40] Due to the widely internalized paradigm of the dichotomy of military and politics, and because of a principally apolitical conception of the military, a military coup is deemed unlikely by Israeli political science and historical research. To the contrary, the Israeli army is thought to be averse to political and civil tasks.[41]

A second line of research describes the relationship of military and politics by referring to the model of a "nation in arms."[42] In contrast to the paradigm of the dichotomy of military and politics, this approach stresses the close connections and common features of both spheres. The national state as an organizational principle and dominant basic structure requiring a high degree of political par-

38 Edmonds 1999.

39 Janowitz 1971; Huntington 1968.

40 Lissak 1983.

41 Barzilai 1996.

42 Ben-Eliezer 1994/1998.

ticipation is the precondition for enabling the masses to war or mobilizing them for other national goals. In this sense, the state armies are mass organizations.[43] The model of a “nation in arms” focuses on a centralistically ruled state, and is committed to an understanding of national statehood that originates in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Along these lines, Israeli sociologist Uri Ben-Eliezer (1951–) identifies four characteristics of the “nation in arms”: Firstly, the existence of a state army; secondly, a close cooperation between military and political elites based on a commonly shared ideology; thirdly, obscure boundaries between the two spheres; and fourthly, the self-image of the national army as apolitical and non-partisan, representing the values of the nation. Ben-Eliezer’s conclusion is that Israel is indeed a nation in arms. Ben-Gurion popularized the maxim of *Mamlachtijut* (“statehood”) which resulted in a professional mass army, legally anchored by the *Military Service Act* that was enacted in 1949.[44]

But which of these models matches the Israeli understanding of politics and military: the concept of a state with a “civilianized military” or that of a “nation in arms”? What is the nature of the relationship between politics and military, and what position does security policy take regarding the rule of law in the face of a permanent state of war? What significance does the Middle East conflict have for Israeli democracy? And what kind of security-political culture is ultimately created in Zionist Israel?

Let us first turn to the so-called Lavon Affair. Originally a purely security-political and military matter, it eventually escalated into a full-blown domestic and party political crisis. The Lavon Affair began in 1954 and the split of the ruling *Mapai* party marked its endpoint in 1965, as brought about by its leader of many years, the state founder David Ben-Gurion.

Similar to the Lavon Affair, the second conflict that will be examined, the Shin Bet Affair, starts out as a security-political, military problem, but later turns into a profound crisis of government and the rule of law. The main point of dispute was the democratic principle of the division of powers. In how far should the executive – that is, the government and the state security apparatus – be amenable to the law? The Shin Bet Affair dragged on for two years, from 1984 to 1986, during which time Shimon Peres held the office of prime minister.

43 Vagts 1959.

44 Ben-Eliezer 1998A: 318–320.

The Lavon Affair 1954–1964

The background to the Lavon Affair is the July 1954 military operation undertaken in Egypt by Unit 131 of the Information Department of the IDF Aman. Its goal was to undermine the relations between the USA, Great Britain and Egypt. The operation was carried out by the military without the authorization of Israel's political leadership. Only after the arrest of the involved Unit 131 members by Egyptian police did Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett (1894–1965), Minister of Defense Pinchas Lavon (1904–1976) and the rest of the Israeli government learn about the scale of the operation, which would soon be referred to in Israel by the code name *Esek Bish*, meaning "bad business" in Hebrew.

In early 1953, the newly elected American government under Republican President Dwight D. Eisenhower exerted pressure on Great Britain to pull out of its military bases in the Suez Zone. Israel followed the British-Egyptian negotiations with concern because the matter was also related to the handover of British arms depots and military facilities to Egypt. It was speculated in some military and political circles that an act of violence directed against the Brits in Egypt would suspend the negotiations, or even thwart the pullout plans.[45]

And thus Unit 131 was activated. In May 1954, the head of Aman, Benjamin Gibli (1919–2008), sent the commander of the unit to Paris where he met up with contact man Avri Elad (1925–1993) and gave him instructions for the activation of the sabotage unit in Egypt. The operation began on July 2, 1954, with small fire bombs that were deposited in different mail boxes in Alexandria. Two days later, rather harmless explosive charges were set off in American cultural centers in Cairo and Alexandria. On July 23, the Egypt's Revolution Day, Philip Natanson (1933–2004), a member of the unit, set out to place explosive charges in various cinemas in Cairo and Alexandria and in the Alexandria railroad yard; but one charge exploded prematurely in his pocket, leading to his arrest.

In the very same night the Egyptian security police arrested the other members of the unit, most of whom were Egyptians of Jewish faith. The court proceedings against them began on December 11, 1954 in Cairo. One member committed suicide in prison and two were sentenced to death and duly executed in late January 1955. The other agents received prison sentences.[46]

The "bad business" of 1954–1955 became a state affair the moment high-ranking officers of the army, the Chief of General Staff among them, intentionally – and for some time also successfully – covered up the incident. The secret inves-

45 Kafkafi 1998: 235–236; Eldar 1990.

46 Black and Morris 1994: 177, 180.

tigative commission that was appointed in early 1955 by Sharett in consultation with Lavon was not a juridical or parliamentary committee because Israel did not officially admit to the operation in Egypt. A "two-man commission" made up of the President of the Supreme Court Yitzhak Olshen (1895–1983) and the ex-Chief of General Staff Yaacov Dori (1899–1973) was appointed to investigate the question as to who was responsible for the operation.

Initially it looked like the military would be able to dodge accountability because the evidence led the "two-man commission" to the conclusion that it was impossible to determine who was accountable for the order. What is more, Minister of Defense Lavon resigned as a consequence of this finding, even though his responsibility for the "bad business" could not be established and his involvement in the matter seemed unlikely given the conditions in the security establishment.

It says a lot that the events surrounding this failed military operation in Egypt of mid-1954 and its aftermath lasting well into 1965 were generally referred to as "The Affair"; such was the significance of the Lavon Affair's long-term and far-reaching consequences. Since all this took place during Israel's formative years, the affair had a considerable impact on the political culture of the new state. It is a powerful example of the relationship between politics and military in a state in which the army was progressively gaining in significance.

This complex and multi-faceted story has all the ingredients of a full-fledged state affair, including the deception of a prime minister and minister of defense by the military as it executed a military plot in a neighboring state without any political authorization, intrigues in the highest echelons of the security organs, forgery of documents, cover-up of mistakes and false testimonies given to the investigation committee, as well as conspiracy against a minister and betrayal of one's own people.

In its second phase, the affair developed into a party-political matter. As details about the first phase became known to the affected individuals, the struggle to expose the entanglements of 1954 lead to an intense personal dispute within the *Mapai* party between David Ben-Gurion and Pinchas Lavon, who was dismissed as Minister of Defense in 1955 as a result of the occurrences of 1954. This dispute was a continuation of the political power struggle which had already been seething between the two camps of the ruling *Mapai*; namely the "Old Guard" and the "Ben-Gurion Boys," which included Ben-Gurion's protégés Shimon Peres and Moshe Dayan (1915–1981). From the time of the failed military operation in July 1954 right up to the split of the *Mapai* party in 1965, the affair repeatedly boiled up and became the subject of numerous publications.[47]

The Security Establishment of the First Years

When David Ben-Gurion resigned as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense in late 1953, he appointed Pinchas Lavon as Minister of Defense and Moshe Dayan as Chief of General Staff. New Prime Minister Moshe Sharett met this with some reservation. Meanwhile, Shimon Peres was given the post of Director-General in the Ministry of Defense. With these three changes of staff in the field of defense, Sharett's attempt to push through a moderate course with respect to security policy was considerably complicated.

As secret exploratory talks were held with Egypt in the course of the year 1954, not only Dayan and Peres but also Minister of Defense Lavon took a critical attitude towards the new prime minister because of the latter's allegedly "weak stance." They had doubts when it came to Sharett's political authority since he was maneuvering between different positions regarding retaliation policy. Despite a supposedly shared ideology, a power struggle concerning security-political questions soon ensued among the three new heads in the Ministry of Defense.

Tensions developed in the course of time between Peres and Dayan about the respective areas of competence of ministry and army, but they soon identified a common enemy. The times when Peres and Dayan could enjoy generous freedom of action in ministry and army under the aegis of Ben-Gurion – not least thanks to the latter's double responsibility as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense – were a thing of the past. As Lavon intensively immersed himself in ministerial issues, his two subordinates found it difficult to get used to his methods which were meant to exhibit accountability and transparency towards the political elite. They also found it hard to accept his authority.

For Peres, it meant a restriction of the freedom of action he had enjoyed as Vice Director-General (1952–1953) under Ben-Gurion. Differences of opinion in ministry matters, such as the purchase of weapons or the structure of the army, were growing between Lavon and Peres. And so Peres, together with Dayan, often chose to consult with the former Minister of Defense Ben-Gurion about ministerial issues. According to Lavon's biographer Eyal Kafkafi (1941–2002), Ben-Gurion *de facto* continued to rule during his "hiatus" in the south Israeli kibbutz

47 Hasin and Horowitz 1961; Arieli 1965; Harel 1979/1982; Eshed 1963/1979; Teveth 1994/1996; Kafkafi 1998; Shahar 1989; Kafkafi 1998; Uri Avneri 1975; Elgazi 1997; Arye Avneri 2004.

of Sde-Boker by proxy through his two protégés, whereby he effectively circumvented Sharett. This constellation is habitually referred to as the "Sde-Boker government"[48], and the question arises as to how far this government was involved in the conception of the sabotage operations in Egypt.

Dayan's actions in the wake of the undercover maneuvering, including the cover-up strategy before the "two-man commission," were aimed at denying any responsibility whatsoever for his failure as Chief of General Staff. Dayan left it up to the head of Aman, Benjamin Gibli, as to whether he would assume responsibility for the military operation himself or "transfer" it to the minister of defense. Secretly, Dayan pursued the second option, without seriously examining the state of affairs. Therefore he bound himself, as it were, to aligning with Gibli's side, even as signs were subsequently adding up that Gibli's version rested on shaky ground.[49]

Soon Peres ranged himself with Dayan. For him, the mentioned conflicts concerning the area of competence in the Ministry of Defense were in themselves an obvious and sufficient motif to testify against Lavon before the "two-man commission." But there were also fundamental differences of opinion about the role of military in a democratic society coupled to this personal power struggle. The Director-General of the Ministry of Defense was skeptical of Lavon's suggestions for the reorganization of the ministry.

These comprised the following items: Clear delimitations of the supervision areas of minister, chief of staff and director-general, so that the range of competence of the three positions would be unambiguously defined; the formation of a defense council comprised of representatives from the civilian as well as the military sphere; the introduction of the office of vice minister of defense (under Ben-Gurion this office did not exist, which provided the precondition for Peres' position of power); subordination of the army spokesperson under the minister of defense rather than the chief of general staff; and the regulation of all matters concerning military purchasing being under one roof.[50]

All these measures were aimed at politically controlling the military. In fact, Peres should have found little fault with this concept as a high-ranking civil servant in the Ministry of Defense. But then, these plans would have meant the curtailment of his political elbow room, since now he would not only have to accept an independent minister but also a vice minister as his superior. What is more, Lavon's intention to submit the military to political authority represented a

48 Kafkafi 1998: 197–199.
49 Arieli 1965: 46, 55.
50 Ibid. 113; Kafkafi 1998: 280–281.

rival concept to Peres' idea of the Ministry of Defense being a "closed structure of a separated security empire."[51]

Peres' notion was perfectly aligned to Ben-Gurion's understanding of the tasks and work methods of the minister of defense, in which the political level determines general guidelines but leaves the actual implementation up to the military or the "security experts." As a consequence, the security establishment developed into a closed-off kingdom that enjoyed such a high degree of authority and autonomy that the political institutions – *Knesset*, government and judicial power – had little way of supervising it; a situation that was already noted in 1961 by Israeli journalists Eliyahu Hasin (1927–2008) and Dan Horowitz.[52]

The further course of the affair suggests that Peres' rivalry with Lavon was of a personal, power-political nature. His idea to help bring Ben-Gurion back into power in 1955 in order to improve his own political career prospects became increasingly obvious. As the Israeli historian Yehoshua Arieli (1916–2002) suggests, it was already at this point that Peres and Dayan saw their future in politics coupled to Ben-Gurion's political power. Lavon's disempowerment along with an unstable government under Sharett would propel them closer towards their goal.[53]

As the affair continued to unfold through late 1960 and early 1961, Ben-Gurion and his Boys in the *Mapai* party kept antagonizing Lavon until they succeeded once more in bringing about his dismissal from his post as secretary general in the trade union confederation *Histadrut*. Hasin and Horowitz see the reason for this campaign in the fact that Lavon was still fighting for his rehabilitation in the Lavon Affair, the clarification of which might have endangered the Boys' not yet secured political power position within the *Mapai*.[54]

As it were, the Lavon Affair was reignited in 1960 because of a series of events gradually bringing the truth to light. Bit by bit, Lavon learned about the 1955 conspiracy against him, but had little solid proof. In 1957, however, he got more evidence following the arrest of the Aman officer Avri Elad. The secret lawsuit against Elad, who turned out to be a double agent, is surrounded by rumors regarding his contribution to false testimonies made by officers before the "two-man commission," also concerning Lavon's role in the affair. Lavon turned to the head of government and party leader demanding elucidation, and henceforth his rehabilitation. Ben-Gurion commissioned his military secretary Chaim Ben-David

51 Arieli 1965: 114; Hasin and Horowitz 1961: 214–215.
52 Hasin and Horowitz 1961: 214–215.
53 Arieli 1965: 24.
54 Hasin and Horowitz 1961: 219.

(1919–1967) to investigate the matter based on the existing evidence, including the body of evidence Lavon had compiled over the years.

By mid-June 1960, Ben-David concluded his investigation with the suspicion that documents had been forged or made to disappear.[55] In late August 1960, Ben-Gurion appointed another investigative commission, this time headed by Justice of the Supreme Court Chaim Cohn (1911–2002). The findings corroborated the results of the previous investigation. Moreover, they confirmed the suspicions regarding the destruction of documents, false testimonies and coercion of witnesses before the "two-man commission." Based on these results, Lavon demanded his political rehabilitation from Ben-Gurion but was refused. The situation spun out of control and the details became known to the public.[56]

From this point on the affair increasingly turned into a duel between Lavon and Ben-Gurion, or the "Old Guard" and the "Boys," both of who were members of the *Mapai* party. Much to Ben-Gurion's dismay, Lavon appealed to the *Knesset's* Security and Foreign Affairs Committee. But his statement before this committee on October 17, 1960 turned out to be his own downfall. Lavon reported on the intolerable state of affairs in the security establishment of 1954, which up until that point had only been known within a small circle. For example, he drew attention to a budget meeting of the Ministry of Defense that had been held by Ben-Gurion during Lavon's term of office and in his absence, by which the parliament's power of the purse was bypassed.[57] Ben-Gurion reacted with outrage and condemned Lavon's statement as "an intrusion into his empire," and a direct attack on the military: "The officers [...] must not be convicted before their guilt has been proven. This falls under the authority of the court of law alone."[58]

Faced with the imminent escalation of the affair into an outright crisis, the *Mapai* leadership sought to withdraw responsibility for uncovering the events from the *Knesset* Security and Foreign Affairs Committee. A commission of ministers consisting of seven ministers from different parties was appointed as the investigation committee.[59] Hired by the commission, State Prosecutor Gideon Hausner (1915–1990) uncovered another piece of evidence. The then Aman secretary Dalia Carmel-Goldstein testified that a letter dated July 19, 1954, in which the order for the operation in Egypt was given, was a forgery.[60] Based on various

55 Ibid. 88.
56 Ibid. 91.
57 Kafkafi 1998: 372–373.
58 Quoted from Arieli 1965: 155–156.
59 According to Hasin and Horowitz 1961: 144, the investigation had been comprehensive and intensive.
60 Segev 1989.

findings, on December 25, 1960 the "seven-man commission" arrived at the conclusion that Lavon neither gave the order for the operation in Egypt nor did he have any knowledge of it.[61]

But Ben-Gurion refused to accept this verdict as well. Quite the reverse, in that same cabinet meeting of December 25, 1960 he gave a speech that has been figuratively called the "raised hatchet" by Hasin and Horowitz.[62] He accused Lavon of "dangerously hawkish" tendencies, which cannot be reconciled with "the honor of the military." He maintained that high-ranking officers of the Israeli army could hardly have come up with a plan like the sabotage operation in Egypt all by themselves. Thus, Ben-Gurion refused to accept the conclusions reached by investigative committees he himself had appointed. And so Pandora's box remained open as the Boys kept opposing Lavon's rehabilitation contrary to the decision of the commission of ministers by which Lavon was exonerated, and also against public opinion.

But Lavon found well-known spokesmen for his rehabilitation among Jerusalem intellectuals who, when faced with Ben-Gurion's conduct, assembled on January 11, 1961, to express their concern regarding the democratic values of Israel in a petition. They pointed out the following aspects as particularly concerning: Firstly, Ben-Gurion's demand to retract the decision of a government commission; secondly, the insistence on Lavon's dismissal despite his exoneration – as should this claim be complied with the credibility of the rule of law would be seriously damaged; thirdly, the argument brought forward by Ben-Gurion's Boys that the country depended on the leadership of a single person, which is irreconcilable with democratic principles; and fourthly, the endangerment of democracy not only through words, but also by the methods of the Boys. Further, these Jerusalem intellectuals criticized the opinion of the Boys that the credibility of the military is based on its sacrosanctity, on "the honor of the military." They regarded such a thought as alien to democracy.[63]

All this public and intra-party pressure notwithstanding, Ben-Gurion and his Boys not only succeeded in forcing the *Mapai* party to dismiss Lavon from his *Histadrut* post, but also in having his name removed from the party list for the *Knesset* election. These had been Ben-Gurion's conditions if he was not to resign from his offices.[64] By early 1961, the anticipated final line under the affair was still

61 Arieli 1965: 148–149; Kafkafi 1998: 386; Hasin and Horowitz 1961: 150.
62 Hasin and Horowitz 1961: 156.
63 Ibid. 174–175.
64 Kafkafi 1998: 398.

not drawn; just as reconciliation within the internally divided government party had still not been reached.[65]

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Defense was busy preparing the official version of the affair. In October 1962, the journalist of the union newspaper *Davar*, Chagei Eshed (1928–1988), was commissioned to investigate the affair.[66] Apparently it was not enough for Ben-Gurion and his Boys to get their way, they also wanted to be in the right. In early 1964, Ben-Gurion, who had by then left his offices, judged that Lavon "had sole responsibility for the affair" based on Eshed's conclusions.[67] He demanded that the inquiry into the events be reopened within the framework of a "juridical investigation" based on the claim that a commission of ministers was unlawful. But the government under Levi Eshkol (1895–1969) declined Ben-Gurion's request. At a party congress on November 11, 1964, Ben-Gurion repeatedly expressed his opinion of Lavon, yet his words were aimed mainly against his successor Levi Eshkol and his government.

Now that Lavon was banned from politics once and for all, Ben-Gurion attempted to remove the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Levi Eshkol. Dayan and Peres, who both held ministerial offices in the Eshkol government, supported him in the endeavor. This time, however, Ben-Gurion failed to reach his goal. Instead, on December 14, 1964, Eshkol handed in his notice of resignation to the president of the state. On the following day he was elected by the Central Committee of the *Mapai* party as their candidate for the office of prime minister.

Eshkol also managed to assert himself within the party concerning the question of the "juridical investigative commission" repeatedly demanded by Ben-Gurion. Thus, the prime minister closed the Lavon Affair with the conclusion of the "seven-man commission," in other words, with Lavon's exoneration. Faced with defeat, Ben-Gurion deserted his own party. During a meeting of his party supporters in June 1965 he declared the necessity of "purges" within the party due to "insecurity and deception" as well as "distortion of judgment." In late June 1965, he founded a new party named *Rafi*, Israel's Labor List, and forced his protégés Peres and Dayan to follow him into the opposition.

65 Arieli 1965: 149–150; Teveth 1996: 268.
66 Kafkafi 1998: 401.
67 Eshed 1963/1979.

The Lavon Affair as a Battle between Generations

The sociologist Baruch Kimmerling interprets the Lavon Affair as a power-political struggle between two generations who respectively established their power bases in different state institutions. The so-called "Old Guard" – comprised of the second generation of the *Mapai* party – exerted influence via the party and the strong union organization *Histadrut*. Among the people belonging to this group were Lavon, Eshkol, Sharett and Golda Meir (1898–1978); all in their sixties. In contrast, the younger generation that was supported by Ben-Gurion was in the fourth decade of their lives. This group of politicians saw the security department as the main pillar of state leadership, and consequently sought to reinforce it as their power base.[68] For them, the 1965 split from the *Mapai* mother party and the loss of power that accompanied it marked only a temporary power-political defeat.

The "necessity of war" and the resulting increased significance of security soon helped the Boys regain state leadership. Dayan and Peres returned to the Ministry of Defense. In the course of the crisis of May/June 1967, on the eve of the Six-Day War, Ben-Gurion's new party *Rafi* formed part of the government in the grand coalition. Dayan became minister of defense in Eshkol's stead. This change facilitated the decision to enter into the military conflict of the June War. In 1974, in the wake of the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and the domestic political crisis that followed because of the high number of dead and injured Israelis, Peres took over the Defense Department from Dayan, holding this office until the Labor Party's electoral defeat and changeover of power in 1977.

The *Mapai* party had already been dissolved in 1968 and unified with the labor parties *Achdut Haavoda* and *Rafi*, and later also the Marxist *Mapam* party, to form the Israeli Labor Party. Thus, the "Old Guard" was already considerably weakened by 1974, when the Golda Meir government fell as a consequence of the Yom Kippur War debacle. In 1977, the Labor Party lost its state leadership for the first time, and the *Likud* party, led by Menachem Begin, came to power. After seven years in the opposition, the Labor Party returned to government responsibility in 1984, this time with Peres as party leader and prime minister, in a grand coalition with the *Likud*. Shortly after his assumption of office, Prime Minister Peres was forced to deal with a string of serious security-political matters that dominated the political agenda and increasingly thrust Israeli democracy, including its concept of an open society, into a quandary.

68 Kimmerling 1993: 346.

The Shin Bet Affair of 1984–1986

Two decades after the end of the Lavon Affair, the special significance of the military-territorial security had long been cemented into the political culture of the country. Still in a state of war, Israel had to come to grips with the conflicting priorities of "security" (understood as national-state existence) and the rule of law as an imperative feature of democracy. A number of affairs dominated the political agenda. This time, the illegal methods of the internal security service Shin Bet as well as the foreign intelligence agency Mossad were the focus of the debate.

It all began in April 1987, when details of the Nafsu Affair surfaced. In short, the Shin Bet had tortured Izzat Nafsu (1955–), a lieutenant in the Israeli army, and accused him of treason and espionage. By the time the public finally gained knowledge of it, the Circassian lieutenant had already served seven years of an eighteen-year prison sentence. In reaction to these events, the so-called Landau Commission took on the task of examining Shin Bet investigation methods in cases of "hostile terrorist activities," also with the goal of developing recommendations for the future.[69]

The second scandal, the Pollard Affair of November 1985, revolved around John Pollard (1954–), an American of Jewish faith and a convinced Zionist, who had worked for the US Navy and the "Anti-Terrorist Alert Center" (ATAC). He had offered Israel his services as a spy and provided the Mossad with vast amounts of valuable secret documents from the beginning of 1985 up until the time of his arrest.[70] The Mossad also had a hand in the Iran Gate Affair, which became known in late 1986. As it was uncovered the secret arms deals between the USA and Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini came to light. And then there was the 1986 Vanunu Affair, which led to the unraveling of the Israeli "policy of ambiguity" with regard to its nuclear capacity.[71]

The many scandals of the 1980s offer deep insights into the political culture of Israel as they disclose the characteristic structures of the "Israeli order." The Shin Bet Affair serves to illustrate this in an especially poignant manner, because it shows what happens when there are people who are not willing to play by the specific rules of the Israeli order. The term "Israeli order" refers to the relationship between the respective state institutions and the associated historically grown political culture that is committed to the Israeli reason of state. The term also covers the *habitus* of the political and military elites with regard to the Zionist

69 Black and Morris 1994: 591–595.

70 Ibid. 601–614.

71 Cf. pages 121–127 of this book.

project of the "Judaization" of the country and the closely related task of state security. Another facet of the Israeli order is the democratic and constitutional conception of the state, meaning its respective institutions and laws. The Shin Bet Affair provides a glimpse into the conflicting priorities of law and security within a security-political order dominated by war, fear and loss of control in a time when the war that had started on the northern front in 1982 had become the "Lebanon quagmire."

Similar to the Lavon Affair, the Shin Bet Affair was about the illegal conduct of the leadership within a security authority, in this case Avraham Shalom (1928–2014), who, in an attempt to cover up his own responsibility undermined the work of state investigative commissions. Innocent people were held accountable while the real culprits seemed to be able to dodge responsibility. Despite the attempts to sweep the matter under the rug, it unleashed political discussions and finally led to inquiries by prosecuting authorities.

The conflict between politics and law that unfolded in the course of the Shin Bet Affair had a far-reaching and profound impact. In contrast to the Lavon Affair, the focus in this scandal was not on the ruling party or the government. Rather it was on the quarrels between the executive represented by the protagonists of security politics and the secret service Shin Bet on the one side, and the judicial power, particularly the prosecuting authorities, on the other. In this affair, law fought against politics. And by Israeli standards the success it managed to score is not to be underestimated.

The Shin Bet Affair is the subject of numerous publications.[72] Especially worth mentioning in this context is the "*Maariv* Special Report – Shin Bet Affair" published in the daily newspaper *Maariv* on July 18, 1986. It elaborates on various issues of the operational, political, legal and medial level, and also discusses aspects of the political culture. Explosive details about the affair were also disclosed by the journalist Nahum Barnea (1944–) in his article "The Shin Bet Way" (June 4, 1986) written for the newspaper *Koteret Rashit*, and later in "We Were at War" (June 25, 2004) for *Yedioth Ahronoth*.

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72 Barnea 1984; Baron 1986; Ben-Porat 1986; Azoulay-Katz 1986; Oz 1986; Zertal 1986; Rosental 1997; Bar-Josef 1997. In their work *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services,* Ian Black and Benny Morris provide a concise overview of the events. The Israeli political scientist Michael Keren also includes the Shin Bet Affair as he tries to analyze Peres' legislative term from 1984 to 1986 from a political-science angle. In his book *Professionals Against Populism, The Peres' Government and Democracy,* Keren points out Peres' dilemma and explains his view of things in the chapter "Law and Democracy." In his biography, Bar-Zohar also devotes several pages to Peres' conduct in the course of the affair. A detailed but still pointed description is provided by Yechiel Gutman in his 1995 book *A Storm in the G.S.S.*

The Shin Bet Affair became publicly known on May 24, 1986, but had actually begun two years earlier with an assault on a group of Israelis. On the evening of April 12, 1984, four Palestinian teenagers from the Gaza Strip hijacked a bus on the 300-line, which was on its way from Tel Aviv to Ashkelon. They forced the bus driver to head towards Gaza instead. As they let the passengers know, their intention was to have their comrades released from Israeli prisons. A pregnant woman was allowed to disembark near Ashdod, at which point she alerted police.[73]

Israeli security forces managed to stop the bus on the outskirts of Deir al-Balah, south of Gaza City. During a blitz operation by storm commandos, one female passenger and several members of the security force were killed. Seven passengers were injured. Two hijackers were shot during the rescue operation and the other two were overpowered. Following a brief interrogation by Brigadier General Yitzhak Mordechai (1944–), they were handed over to Shin Bet and executed illegally on the orders of Shin Bet Chief Avraham Shalom who was on site. All this occurred in the presence of the press.[74]

Photo evidence showing the hijackers still alive led the army and press to ask questions about the course of events. Finally Minister of Defense Moshe Arens (1925–) initiated the elucidation of the case and appointed a secret commission headed by Reserve General Meir Zorea (1923–1995) to investigate the incident. As Arens was well aware, being the highest-ranking person present at the scene on the evening of the execution, he himself could be suspected of having given the order.

Shalom, who had been trying in vain to avert the investigation, ultimately persuaded Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Arens to accept his demand that one of his own men, Yossi Genossar (1946–2004), be included in the commission as a representative of Shin Bet. Shalom considered this appropriate given the tensions between the army and Shin Bet. To Attorney General Yitzhak Zamir (1931–), however, the new member of the investigation committee seemed highly suspicious. And indeed, Shalom used Genossar as a Trojan horse in the investigation so the truth might be kept from emerging.[75] What the chief of Shin Bet ultimately wanted was to cover up his own responsibility for having given the command to kill, and in this he was successful.

The Zorea commission determined that the two Palestinian hijackers died as a result of skull fractures, and that unidentified members of the security force were guilty of this offense. The commission recommended that the Attorney

73 Black and Morris 1994: 579–590.
74 Ibid. 579–581; Gutman 1995: 16–18.
75 Gutman 1995: 24.

General persevere in the case, at which point Shalom put Zamir under considerable pressure to terminate the all inquiries. In spite of this, on June 4, 1984, Zamir appointed an investigation team headed by State Attorney Yonah Blatman (1929–2012).[76] This time Shin Bet managed to throw suspicion of having committed homicide on Brigadier General Yitzhak Mordechai, since he was the only one who had admitted to the Zorea Commission that he had beaten the bus hijackers after their arrest.

In the end, Mordechai was successfully framed as the main suspect through Shin Bet's statements. On August 12, 1985, the Blatman Commission concluded there was no sufficient proof to charge Mordechai with having murdered the kidnappers. But it recommended putting him and other members of Shin Bet, as well as three police officers, on trial for assault and battery. On the orders of Zamir, Mordechai was subjected to a disciplinary procedure by the army in which he was acquitted on August 18, 1985 after a seven-minute hearing. Shortly after that, he was promoted to major general.[77] The five other members of Shin Bet that were involved in the case were likewise acquitted of their assault and battery charges in a special disciplinary procedure.[78]

At this point, the "Bus Line 300 Affair" would have been the end of it had not high-ranking Shin Bet members turned it into the Shin Bet Affair. Although Shalom's deputy Reuven Hazak (1938–) had been privy to the cover-up scheme of the Shin Bet, with Shalom intimating to him that it had been agreed to by then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, Hazak soon discovered that Shalom had acted on his own initiative. Thereupon, on October 14, 1985, Hazak asked Shalom to resign.

Two high-ranking Shin Bet representatives, Rafi Malka (1943–), head of the operations division, and Peleg Radai (1938–), head of the protection and security department, joined in supporting Hazak. They were of the opinion "that the service's tradition of honest reporting was crucial to the Shin Bet's efficient functioning both internally and externally in its relations with the Ministry of Justice and the courts."[79] When Shalom refused to comply with Hazak's demand, Hazak turned to the new Prime Minister Shimon Peres.

Peres commented on his meeting with Hazak, who had already been described to him by Shalom as an "over-ambitious deputy[80], on October 29, 1985: "He [Shalom] said that action is being taken against him from within the service.

76 Ibid. 27.
77 Black and Morris 1994: 584.
78 Ibid. 584–585; Gutman 1995: 28–32.
79 Black and Morris 1991: 405.
80 Ibid.

Naturally the leader has to be protected. […] The leader is constantly facing conspiracies. […] Three people within the organization have attempted to proceed against him. I cannot tolerate such conduct in such an organization."[81] Peres interpreted Hazak's accusations against Shalom as a "coup attempt" within the Shin Bet, even though he had been informed by Shalom that Hazak was prepared to accept the possibility of having to resign.[82] Peres' coup hypothesis is also untenable for the reason that Hazak would have acceded to Shalom's post in only a matter of months had he not made the issue known to outside circles.

The *Maariv* journalist Avi Betelheim notes that the meeting with Hazak made Peres very apprehensive for the secret service that he had politically supported for over a decade. For patriotic reasons, Peres preferred "to extinguish the fire as quickly as possible" instead of getting to the bottom of the issue.[83] A few days after their first discussion, Peres let Hazak know:

> I have pondered the matter. I have no judicial authority […]. After the various judicial proceedings that have already been undertaken, I have arrived at the conclusion that I will believe the leader. Because you [Shalom and Hazak] are at strife, and such a situation won't work in an organization like this one, you have to go. […] I do not convict you, of course; I respect your rights. But because of the conflict between the head and his deputy, and because I have no reason to dismiss the head, I suggest that you go on educational leave. The matter is herewith settled.[84]

The events soon sparked a fierce controversy between the Prime Minister and the Attorney General, escalating into a serious state affair. At the core of the dispute was the question as to whether Israel's existing laws were sufficient for serving the special security requirements of the country, or whether there were cases that had to be dealt with outside of the law in a silent arrangement between the respective state institutions. While the Attorney General and Law Professor Yitzhak Zamir held up the law and saw it as sufficient for the security requirements of the state, Prime Minister Peres took a conspicuously uncritical stance towards the Shin Bet.

For Peres, the secret service and all other state security apparatuses had an almost sacral character and were not to be touched under any circumstances. Whereas Zamir intended to hold the Shin Bet responsible for their alleged criminal act, Peres did everything in his power to shield them from the law. He totally ruled out the possibility that the secret service might have indeed acted unlaw-

81 Gutman 1995: 36.
82 Ibid. 39; Black and Morris 1994: 585.
83 Betelheim 1986.
84 Ibid.; Gutman 1995: 40.

fully. In Zamir's eyes, the affair was much more than a purely security-political matter. It was not just the murder of Palestinian prisoners in the "Bus Line 300 Affair" that worried him, but also the conduct of the Shin Bet members towards the investigative commissions. For Peres, however, the highest precept remained to prevent any investigation into the Shin Bet Affair. This repeatedly brought him into conflict with the law. Initially, Peres relied on dealing with the affair internally by means of personnel decisions. In doing so, the Prime Minister unleashed an avalanche of events over which he almost failed to regain control.

After Hazak, Malka, too, was fired. He appealed to the Supreme Court, seeking to push through his own reappointment as well as Shalom's dismissal by way of legal action. A little later, Radai voluntarily handed in his resignation, as he was no longer willing to support the policies of Shin Bet. These occurrences had not yet come to the public's attention, but they did cause some anxiety within Shin Bet and the prosecuting authorities.[85]

Finally, Hazak himself contacted the Attorney General and his staff to provide first-hand information about the cover-up. After secretly questioning the three Shin Bet dissidents for days, Zamir came to be convinced that their statements, according to which Shalom intentionally misled the two investigation committees to evade responsibility for having issued the order to kill the two captive Palestinians, were indeed truthful.

Zamir prompted Peres to dismiss the four people directly involved in the attempted cover-up – Shalom, Ginossar and the two legal advisors of the secret service – but Peres refused. He insisted on an internal settlement of the conflict, and suggested that the Attorney General appoint a former Shin Bet member – Josef Harmelin (1922–1994), the Shin Bet Chief from 1963 to 1974, and eventually Shalom's successor from June 1986 to March 1988 – as investigator. Zamir declined, feeling that as a partisan of Shin Bet, Harmelin would contribute little to finding the truth.[86]

Shortly before Zamir left office he managed to initiate further investigations into the affair. This move once again brought him into conflict with Prime Minister Peres as the latter strictly opposed any inquiries. Peres remained convinced that state security would be endangered by the investigations because Shin Bet, one of the pillars of the Israeli security systems, would be moved into the spotlight. He countered Zamir's demands with stalling tactics. As commander in chief of Shin Bet, Peres hesitated for some weeks before responding and finally granting a meeting to the Shin Bet dissident. He quoted "state security" and the "welfare

85 Gutman 1995: 40–41.
86 Ibid. 43.

of the state" as reasons for his decision to avoid an investigation at all costs.[87] He was downright appalled by the idea of seeing the secret service caught up in a police investigation as this amounted to a heresy in his eyes:

> As head of state, it is my duty to protect this organization [Shin Bet] as it grapples with secret and complex matters and requires this protection. After all, its people – in contrast to other people in uniform – act in a legal gray area, which is why I must grant it the necessary defense […]. It is an excellent organization. I believe the Chief and defended him because he should not appear before the public. […] In the event of a court case, he would need the support of attorneys. And also previous cases would have to be discussed. Therefore, it is my security-political objective to leave the matter alone. […] This could do serious harm to the service.[88]

The central motive of this argumentation is the security of the state, in this case epitomized by an Israeli internal security service that is supposed to remain untouchable despite allegations being brought against it. Similar to Peres' comments on the Lavon Affair, published in 1995, the actual events are shifted into the background.[89] Instead, Peres applies a victim discourse when talking about Shin Bet, portraying its strengths – its secret mode of operation and its ability to act within a grey zone – as weaknesses in order to justify the special protection of Shin Bet from the law. He is concerned that a court trial might expose questionable methods applied by the secret service. Accordingly, his final resolution is "to leave the matter alone."

In reply to Zamir, Peres invokes that judicial procedures against Shalom would seriously impair the struggle against terrorism: "My duty is to fight terrorism, and for this purpose I need the best man. This man is Abrum [Avraham Shalom], so let him do his work." Zamir and his team were put under enormous pressure by this statement that a judicial inquiry would endanger "one's own people" and paralyze important security-political structures.[90]

In April and May 1986, before the dismissal of the Attorney General on June 1, 1986, an unprecedented contention about the status of the Israeli secret services and their relationship to the law flared up between Zamir on the one side, and Peres, his closest "cabinet of ministers" (Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin, 1922–1995) and the Israeli government on the other. Were the circumstances of the Palestinian hijackers' deaths to be investigated any further? Or do the members of the Shin Bet enjoy an implicitly

87 Betelheim: 1986.
88 Gutman 1995: 47.
89 Amar-Dahl 2010: 147–164.
90 Betelheim 1986.

assumed immunity from the law due to the national task of fighting terrorism that is entrusted to them? And should they accordingly be spared any investigation that concerns civil offenses falling under civil law, such as in the present case of alleged wrongful deaths?

The Attorney General initially insisted that the investigation be continued, but relenting in the course of the controversy and being willing to forego any further inquest – provided that the four Shin Bet suspects were removed from their offices. But they, with the support of their political allies, continued to insist on their immunity from being investigated or, for that matter, from suffering any further consequences. Zamir declared: "Things have been done for which someone must be held accountable, so that something like this does not happen again. Such cover-up maneuvers before the judicial branch must never happen again."[91]

But Peres remained adamant. On the occasion of a no-confidence vote against his government following the Shin Bet Affair, he declared before the *Knesset* on June 30, 1986:

> Rule of law means that not only the accuser but also the accused is granted rights. Each may defend themselves as is allowed by the law. [...] I have arrived at the conclusion that there are weighty security-political reasons [against the investigation]. In the event of an investigation I would have to allow the service to present precedents which the entire state [what is meant is Israeli society] wishes to see treated as secret matters. [...] And because the government is not able to grant the defendant [the Shin-Bet] the same position as the accuser [attorney], a situation of inequality [before the law] to the disadvantage of the defendant arises. This is why I am fully convinced that fighting terrorism is essentially impossible without secrecy. This is by no means an attempt to use the argument of security merely as a pretext.[92]

Peres maintains that in cases such as this one the rule of law cannot be satisfied, because given their special tasks the accused persons are not in a situation where they can let themselves be defended. The government cannot allow such a lawsuit to happen, as this would mean that state secrets would be disclosed. For Peres, the work of the secret service has a special status within the law, even if he does not explicitly state this. He also fails to describe in any more detail what such special status actually involves.

In any case he is convinced that strict secrecy is the only means of guaranteeing national security, which holds the highest priority in his political thinking.

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91 Gutman 1995: 48.
92 Ibid. 50.

Consequently, the security authorities, including their methods of operation, can neither be subjected to the principle of rule of law nor to any universally valid legislation. For Peres, the secret service with its "special task of fighting terrorism" should be the concern of a very small circle of "security experts" within the executive.

Zamir, however, who had experienced intelligence methods first hand[93], took the view that in this case the security argument is merely a pretext, misused for the purpose of covering up questionable intelligence practices. He felt obliged to bring this matter before the court and filed a suit with the police, presenting evidence against Shalom and other Shin Bet members. On May 30, 1986, right before his dismissal and only a short time after the affair had gone public, Zamir presented his position to the press, the majority of which were soon on his side:

> Peres said that I was put under no pressure whatsoever [to refrain from an investigation]. Perhaps one should ask what exactly he means by 'pressure on the attorney.' […] I cannot accept that [military] censorship prohibits the affair from being made public. […] I do not believe that a publication painting a comprehensive picture of the affair will endanger national security. It may cause certain people some embarrassment. I think it would be appropriate to first inform the public of the facts, so that we can have a more intelligent debate. I am firmly convinced that even then some would demand no action be taken against the people against whom such serious allegations have been made. But it is beyond question that essential aspects of democratic rules are being violated by withholding facts from the public.[94]

As Zamir sees it, democratic values such as the flow of information and the division of powers are reconcilable with the Israeli primacy of security. By contrast, Peres perceives security policy and intelligence activities as something that should be dealt with exclusively behind closed doors. To him, the mere fact that the affair has shifted Shin Bet into the center of the public eye is already enough to endanger national security. In other words, Shin Bet shall not be deprived of its mystique.

For this long-serving politician, one property of the Israeli order is the taken-for-granted exclusion of society, judicial power and the *Knesset* from the sphere of security. To what extent this political culture had already been established in Israel by this point is illustrated by Peres' remark, as quoted earlier: "In the event of an investigation I would have to allow the service to present precedents which the entire state wants to see as a secret matter."

93 Gutman 1995: 50–51.
94 *Haaretz*, May 30, 1986.

This presupposition made by an establishment man and bearer of hope for the Zionist Left, according to which there is a social consensus to remain silent on certain topics as well as the concurrent assumption that society is identical with the state, demonstrate to what extent Peres has internalized security as a universal task of politics. In his understanding this goal can ultimately only be accomplished by security organizations using their own methods of operation while society remains excluded. Security is thought of as the security experts' field of competence, by no means an object of public debate. Against the backdrop of this perception, it may be explained why Peres kept the *Knesset*, his own party and even his own government in the dark right up to the moment the affair came to light.

From this point on, the events threatened to spin out of control. Shortly after, on June 1, 1986, Attorney General Zamir was ousted. But as he had already personally filed an indictment against the four Shin Bet suspects with the chief of police and instructed him to take up investigations, Zamir's successor Josef Harish (1923–2013) had to deal with his predecessor's problematic legacy.[95]

Now a new proposition shifted into focus, namely that the defendants should be pardoned, by which the earlier process and guilty verdict would be waived. The person authorized to carry out such a procedure was the president of the state. This office was held by Chaim Herzog (1918–1997), a lawyer, former chief of Aman and co-founder of *Rafi*, and given his personal and political relationship with Peres, as well as his security-political ideology, he was indeed willing to contribute to the "rescue of the security service and state security." On June 25, 1986, Herzog went ahead with the procedure and put the pardon to a vote in a cabinet meeting.[96]

As was to be expected, the amnesty of the Shin Bet's suspects provoked a wave of criticism in the Israeli press, particularly aimed against a political leadership that bent the law by using "cheap tricks." The Israeli lawyer and journalist Moshe Negbi (1949–) interprets the role of the Israeli government in the Shin Bet Affair as "a rebellion against the constitutional state and the rule of law."[97] The outrage in the country reached a peak.

But ultimately even the pardon could not avert a police investigation, which led to all four pardoned persons resigning by the end of 1986. In August, the Supreme Court upheld the legal validity of the pardons, so that a government crisis was avoided. The result of the police investigation was presented to Harish

95 Gutman 1995: 81–82.
96 Ibid. 87–91.
97 Negbi 1987: 9.

in mid-September and analyzed by three high-ranking officials of the Ministry of Justice. At this point there was no doubt that the two Palestinian hijackers had been killed on Shalom's orders. And yet Shalom maintained that he gave the order on the grounds of a private meeting with Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir in November 1983, in which the treatment of captured terrorists had been discussed.

Shamir, however, told the police that although he remembered a talk taking place, he had not given any kind of authorization to act in the course of that conversation. The judicial commission neither held Shamir responsible for the killing of the kidnappers nor for the attempted cover-up that followed. Harish closed the case by the end of December 1986.[98]

Security, Rule of Law and the Israeli Order

The conduct exhibited by Shimon Peres in the course of this affair shows his deep commitment to the "Israeli order." This order is a firmly established political culture centered on "security" which has taken shape with time as a result of the tensions between the Zionist goal of nation building and the frequently escalating Arab-Israeli conflict. The strong fixation on security has become a characteristic attribute of the Israeli social fabric and one of its untouchable tenets.

This development can be explained by the fact that in the eyes of many Israelis national statehood is still in the process of being shaped. And having not yet been fully realized, it still has to be consolidated by settlements and properly secured in the first place. Consequently, security is the absolute, basic prerequisite for the existence of the national state and thus indispensable to it. In turn, this fixation on security sustains the Arab-Israeli or Palestinian-Israeli conflict, so that the high social significance of security is being continually fostered.

The Shin Bet affair clearly outlines the existing relationships. The prime minister, acting and arguing in the name of security, was able to assert himself against the resistance of the press and the law by drawing on the firmly established political culture in which the public is excluded from security-political matters. In the various offices and functions he has held since the early 1950s, Peres has significantly contributed to this depoliticization of security that has become such a defining feature of the Israeli mindset.

As the example of the Shin Bet Affair shows, security is understood as an elementary basis of the Israeli immigrant and settler society. Rule of law, integrity, morality and the "truth" take a backseat in the face of this goal. Since the fight

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98 Black and Morris 1994: 588–590.

against terrorism and the securing of Zionist Israel are deemed so essential, even questionable intelligence methods of operation are considered admissible – provided they continue to be excluded as a subject matter for public debate.

Peres' telling statement of 2000 – "In the first fifty years Israel fought for its physical existence, in the next fifty years it will be fighting for its moral identity."[99] – reflects his notion that democratic, constitutional and moral values can only be warranted to a certain extent while the process of shaping a Jewish national statehood is still underway. This also applies to the domestic context. Within this political order, not only the public and its representatives but also ultimately the law has to be subordinated to the primary principle of national security. Even if Peres did not want to right out dismiss the rule of law, like in how he was careful to avoid openly questioning the Attorney General's authority, he still solved "the dilemma" in this affair between security and law in his own way.

Israeli political scientist Ehud Sprinzak (1940–2002) sees the demeanor of the political leadership in the Shin Bet Affair as a typical example of the firmly established political culture of "elite illegalism":

> [...] the Shin Bet scandal [...] shows that Israel's political culture contains a strong dimension of elite illegalism, an instrumental orientation of the nations' leadership toward the law and the idea of the rule of law. Israeli leaders, so it seems, do not appear to be antidemocratic in principle, or have an alternative model of government to the democratic order. But their conception of democracy is limited, and their commitment to universal legal principles, recognized today as an integral part of the modern democracy, is very low. [...] Israeli democracy has always been very weak on the question of legalism, and [...] recent governments have not been an exception to this phenomenon. Legalism in the Western sense of the term never was an integral part of the democratic system established in Israel by the Zionist parties and their leaders.[100]

In his detailed presentation of the development of the tradition of "elite illegalism" since the time of the *Yishuv*, Sprinzak goes on to say:

> The political psychology of Yitzhak Shamir, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin, the ministers involved in the Shin Bet Affair, was shaped when almost everything was permissible. They all grew up in Palestine of the 1940s, when it was prestigious to cheat on the British and to engage in 'illegal' settlement, 'illegal' defense, and 'illegal' immigration; [...] The Zionist founding fathers of Israel were not vicious or corrupt. They were great idealists and daring dreamers. They wished to build a better society and set an example for the rest of the world.

99 Schmidt 2000: 75.
100 Sprinzak 1993: 174–175.

> Eager to do so as fast as they could, they ignored legalistic details and procedures. All they wanted was political power, free of constraints, to make the dreams come true.[101]

Peres' way of presenting the Shin Bet Affair in his 1995 political memoirs reaffirms the notion that the existing Israeli order is inevitable for the state's existence and therefore has to be kept up under all circumstances. Even a decade later, Peres still clings to his truth of 1986 – and not just out of self-righteousness. Although he is aware that the Shin Bet Affair is not exactly a glorious chapter in his political career, he supports the Shin Bet in his carefully constructed historical narrative and creates the impression that the guilt of the secret service has never been conclusively established.[102]

When called out on his "selective way of narrating" by the journalist Nahum Barnea, who was well acquainted with the details of the affair, Peres replied that "facts are a subjective matter," whereupon Barnea commented that this is "Peres' way of justifying his disgraceful role and that of his colleagues in the Shin Bet Affair. For Peres, political survival and one's own interests are of greatest priority. [...] the rest is of secondary importance."[103]

But when it comes to this particular case, Barnea's hypothesis that Peres' actions were motivated by the goal of maintaining power falls short. There was far more at stake for him. Of course, the assumption that Peres refrained from politically capitalizing on the affair because he did not want to strain his image any further and reinforce his repute as an untrustworthy politician cannot be fully dismissed.[104] Indeed, it would have compromised his position had he failed to observe the coalition agreement with Shamir because of the affair and called early elections. He also knew: "No one in Israel ever won votes by making an issue out of two dead Arab terrorists. Peres seems to be doing everything he could to bury the affair."[105]

However, as far as Peres was concerned, the "two dead Arab terrorists" were indeed not sufficient grounds for a state affair, and so he did everything in his power to prevent them from turning into one. After the affair had become known in May 1986, he was put under massive pressure to join "the good guys," that is, to advocate an investigation into the matter so as to possibly capitalize on it politically. But he ultimately stayed true to his innermost convictions that Shin Bet has to be protected in the interests of the Israeli order. By doing this he accepted the

101 Sprinzak 1993: 190–191.
102 Peres 1995: 295–300.
103 Barnea, June 25, 2004.
104 Bar-Zohar 2006: 542; Keren 1996: 50.
105 Black and Morris 1991: 407.

possibility of losing part of his authority and damaging his moral standing in the eyes of the public.

Peres' reappraisal of the events in his memoirs of 1995 further attests to his depoliticized understanding of the affair. Here, the seventy-two-year-old still-acting politician is intent on stripping this clearly political affair of its explosive political nature. He insists that his actions in the years of 1985 and 1986 were correct, precisely because he perceives the existing political order as a matter of course and apodictically right, so that it must be maintained at all costs. This is what Peres understands to be his duty in this affair, even though he may express it in a more instinctive than reflective manner.[106]

Conclusion: Civil Militarization of Israeli Democracy

Established politician that Peres is, his contribution to what the sociologist Uri Ben-Eliezer has termed "state-spawned praetorianism"[107] – in other words the government-sponsored concentration of power in the hands of the army – cannot be overstated. The security-political affairs discussed herein may serve as telling examples of how the special status of the Israeli military and security apparatuses is reinforced and ultimately consolidated by state and politics. It was particularly from his civilian political position – first as a government official in the Ministry of Defense, and later in an unprecedentedly long political career in central positions of power – that Peres effectively helped shape the civilian militarization of Israeli democracy. His was a historically as well as socio-politically important contribution, in the process of which the security authorities, especially the military, were stylized as the "guardians of the nation."

And so, to this very day they are viewed as indispensable for the protection of Zionist Israel, which is seen as the only available option. A scenario where the military might seize power, where the "nation in arms" might rise up against its own government or against civil society seems unimaginable in Israel. For the military is still perceived as the main identity-establishing institution of the national state. More than any other entity, it is thought of as the agent that the State of Israel owes its existence to. As a result, the security apparatuses are held in high esteem and are still determining the security-political discourse in political and public life.

106 Amar-Dahl 2010: 178–183.
107 Ben-Eliezer 1998: 338–339.

In Israel, this is linked to a highly developed civil militarism, with politics and military closely cooperating in the political culture of the country. By and large the security policy represents a product of an agreement between these two spheres, where the heads of the security apparatus are entrusted to set the tone and *de facto* shape security policy in their function as "security experts."

This may serve to explain why the depoliticization of the topic of "security" is a central feature of Israel's political culture. A depoliticization of security means the effective transfer of the power of decision on security matters from the hands of civil society and its political representatives into those of the security forces and the exclusive "security cabinet" clique. Such a depoliticization process amounts to nothing less than a disempowerment of civil society, since the entire field of internal and external security cannot really be made the subject of public debate. Considering its existential importance, it is deemed untouchable – and therefore apolitical.

Peres' statement from the year 1970 – "If the Israel democracy faced any danger at all, it would be from perverted civilians and not from a misguided soldiery."[108] – is baffling, not least because Peres is a career politician. But as has been shown here, this is indeed consistent with his worldview and politics. In the Lavon Affair, it was the "Old Guard" of the *Mapai* party or individual political decision makers of the first decade after the state's founding that Peres fought as the enemies of the security authority he considered sacrosanct. Later, in the Shin Bet Affair, it was the judicial power, the press, and the public. Peres' dictum that "in Israel arms are not only subjected to civilian authority but quite literally lie in civilian [i.e., political] hands." illustrates the perception of the Israeli order as it is widely held in the country. The same is true for this point of view: "The necessity for defense against exterior threats corresponds to the [Israeli] will to remain a free and pluralist society, just as if there were no security problems. That is to say, the military in Israel is a consequence of the situation and not of the [Israeli] orientation."[109]

What finds expression here is the conviction that Israeli democracy can unite both elements, namely the special status of the military as guardian of the newly formed small nation in need of protection, and at the same time the self-conception as a democratic, open and pluralist, but nonetheless Jewish society. The "Jewish democracy" which has historically emerged in Israel is indeed the product of a political order that corresponds to the model of a "Jewish-Israeli nation in arms." And indeed war does represent an integral part of this democracy.

108 Peres 1970: 255.
109 Peres 1970: 210. (Hebr.)

4 Israel's War Policy in the Service of Zionist Israel

From its very beginnings, the Zionist movement was highly ambivalent when it came to the question as to whether its adherents were allowed to use violence to reach their goals. In her book *The Sword of the Dove*, the Israeli-Zionist historian Anita Shapira puts forth the hypothesis that prior to the establishment of the State of Israel the policy in the *Yishuv* was initially characterized by a "defensive ethos." As a matter of necessity and only hesitantly did it turn into an "offensive ethos" over time. Shapira identifies the "Arab Revolt" of 1936 to 1939, when the organized Arab-Palestinian community protested against the progressing Jewish settlement of the country, as a decisive watershed event. From that point on a more offensive stance developed in Zionism, culminating in the war of 1948.[1]

As for Jewish nationalism in the Zionist context, Shapira makes out two different notions regarding the issue of violence. For a first group, it is not only inevitable, but even plays a positive role when Jews make recourse to violence. Jewish authors like Micha Josef Berdyczewski (1865–1921) and Max Nordau preached a "muscular Judaism" as a prerequisite to creating the "New Jew" who was to make nationalization possible, and by doing so would help bring "Judaism back into history."

By the same token, the physically weak exiled Jew who recoiled from any kind of violence was denounced as an obstacle to nationalization and thus to a "normalization" of Jewish life. The German-Jewish philosopher Emil L. Fackenheim (1916–2003) and the Zionist-Israeli philosopher Eliezer Schweid (1929–) go so far as to interpret violence used by Jews as a form of counter-violence, given that the Jews are powerless and the ultimate victim of the aggression directed against them. This reasoning helps to shape an attitude in which violence against the *Goyim* is generally considered legitimate, however unrestrained it may be.[2]

The second notion, as proposed by Cultural Zionist Achad Ha'am, makes a plea to the Jewish people to sustain their "moral superiority" and to reject any kind of violence. He thinks that "true Jews" should never be ashamed of their physical weakness, but rather cherish it as a source of their uniqueness and moral superiority over the *Goy*. Zionism, as Achad Ha'am understands it, is decidedly not a project of Jewish assimilation to the non-Jewish world with regard to politics and national-state existence, but rather an endeavor to preserve the mental and cultural singularity of the Jewish people. His Cultural Zionism challenges the

1 Shapira 1992; Biale 1986.

2 Fackenheim 1990/1978; Schweid 1973.

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maxim that a Jewish state has to follow particular examples and define itself by physical strength and power.[3]

Militarism in Israel

From 1948 on, the military was given a pre-eminent role in the realization of the Zionist project in *Eretz Israel*. The Jewish state was born out of war and has been in a permanent state of war ever since. This is true in the political, legal and mental sense. As for the juridical situation, Israel has been under emergency law since the proclamation of the state in 1948, with emergency ordinances being in effect from then on. In spite of this fact, traditional Israeli political and social sciences are unwilling to speak of an Israeli militarism.[4] It is not that the question is not raised as to why no militarism would evolve in a country where the military enjoys such high prestige, is given such a central status, and also has an enormous budget at its disposal. Also, Israel's influential military-industrial complex controlled by the Ministry of Defense does not remain unnoticed.[5]

Rather the notion that these factors might pose a danger to the democratic social order or that Israel might be well on its way to becoming a "modern Sparta" is brushed aside. It is presumed that the country's democratic culture is just too firmly established, the political system too stable for any such thing to happen. Besides, the Israeli army is seen as a "people's army" comprised of reservists and civilians, so that the formation of a closed-off military class is by no means considered likely.[6]

In addition, the institutional and mental separation of the army and the "civilian," i.e., political, sphere is looked upon as an indication that the military is concerned exclusively with matters of national security. It is underscored that members of the military, including the officers, are strongly involved in the national decision processes and therefore have no reason to break the democratic rules they themselves profit from. According to this point of view, the danger of militarism is neutralized.[7]

Other sociologists, however, explicitly address a pronounced "Israeli militarism." One of them, the Israeli sociologist Uri Ben-Eliezer, proposes the hypoth-

3 Shapira 1992: 37–53.
4 Shapira 1992.
5 Mintz 1983.
6 Horowitz 1977; Lissak 1984.
7 Horowitz 1977.

esis that a political culture of the martial has gradually emerged and taken on a life of its own in Israel, resulting in fundamental impacts on nearly all political decisions. The model of a "nation in arms" provides the socio-cultural context.[8]

Israeli militarism, so says the Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling, has been developing one step at a time since the establishment of the state to become a shaping principle of the Israeli social order. Although he sees this militarism as arising mainly in reaction to the Arab-Israeli conflict, he thinks that by now it in and of itself has become a reason for keeping up that conflict – one that forms an integral part of Israeli reality and is firmly rooted in social awareness.[9]

Kimmerling generally distinguishes three central dimensions of militarism. The first dimension is the *political-violent* one, which develops only when a direct or indirect military government exercises power over an extended period of time – as was the case with the military regimes in Africa and South America during the 1970s.

Kimmerling's second dimension of militarism,, *cultural* militarism, arises in societies where the military plays a central role for public life and collective self-perception, with the military being an important symbol of collectivity and epitomizing patriotism.[10] Here, Kimmerling bases himself on Alfred Vagts' concept of civilian versus soldierly militarism: In civilian militarism most collective aims are defined in connection to war. Wars are considered a central part of collective life and are initiated by civilian leaders.[11]

The third dimension of militarism identified by Kimmerling lies in the sphere of the c*ognitive*; structural and cultural militarism are internalized to such a degree that they become a general state of mind. It is on this level that militarism, not being consciously reflected, unfolds with a particularly strong effect. It is taken for granted and no longer questioned by either the ruling or the ruled. With all these mechanisms in place, the collective becomes fixated upon war, both on the institutional (politics, military, society, economy, industry and legal system) as well as on the mental level. War preparations become an ongoing social state. The next armed encounter appears inescapable. Wars and military missions turn into routine.[12]

This last dimension of militarism is defined by Kimmerling as "civilian militarism," and he uses it to refer to Israel. He sees Israel as profoundly influenced

8 Ben-Eliezer 1994: 63.
9 Kimmerling 1993A: 125.
10 Ibid. 125–127.
11 Vagts 1937.
12 Kimmerling 1993A: 127–128.

by it, with the pillars of Israeli militarism being no other than the civilian government, the academic, legal and economic elites, and not least, Israeli society itself.

The military does not have to stand at the center of political power to be influential. It suffices that military approaches, worldviews and mindsets are systematically internalized by most decision makers as well as the broad public, across all party affiliations and class identities. In "civilian militarism" the military is understood to be the warrantor of "national security," in other words it guarantees the state's existence. And as the guarantor of existence it nearly always is granted priority over all other areas of life. Kimmerling sees this precept as an organizational principle of Israeli polity.[13]

A good example of this is the eulogy that Chief of General Staff Moshe Dayan gave at the open grave of the soldier Ro'i Rotberg on April 30, 1956. The words he uttered on this occasion in the formative years of Jewish national statehood have sunk deep into the new society's collective memory. The Israeli historian Idith Zertal (1945–) draws attention to the wide circulation of this text in Israeli media: "It had an immediate, stunning impact. The Israeli collective, the members of the young Israeli elites, saw themselves as represented and defined by this text, which had become the voice of a generation."[14] With this in mind, it is worthwhile quoting the speech in its entirety:

> Yesterday morning Ro'i was murdered. The quiet of a spring morning blinded him, and he failed to see those who lurked in wait for him behind the furrow. Let us not, today, hurl accusations at the killers. Why should we complain at their fierce hatred of us? For eight years they have been dwelling in refugee camps in Gaza, and before their very eyes we are turning their land and the villages where they and their forefathers dwelt into our home.
>
> It is not from the Arabs in Gaza, but among ourselves that we should seek Ro'i's blood. How could we have failed to look our fate in the eye, to see the destiny of our generation in all its brutality? Have we forgotten that this group of young people, living in Nahal Oz, bear on their shoulders the heavy gates of Gaza, gates beyond which are crowded hundreds of thousands of eyes and hands, praying for our weakness, so as to tear us to pieces – have we forgotten this? For we know that, in order for their hope of annihilating us to die away, it is incumbent on us – morning and night – to be armed and ready. We are the generation of settlement, and without the steel helmet and the cannon's mouth we cannot plant a tree nor build a house. There will be no life for our children if we do not dig shelters, and without barbed wire fences and machine guns we cannot pave roads nor drill for water. Millions of Jews, who were exterminated because they had no country, are watching us from the ashes of Israeli history and exhorting us to settle and to build up a land for our people.

13 Ibid.130.

14 Zertal 2005: 179–180.

> But beyond the furrows of the border surges a sea of hatred and dreams of vengeance, awaiting the day when the calm dulls our alertness, when we lend an ear to the ambassadors of scheming hypocrisy, who exhort us to lay down our arms. Ro'i's blood cries out to us from his mangled body. For we swore a thousand times that our blood would not be spilled in vain and yesterday we were beguiled once more, we listened and we believed. Let us conduct a reckoning with our selves today. Let us not shrink from seeing the enmity, which attends and fills the lives of hundreds of thousands of Arabs, who dwell around us and await the moment when they can spill our blood. Let us not lower our gaze lest our arm be weakened. This is the decree of our generation. This is our only choice – to be ready and armed, strong and hardy, for if the sword slips from our fists – our lives will be cut short.
>
> Ro'i Rothberg, the lean blond youth, who left Tel Aviv to build a home at the gates of Gaza, to be a wall for us all; Ro'i – the light in his heart dazzled his eyes, and he did not see the glint of the knife. The yearning for peace dulled his hearing, and he did not hear the sound of lurking murder. The gates of Gaza weighed too heavily on him and undid him.[15]

Kimmerling discerns seven codes of Israeli society in this text: Firstly, the State of Israel is a settler and immigrant state and its existence in the region is neither secured nor can it be taken for granted. The second code reads that the "Arabs" – an undifferentiated and generalized category – hate "us." Thirdly, Kimmerling gathers from this text a code by which the immutability of the situation is postulated. All is fate, and it is for Israeli society alone to secure its existence. Fourthly, this existence can only be secured "with the fist and the sword," by which the necessity of war is implied. The fifth code, namely the dominance of security, follows from this inevitability. This in turn is, sixthly, connected to the perpetual mobilization of Israeli society. And, seventhly, Dayan also speaks of unavoidable "human sacrifices."[16]

Critical voices in Israel have repeatedly put into question the constitutive power of these codes. Nonetheless, their defining influence in shaping the new society remains by and large uncontradicted to this day. Against this background the conflict with the Arab neighbors and the Palestinians stands as a given, unchangeable fact, with the negative attitude of the "new *Goyim*" towards the "Jews" being thought of as a constant that defies all historical developments.

The Arab rejection of Israel's existence is put in the same line as the Jewish experience of violence in Europe. And even as it is admitted that the Arab position is understandable given the new historic developments, the Arab-Israeli conflict still appears as nothing more than another version of anti-Semitism in the

15 Zertal 2005: 180–181; text quoted from Dayan.
16 Kimmerling 1993A: 123.

Jewish-Israeli awareness. But this also serves to dehistoricize and depoliticize the conflict, rendering its concrete subject matter all but irrelevant.

Soon this notion of an “eternal” conflict solidified, and social institutions prepared to face a long-term confrontation. Therefore, Kimmerling speaks of a routinization of war, in the course of which Israeli society improved its ability to mobilize from one war to the next. This goes on to the point where war finally permeates the entire day-to-day reality, while it can still be conveniently pushed aside in “times of peace.” In this way, the conflict becomes a constant and constitutive factor of the Israeli order and thus of Israeli awareness. The boundaries between politics and military are dissolved, and as a general rule politics bows to the military, the ultimate argument of national security. This submission in turn serves a particular kind of security policy that perpetuates its own monopoly by blurring the dividing lines between war and peace, civil society and military.[17]

The genesis of Israeli security policy is explained by the Israeli political scientist Reuven Pedezur (1948–): In the founding years of the state between 1949 and 1956, leading political personalities have formulated a security doctrine and developed a distinct security culture. In all of this, Prime Minister and Minister of Defense David Ben-Gurion had a key role. In his unique party-political position as the father of the nation, he laid the foundation for a national security policy. He did this by excluding the members of his party from this decision process, so that *de facto* he obtained unlimited freedom for himself and the security establishment in the shaping of security policy.

Ben-Gurion asserted himself within the ruling *Mapai* party in that he separated the complex of “security” from other “political” matters. In this way, he laid the tracks toward a political culture in which security was no longer the concern of party and government, but rather of the Ministry of Defense and the military.[18] As a consequence of this division between security and politics, a small group of politicians and members of the military were able to push through an “offensive ethos” under the protective hand of Ben-Gurion. As a proponent of the “defensive ethos,” Moshe Sharett (foreign minister from 1949 to 1956, and prime minister from 1953 to 1955) struggled in vain against the hardliners in the security establishment.[19] The Israeli historian Motti Golani (1954–) thinks of the 1950s as a crucial period for the history of Israeli militarism. It was in the 1950s and 1960s

17 Ibid. 131.
18 Pedezur 2003: 88–89.
19 Sheffer 1995; Amar-Dahl 2003.

that the "offensive stance" that had emerged in the 1930s and finally taken on an aggressive dimension in the subsequent decade was ultimately cemented.[20]

Let us now investigate further the connection between the establishment of the Jewish state and Israel's war policy by trying to answer the question as to which role the use of national-state violence plays in the realization and protection of the Zionist project, and as to what exactly the Israeli security doctrine entails. Why does war appear to be a permanent companion of its politics and history? And which social constellation facilitates the perpetual use of military violence? Does Zionist Israel have to be a modern Sparta to survive?

The Sinai-Suez Campaign of 1956

The Sinai-Suez Campaign is considered the climax of the so-called "little border wars" that were fought after the war of 1948 between Israel and its Arab neighbor states, or between Israel and the Palestinian refugees[21], as the Israeli leadership and army opposed the attempts of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties in the core country of Israel. During its first years Israel developed defense strategies in reaction to the Palestinians' attempts to return, which they referred to as "infiltration." These tactics comprised measures such as the founding of Jewish settlements at the borders, the deployment of a border protection police, and even the expulsion or killing of the "intruders."[22]

In addition, an offensive form of military response was established: the policy of retaliation. This practice dates back to the 1930s, when already the *Haganah* ("defense" in Hebrew), a paramilitary Jewish organization controlled by the Jewish Agency, reacted to Arab raids with violence. It did not only target the actual perpetrators, but also their families and tribes for the purpose of determent. After the establishment of the state, the political leadership carried on with the retaliation policy but did not officially admit to it until 1953. The military operation in Qibya in October 1953, in which the Israeli army killed sixty-nine Palestinian civilians in a Jordanian village in the West Bank, is a well-known example of the public denial of such measures by then Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion.[23]

20 Golani 2002: 97.

21 Morris 1996: 458–459.

22 Ibid. 129–198.

23 Ibid. 199, 203. On the cooperation of the Israeli press with the government as it rejects responsibility for Qibya, see Morris 2000: 175–197.

Revenge was an important motive of this retaliation policy, but so was the wish to demonstrate military strength as a defensive strategy. The excessive retaliatory strikes served the purpose of deterring the Arab neighbor states and the Palestinians from attacking Israel. Another thing Ben-Gurion and his Chief of General Staff Moshe Dayan had in mind was to make the Arab World recognize Israel's strength and therefore accept its existence in the borders of 1949.

National statehood was associated with military strength and ultimately made dependent on it. After all, the new state territory – seventy-eight percent of Palestine – still remained to be secured. Already in the 1950s, the so-called "activist stance" – in other words the tough military course – became the dominant approach, not least because it was deemed indispensable for the desired security. Very soon this activist stance came to constitute a central tenet of the Israeli security doctrine. Moreover, the retaliation policy also had a domestic political aspect. According to the Israeli historian Benny Morris (1948–) it created a permanent state of emergency, which strengthened the ruling *Mapai* party. Besides, actively fighting was a suitable way to bind together the young society of immigrants.[24]

This retaliation policy of the 1950s unsettled the Arab neighbor states, infringed on their territorial sovereignty and made them look powerless. At a certain point, the ongoing Arab-Palestinian acts of violence against Israelis and the Israeli military attacks crossed the line into a conventional war. Having originally been directed solely against the Palestinians who were attempting to return, the retaliation practice led to an expansion of the conflict when it was increasingly aimed at the responsible Palestinians and also more against the Arab neighbor states.

Another reason why the Israeli-Palestinian and the Arab-Israeli conflict blended into each other was Israel's rejection of its responsibility for the Palestinian refugees, instead shifting it onto the states that took them in, i.e., Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon. The intertwining of the two conflicts had further consequences. In 1955, the devastating escalation of violence at Israel's southern border brought the Palestinian combat units onto the scene against Israel.

Especially after the heavy attacks of the Israeli army in February and August of 1955 in the Gaza Strip, Egypt's President Nasser deployed the "Fedayeen" (Arabic for "liberation units") – who had opposed the British in 1952 and 1953 at the Suez Canal – against Israel. Despite their military inferiority, they inflicted heavy losses on the Israelis and scared the settlers on Israel's southern border. In

24 Morris 1996: 199, 206–208, 447; Landau 2015: 35.

late 1956, a crackdown on the Fedayeen was announced as a war objective in the conflict with Egypt.[25]

The role of the retaliation policy in the eruptions of violence in the years 1955 and 1956, particularly in the Suez War in October 1956, is assessed differently in historical research. Benny Morris regards the numerous skirmishes at the border and the conflicts between Israel and its neighbor states, especially Egypt and Jordan, in these years as an important escalation factor that ultimately led to war. One of the reasons brought forward by the Israeli leadership as justification for the first preemptive war, was the goal of eliminating Fedayeen strongholds on the Sinai Peninsula. The Israeli army finally succeeded in seizing the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula and in destroying these bases in the Sinai-Suez War.[26]

In contrast, the Israeli historian David Tal argues that the French-British-Israeli cooperation against Egypt in October 1956 was based on the Israeli-French alliance: In return for the military-strategic alliance with France that was still in the process of being carved out and was considered a matter of existential importance, Israel was expected to render a counterperformance. And that it did by getting involved in a risky armed encounter with Egypt, hoping to get an angle against Egypt at optimal conditions.[27]

Tal turns against the commonly held research opinion that there is a close connection between the border wars and the Sinai-Suez War[28], whereby the latter is made to look like a "self-defense encounter" as well. He thinks of the situation at the borders as more of a local issue, with both Israel and Egypt being averse to a conventional war. Accordingly, Tal rules out a direct relationship between the border wars and the Sinai-Suez War.[29]

Motti Golani assumes a loose connection between the border wars and the Sinai Campaign. He thinks that Israel was "in search of a war" in the years 1955 and 1956. In stating this, Golani mainly refers to Moshe Dayan, the political chief of general staff of the Israeli army, who he says explicitly sought war and instrumentalized the retaliation and escalation policy of the 1950s for that purpose.[30]

In his 1992 book about Israeli foreign policy in the years 1955 to 1957, Dayan's then secretary Mordechai Bar-On (1928–) lists the following motivations for the war: One of the decisive aspects was the desire to defeat the Egyptian army, and

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25 Ibid. 446, 459, 372–376.

26 Ibid. 382–436.

27 Tal 2001: 1.

28 Tal is referring to Bar-On 1992; Love 1969; Oren 1992, Morris 1996.

29 Tal 2001: 2.

30 Golani 1998: viii- ix.

by using this argument Ben-Gurion was able to get the government to consent to the war. Bar-On goes on to outline the security-political concept of the hardliners, namely that the demonstration of military dominance over a leading Arab state could create a sufficient degree of determent so that other potential enemies would be discouraged from taking up arms against Israel.

From that time on, determent has been a cornerstone of Israel's concept of security. Military passivity is deemed a long-term danger for the existence of the state. Weakness equals vulnerability. In "activistic" policy, war became a "part of the defense strategy." Military strength was to be demonstrated, not least in order to "make it clear to the enemy that by attacking Israel they put themselves in danger." Bar-On is convinced that the armed encounter of 1956 considerably strengthened Israeli deterrence power, and thus made the quiet years at the southern Israeli border from 1957 to 1967 possible in the first place.[31]

But the doctrine of determent involved two problems. For one thing, the "demonstration of strength" always entails the danger of escalation, which is exactly what it originally tried to avoid. Even if Israel is militarily superior, a military reaction by the other state still cannot be excluded. This can be clearly seen in the history of border wars, and indeed Ben-Gurion's qualms in the run-up to the war decision were grounded in his fear of such a counterstrike. The term "preemptive war" reflects this problem: It follows the logic that in order to prevent an attack from the outside, one has to start a war oneself. However – and this is the second problem – Israel could not yet boast clear military superiority in 1956, which is why Ben-Gurion dared to go to war only with the support of two European powers. It is not by its own means that Israel achieved the 1956 military victory.[32]

Regional War in Exchange for an Alliance with France

So why did Israel enter into the Sinai-Suez War? In those years, Israel was trying to obtain weapons from the Western Powers. Armament and purchase of weapons were an important factor in the cooperation with the West up to the Sinai-Suez Campaign. In the early 1950s, the USA, Great Britain and France officially met the corresponding Israeli endeavors with some skepticism because they did not want to freely supply the region with weapons. Secretly, these powers founded

31 Bar-On 1992: 378.
32 Ibid. 378–379.

the "Near East Arms Coordinating Committee" (NEACC) to regulate the purchase of arms.[33]

As for the United States, they responded only reluctantly to Israeli attempts to buy weapons. US Foreign Minister John Foster Dulles (1888–1959) was willing to supply Israel with weapons only for defense purposes, directly or via a third party, i.e., Canada, France or Great Britain.[34] Moreover, he was determined to make the supplies dependent on Israel's border policy and its cooperation with the UNTSO ("UN Truce Supervision Organization"), which was responsible for the observance of the ceasefire agreement, among other things.

The Egyptian-Czech arms treaty that became public on September 27, 1955, threw the Israeli leadership into a newly menacing situation. For Dayan, this supply agreement seemed to provide the occasion for the war against Egypt. He pressed the matter with Ben-Gurion, and the latter, though turning down the war option at this time, decided for an armament of the army.[35]

However, Israeli attempts to purchase weapons through the USA and Great Britain failed. Only in France, in talks with the French Prime Minister Edgar Faure (1908–1988), did the still Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett succeed in laying the foundations of the large arms deal of June 1956 that would ultimately be concluded under the direction of Peres.[36] For it was Peres who was commissioned by Ben-Gurion to carry on the negotiations with France, following the political disempowerment of Sharett in early June 1956.

Peres had developed his expertise in the purchase of weapons during his stay in the USA from 1949 to 1952, at the time of the American arms embargo against Israel. All arms deals had to be concluded illegally and in roundabout ways.[37] Peres commented on the embargo: "The embargo of the great powers was not lifted. The independent, sovereign State of Israel has to buy its weapons through dealers, bring them to her territory by clandestine ways, and keep their very existence in utmost secrecy."[38]

Peres had already tried his luck in France in early 1954, taking advantage of political instability in the Fourth Republic (1944–1958) to gain access to particular individuals in the military and political leadership. He gradually convinced Ben-Gurion to begin negotiations with France regardless of the American arms

33 Kafkafi 1994: 17.
34 Ibid. 18.
35 Tal 2001: 7–8.
36 Ibid. 8.
37 Bar-Zohar 2006: 114–115.
38 Bar-Zohar 2007: 105.

embargo.[39] As Ben-Gurion's personal confidant, Peres succeeded in taking up contact with the new socialist government under Guy Mollet (1905–1975), and in particular with Minister of Defense Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury (1914–1993), the leader of the *Parti radical*.

All this took place to the exclusion of the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Bourgès-Maunoury's primary interest was in securing Algeria for France and crushing the local independence movement ("Front de Libération Nationale" FLN). Egyptian President Nasser was considered a supporter of the FLN, so his disempowerment would certainly have been in the interests of France as well. Having this common enemy, France and Israel now moved closer together. Already in March 1956, talks between representatives of the two ministries of defense took place with the goal of planning a joint action against Nasser. Both respective foreign ministries were excluded from this as well.[40]

The negotiations with France about the acquisition of weapons also created tensions between the Israeli Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of Defense. The two heads of these ministries, Ben-Gurion and Sharett, disagreed on core questions of security policy. Their opinions diverged especially when it came to the foreign-political significance of the retaliation policy, because the responsible people in the Ministry of Defense wanted to be able to decide independently on any purchasing of weapons abroad.

In a special session on April 10, 1956, Ben-Gurion won through and transferred responsibility for the procurement of weapons from the Foreign Ministry to the Ministry of Defense. Peres got the green light for the unofficial acquisition of weapons. In the same session, he hinted at the possibility of cooperating with France in order to satisfy Israel's armament needs: "The main question now is how to make the French believe that we are ready to act together with them. [...] We must take dramatic steps, to make France understand that we are ready to engage in far-reaching cooperation. [...] I propose finding an unconventional way to negotiate with the French, and make them offers that they would consider as real accomplishments."[41]

What Peres is alluding to here in coded language is the Israeli-French cooperation basis for the next months, namely an alliance in exchange for war. Foreign Minister Sharett would not have supported such an agreement. In fact, he most probably would have done everything in his power to prevent it. In order to preempt the possibility of any resistance from Sharett's side, he first had to be

39 Bar-Zohar 2006: 159–163.
40 Ibid. 177.
41 Bar-Zohar 2007: 124.

shut out from the negotiations with France and later, before the planned war, he had also to be deprived of power.

As early as mid-April 1956, Peres was unofficially acting in Paris against the Egyptian president in the interests of the Guy Mollet government. The French Ministry of Defense signalized to Peres that it sought to win Israel's military cooperation for the fight against Nasser. Peres passed this information on to Ben-Gurion on May 31, 1956. Ten days later the latter authorized negotiations with France about working together, which could also include armed clashes as long as responsibility for it would be shared with Israel.[42]

On June 23 and 24, 1956, an Israeli delegation under Peres met with high-ranking representatives of the French government in a top-secret conference in Vermars and concluded agreements about extensive arms supplies to Israel. While the French side sanctioned the entire Israeli purchase list – 200 AMX tanks and 72 Mystère IV fighter jets valued at eighty million US dollars[43] – what was expected in return was a supply of intelligence concerning Egyptian support of the Algerian rebels, as well as the execution of secret operations against Egypt and other forces involved in the Algerian War.[44]

In the run-up to the Sinai-Suez War, Dayan and Peres were looking for arguments that would provide a basis for a war against Egypt and that could also win over Ben-Gurion for it.[45] As of late 1955, the Chief of General Staff explicitly spoke of a preemptive war. After Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956 as a reaction to the USA withdrawing aid for the construction of the Aswan Dam, Dayan once again proposed an offensive. But Ben-Gurion still objected to a war without any foreign support for Israel.

Thanks to Peres' mediation, this assistance was now shifting tantalizingly close. Following the nationalization of the Suez Canal, the responsible people on the French side were increasingly eager to unseat Nasser. They found an ally in Great Britain, where Nasser's actions were also meeting with vehement criticism, and saw Israel as another convenient partner in the fight against him. It was France who finally took the initiative to open negotiations about a military pact between the three states.

In August 1956, Peres met with his French colleague Abel Thomas, *Directeur Général* in the French Ministry of Defense, who informed him that the Brits

42 Tal 2001: 8.

43 According to Bar-Zohar, it amounts to a total of 20 percent of Israel's entire budget. Cf. Bar-Zohar 2006: 189.

44 Tal 2001: 9.

45 Golani 1998: viii-ix.

and the French had opted for a joint military operation for the purpose of taking control of the Suez Canal.[46] The only thing still lacking was a concrete reason for a French-British armed action against Nasser. Great Britain, having taken a critical position towards the Israeli retaliation policy, hesitated to openly team up with Israel. What is more, the country was bound to Jordan by a defense pact, and was also connected to Egypt by the so-called *Tripartite Declaration* of May 1950 between France, Great Britain and Egypt.[47]

The solution finally came from the French side. It would later be referred to as the "Challe Scenario." In talks on October 14, 1956, General Maurice Challe (1905–1979), representative of the French chief of general staff, accompanied by Albert Gazier (1908–1997), representative of the Foreign Ministry, proposed to the British Prime Minister Anthony Eden (1897–1977) an attack on Egypt on the grounds that Israel was to engage in an armed encounter with the Egyptian army in Sinai.

A conflict between Egypt and Israel was in turn supposed to give France and Great Britain a reason to seize the Suez Canal as it would be endangered by the clashes, so as to defend it and keep the fighting parties apart ("Operation Musketeer").[48] Eden agreed in principle, and in further talks on October 16, 1956, signalized to Mollet and Foreign Minister Christian Pineau (1904–1995) that Great Britain would not interfere in the event of an assault on Egypt, the *Tripartite Declaration* of May 1950 notwithstanding.[49]

Ben-Gurion only reluctantly gave his consent to the Challe Scenario at the conference of Sèvres that took place from October 22 to 24, 1956, not least because it put his country in a highly precarious situation. An offensive against an Arab state for the purpose of paving the way for France and Great Britain would not only make Israel come across as the aggressor, but would also expose it to the danger of becoming a target itself. What Ben-Gurion had in mind was an equal partnership between the allies. Instead Israel was granted only a rather subordinated mercenary role in the Challe Scenario.

The Israeli delegation was keenly aware of all this. But to avoid endangering the freshly forged agreements concerning French arms supplies, it was cautious not to snub France. With this in mind, the Israeli delegation and particularly Ben-Gurion made sure to always refer to the "British plan" when discussing the Challe Scenario that was so awkward for Israel, although its true origin was very well known. This linguistic twist made it possible for Ben-Gurion to point to the

46 Tal 2001: 11.

47 Shlaim 2001: 119–143, 121–122.

48 Ibid. 121.

49 Ibid. 121–122.

risk associated for Israel in the scenario, and to oppose Great Britain's plan that would have Israel leading the way all by itself in the first seventy-two hours of the attack until an ultimatum would be submitted to Israel by Great Britain and France. The Israeli Prime Minister pleaded that the Royal Air Force would destroy the Egyptian Air Force before the Israeli troops advanced into Sinai.[50]

Ultimately, an eight-point plan drafted by Dayan and finally endorsed by Ben-Gurion provided the basis for the cooperation. According to this plan, Israel itself would have the authority to decide how to initiate its attack on Sinai. In the second point it was stipulated that Israel was to perform military actions resembling a military operation, so that the French as well as the British government would be able to spin it as an endangerment of the canal. Thirdly, the French and British air forces were to become active thirty-six hours into the attack at the latest. Fourthly, the French and British governments were to separately direct messages to Egypt and Israel a day after the Israeli attack. As for Israel, it was to receive an appeal rather than an ultimatum to withdraw from the Canal Zone. Fifthly, France was to station fighter jets in Israel to protect Israeli cities at the onset of the operation and up to the intervention by the allies, wherein the origin of the planes was supposed to be unrecognizable. In the last point, the date of the attack was determined to be Monday, October 29, 1956, at seven p.m. Israeli time.[51]

David Ben-Gurion's Vision for a New Order in the Middle East

Eventually, Ben-Gurion's allies had to also acknowledge Israel's territorial claims. The Prime Minister had added another item to Dayan's plan, though it did not get included into the protocol as it was ultimately signed in Sèvres. Ben-Gurion appealed to the French and British governments to take note of Israel's territorial aspirations. Here is how the Oxford professor of International Relations Avi Shlaim (1945–) outlines the hopes Ben-Gurion was cherishing at the time for cooperation between the two old European powers, which Shlaim himself calls a "fantastic plan":

> Jordan, he [Ben-Gurion] observed, was not viable as an independent state and should therefore be divided. Iraq would get the East Bank in return for a promise to settle the Palestinian refugees there and to make peace with Israel while the West Bank would be attached to Israel as a semi-autonomous region. Lebanon suffered from having a large Muslim population which was concentrated in the south. The problem could be solved by Israel's expan-

50 Shlaim 2001: 123–126.
51 Ibid. 130–131.

> sion up to the Litani River, thereby helping to turn Lebanon into a more compact Christian state. The Suez Canal area should be given an international status while the Straits of Tiran in the Gulf of Aqaba should come under Israeli control to ensure freedom of navigation. A prior condition for realizing this plan was the elimination of Nasser and the replacement of his regime with a pro-Western government which would also be prepared to make peace with Israel. Ben-Gurion argued that his plan would serve the interests of all the Western powers as well as those of Israel by destroying Nasser and the forces of Arab nationalism that he had unleashed. The Suez Canal would revert to being an international waterway. Britain would restore its hegemony in Iraq and Jordan and secure its access to the oil of the Middle East. France would consolidate its influence in the Middle East through Lebanon and Israel while its problems in Algeria would come to an end with the fall of Nasser. Even the United States might be persuaded to support the plan for it would promote stable, pro-Western regimes and help to check Soviet advances in the Middle East. Before rushing into a military campaign against Egypt, Ben-Gurion urged that they take time to consider the wider political possibilities. His plan might appear fantastic at first sight, he remarked, but it was not beyond the realm of possibility given time, British goodwill and good faith.[52]

Israel's view of the Western and the Arab world is the pivotal point of this new geopolitical order. True to Herzl's vision of a Jewish state also being a bridge pillar of the West in that region, the dominant notion was that of a natural alliance with the West based on allegedly common goals. The orientation towards the West seems indispensable for Israel's vital interests. Meanwhile, the West itself is perceived out of hand as an enemy of the Arab world.

The direct projection of one's own enemy image onto the Western powers is clearly reflected in the plan. It is based on the conviction that Western control over the region would also serve Israeli interests, Ben-Gurion seeing it as a means by which he believed he could contain the dreaded Arab nationalism. The suggestion to just do away with Jordan by parceling it off in order to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict gives an idea of how little Israel was and would be willing to integrate into the region.

Ben-Gurion was pursuing two objectives with his scheme: Israel would expand and by doing so would get rid of its most bitter enemies at the same time. His intentions to pin Israeli interests to the interests of the West illustrates two things: namely the marked fear of isolation felt by the Israeli decision makers in the 1950s and the condescension and arrogance that the Israeli leadership exhibited towards the inhabitants of the region. This way of thinking grows out of a bipolar worldview in which people can be divided into "good ones," the strong and the civilized, and weak ones, the backward. Based on this understanding, an active geopolitical "restructuring" of the region does seem indeed plausible. At

52 Ibid. 124–125.

that time, the Palestinian *Nakba* of 1948 was only a few years in the past, and up to that point Israel had balked at any compromise on the refugee question.

In the Suez War, the Israeli decision makers were well aware they ran the risk of being painted as the helpmates of Western imperialism – an accusation which could have a direct negative impact on the recognition of Israel's right to exist in the region. With this in mind, Ben-Gurion was even concerned about Israel's esteem among its enemies. He wondered whether "the Arabs will ever be able to forgive us and our descendants that we are a bridge head of aggression and annihilation?"[53] But as for Shimon Peres, he had no second thoughts. This can be gathered from his description of the last day of the conference, October 24, 1956:

> I think there was a general feeling that a supreme effort had been made, involving the fate of nations, and had ended with the logical conclusion. We had come together to wipe out evil, to nullify the aggression and stifle the further aggressive intentions of the Egyptian dictator. Of course, [the] decision was not easy, for life is not easy. It is not a tabula rasa but heaped with snares and obstacles, risks and complications. In the final analysis, however, when faced with a historic challenge, there is only one choice – the elementary and fundamental choice between good and bad, right and wrong. With us, the basic alternatives were to defend ourselves, even with the power of the sword, or to submit to the sword of the aggressor.
>
> The French nation had sacrificed the lives of her finest sons, not many years before, because she had failed to recognize in time the danger of Hitlerism. She was now of firm mind that a dictator had to be dealt with not after he had struck but while he was still building his might. Nasser revived painful memories of their recent past.[54]

The enemy image of a Hitler-like dictator eager for war leaves barely any room to consider alternatives to military action. Nasser is portrayed as unpredictable and dangerous but also as powerless, as someone who seems to lack the ability to correctly assess his own power. Nasser's unpredictability concerning his policy towards Israel as well as his actual weakness renders the elimination of "evil" a reasonable option. And since Israel is not the only one affected by this evil, the international community must also be mobilized against it. Over and over, this argumentative pattern would resonate in Peres' long political career during which he repeatedly supported Israel's war policy.[55]

53 Quoted from Bar-Zohar 2006: 199.
54 Peres 1970: 204–205.
55 Amar-Dahl 2010: 219–295.

Of War and Nuclear Weapons

A little known fact is that Israel took advantage of the military alliance with France in the Sinai-Suez War of 1956 to begin developing nuclear weapons. As Director-General in the Israeli Ministry of Defense, Shimon Peres played a key role in all of this. He is considered to be the driving power behind the endeavor to obtain French start-up support for the construction of a nuclear reactor. According to the Israeli historian Avner Cohen (1951–), a specialist in the nuclear history of Israel, Peres' most important contribution to the country's armament with nuclear weapons is the establishment of the connection to France. As the right hand of the Prime Minister and due to his position in the Ministry of Defense, Peres was the man who would continue to advance this strictly secret project over a decade.[56]

According to Cohen, it was three men who eventually fathered the project: Ernst David Bergman (1903–1975), David Ben-Gurion and Shimon Peres. Bergman, Ben-Gurion's scientific advisor in nuclear matters, convinced the Prime Minister that Israel would be able to develop nuclear weapons. Subsequently, Peres was entrusted with the task of probing the international scene for Israel's options for "realizing Ben-Gurion's vision."[57]

Since Israel under the leadership of Ben-Gurion considered military strength an important means for vouchsafing security, the possession of nuclear weapons appeared to be the panacea. Although Cohen himself considers the idea of a country as small as Israel acquiring nuclear technology for military purposes a "considerable brazenness," he also submits that for a state that is "born from the Shoah to find itself thrown into a hostile Arab environment, it would be downright reckless not to do it."[58]

Peres finally convinced his mentor to embark on this project, despite it being not only extremely costly but also difficult to push through internationally. France proved to be the right contact for the initial steps. The political instability of the Fourth Republic presented Peres with a unique opportunity, and he seized upon it between the summer of 1956 and autumn of 1957.[59]

Whether the French support for an Israeli nuclear program already constituted an integral part of the Israeli-French military alliance as it was reached at the conference of Sèvres remains the subject of a controversial scholarly debate.

56 Cohen 2000: 39; Evron 1987: 14–15.

57 Cohen 2000: 37.

58 Ibid. 25.

59 Ibid. 39; Bar-Zohar 2006: 292–296.

Did France buy Israeli cooperation with a reactor? Is this the reason why Ben-Gurion consented to the Sinai-Suez War? Cohen believes that Peres used the Israeli-French rapprochement of 1956 as a singular occasion to "realize the nuclear vision."

But in Cohen's assessment, France's assent to the reactor was not the actual "price" for Israel's intervention in the Suez Crisis: "From the perspective of both states, this cooperation was an 'additional incentive.' […] Had Ben-Gurion declined the political and military conditions for the cooperation, the purchase of the reactor could not have tipped the scales."[60] In any case, Cohen asserts that Peres' motivation for the cooperation with France in the Suez Crisis is directly connected to the armament aid offered by France, which also extended to nuclear weapons.[61]

Avi Shlaim likewise contends that the purchase of a French reactor by Israel was not directly linked to Israeli military cooperation with France in the Suez Crisis. Shlaim's elaborations suggest that Ben-Gurion ultimately had to go to war because of the military alliance. Still, the acquisition of the nuclear reactor was an aspect related to the hopes of satisfying Israel's territorial claims and of weakening or even ousting the Egyptian president. In his memoirs, however, Peres makes a statement about Sèvres that admits interpretations different from Shlaim's:

> Before the final signing, I asked Ben-Gurion for a brief adjournment, during which I met Mollet and Bourges-Maunoury alone. It was here that I finalized with these two leaders an agreement for the building of a nuclear reactor at Dimona, in southern Israel, and the supply of natural uranium to fuel it. I put forward a series of detailed proposals and, after discussion, they accepted them. *Eventually, the Protocol was signed*.[62] (emphasis added)

Despite its significance, Shlaim leaves out this last remark.[63] Unlike Avner Cohen and Avi Shlaim, Peres' biographer Michael Bar-Zohar (1938–) supports the hypothesis that Israel's military backing was bought with the reactor. He quotes a remark Peres made to a French friend about the signing of the protocol, in which he implied that the reactor was one of Israel's conditions: "Should Israel's request [for nuclear start-up support] not be complied with, we may reconsider our commitment [to war]."[64]

60 Cohen 2000: 81.
61 Ibid. 79–81.
62 Peres 1995: 149–150.
63 Shlaim 2001: 41, 142.
64 Bar-Zohar 2006: 292.

Peres is said to have indicated in the talks what sort of risk Israel would face as a result of a military operation against Egypt, such as the danger of "the surge of Arab hostility towards Israel" and the "associated threat to its existence." Israel, said Peres, was in need of a deterrent potential that France was in a position to provide. In the end, Peres got the French to agree to a draft agreement on cooperation for the construction of a reactor in Israel, as well as a French commitment to provide regular uranium supplies.[65]

Although this is not the place to relate the entire process of the emergence of Israeli nuclear power in the 1950s and early 1960s[66], what is important to stress here is that as coordinator of the Ministry of Defense Peres played a decisive role in this top-secret treaty. His was a key contribution to the conference of Sèvres which resulted in the agreement on a "nuclear cooperation" with France that was ultimately concluded in late September 1957, in the last days of the Bourgès-Maunoury government.

Three treaties were finally signed at the end of 1957. The treaty of December 12, 1956 provided French aid in the construction of a nuclear reactor for the purposes of nuclear research. In it, France committed to supply Israel with a forty – according to other sources only twenty-five – megawatt nuclear reactor and 385 tons of natural uranium.

The second agreement of August 23, 1957, negotiated amidst the greatest secrecy between Peres and French Prime Minister Bourgès-Maunoury, stipulated cooperation in the research and production of nuclear weapons.[67]

The third treaty of October 1957 regulated all aspects concerning the construction of the reactor and the production of plutonium. It was only with the greatest effort that Peres was able to reach an agreement in the last days of the government under Bourgès-Maunoury. At this point in time, both Foreign Minister Pineau and Party Leader Mollet had reservations when it came to giving their final consent required to put the deal into effect. After all, this would mean nothing less than putting into place the entire basis for the development of nuclear weapons in Israel. In Bar-Zohar's opinion, the "peaceful purposes" underscored by France were just lip service meant to refute any accusations by Arab states to the effect that France had made Israel a nuclear power.[68]

The pact with France paved Israel's path to Dimona, the site of the nuclear reactor that would soon become a synonym for this Israeli secret. Today, the

65 Ibid. 292–294.
66 Ibid. 292–308; Cohen 2000.
67 Bar-Zohar 2006: 296–297.
68 Ibid. 302.

fact that Peres contributed to the project of turning Israel into a nuclear power is beyond dispute. But what was Peres' politico-ideological stance towards this project? What about the political environment in general? Did any kind of political discussion about this topic even take place in the late 1950s?

David Ben-Gurion made the decision in favor of Dimona from a unique political-charismatic position. Only a small, exclusive circle of confidants was in the know, and the decision process did not take the appropriate legal route via the inclusion of the government and the *Knesset*. Ben-Gurion succeeded in keeping the matter off the political agenda. From the very beginning, construction work on the reactor in the years 1958 to 1960 was subject to the strictest military censorship.

In spite of all this, political debates in the *Mapai* party, the government and the parliament could not be entirely suppressed. As completion of the reactor drew near in early 1962, the question as to what was to be done with the now available nuclear capacities became more pressing. Should they be used for peaceful purposes, or for the production of nuclear weapons? This debate took place to the exclusion of the public.[69]

Over the course of the year 1962, two schools of thought emerged within the small security-political circles that were grappling with the questions of the security concept and the structure of the military. Avner Cohen labeled them the "nuclear technology school" and the "school of conventionalists."[70] The main representatives of the "nuclear technology school" were Vice Minister of Defense Peres (1959–1965) and Moshe Dayan (since 1959 a member of the *Mapai* party, the *Knesset* and the cabinets). At this point, Ben-Gurion was still wavering in his position.[71]

As the responsible person, the Prime Minister had to face down the growing pressure from the United States demanding he put Dimona under international supervision. For that would have meant revealing Israel's actual goals. The adherents of the nuclear technology school expected a long-term regional conflict that would involve an endlessly progressing conventional armament, which is why they advocated the development of high-tech arms systems that would make an ongoing conventional armament superfluous in the long run. The desired deterrent effect would be achieved through nuclear weapons.[72]

69 Cohen 2000: 187.
70 Ibid.194.
71 Evron 1987: 18.
72 Cohen 2000: 194.

These conjectures of the "nuclear technology school" also had a transregional aspect. In light of the experience of the years 1956 and 1957, when the United Nations had forced Israel to give up the territorial conquests it had made in the Sinai War, the determent was also to be directed against the Western Powers should Israel's interests be at stake. The Israeli political scientist Yair Evron called Israel's nuclear weapon capacity an "undeclared trump card" and "leverage" towards the USA, so that they would ensure arms supplies to Israel.[73]

In the security-political cabinet, the nuclear lobby was set against the "conventionalists." This latter was represented mainly by *Mapai*'s coalition partner *Ahdut Haavoda*, headed by Yigal Alon (1918–1980) and Israel Galili (1911–1986). They, too, expected a long-lasting contention with the Arab neighbors, making a powerful army necessary. But their goal was in maintaining a well-armed conventional force comprised of a modern and mobile tank force and a strong air force. In their assessment, a determent by nuclear weapons alone could not provide a lasting guarantee for Israel's security.

Aside from this, the "conventionalists" feared the policy pursued by the nuclear technology advocates would lead to the "nuclearization of the Arab-Israeli conflict," and this could hardly be in the interests of a small state surrounded by enemies. The "conventionalists" also rejected the naïve notion that Israel would be able to maintain its monopoly with regard to nuclear weapons over the long haul.[74] Nuclear weapons might even provoke the Arabs with their demographic and geopolitical advantages to wage war against Israel.[75]

Both lines of thought adopted a negative and pessimistic perspective of the conflict. The subject matter of the debate was made up of specialist military-technical questions, while diplomatic-political approaches for ending the conflict were not taken into consideration as a realistic option. The quarrel between the two schools of thought reflects their perplexity when grappling with the future of Israel in the region, as they both put the main focus on military aspects. And it is not by chance that both the "conventionalists" and the proponents of nuclear technology were able to score successes, with massive investments being made in both directions.

Cohen and Evron show that this domestic political controversy hardly qualified as a proper political debate, since the rivals did not really object to the other side's position. Supporters of nuclear technology did not press for a reduction in spending on conventional armament, while the "conventionalists" for their part

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73 Evron 1987: 80–81.
74 Ibid. 17–18.
75 Cohen 2000: 195.

did not categorically reject nuclear research and development.[76] Ultimately, both schools of thought prevailed by invoking the worst-case scenario.

Published texts by a proponent of nuclear technology like Shimon Peres barely touched on the issue of nuclear weapons, as the topic was and still is subject to the strictest military censorship. But the texts he wrote in the early 1960s may be reassessed in light of what we know today. What is important to remember is that at this point in time the question as to what purpose Israel would put its nuclear plant to use was still open. An anthology published in 1965 as well as some of Peres' statements to the press yield several clues as to what the security policy of the time looked like.[77] In his essay "Aspects of Quality" Peres advocated modern technology and stressed the significance of the determent potential:

> The road to security and peace comprises three stages: firstly, retaliation power; secondly, deterrent power; and thirdly, disarmament. [...] For a long time, we have been fighting for the formation of a defense force in *Eretz Israel* so as to be able to defend ourselves in the event of an attack, but in this we have only been partially successful. [...] In the War of Independence we organized an army and bought weapons, but not in sufficient amounts, so that we were unable to dictate the desired war aim. [...] Today, we are entering the second phase, the creation of a deterrent power. In doing this – and I say this in all sincerity in spite of journalists being present – we do not seek war, but only wish to *deter* our enemies. We want to establish a power so that Nasser may feel compelled to eschew an attack on the State of Israel. Herewith, we proclaim in all sincerity our willingness regarding the third phase: the disarmament of the Middle East.[78]

Here, Peres wants the possibility of disarmament in the region, and therefore of a peaceful solution, to be understood as dependent on the determent potential of Israel. Even if he does not use the term "nuclear weapon," there is no doubt as to what he is referring to. But he suggests that the nuclear weapons are not meant to be used, but are only for determent as a safeguard against being attacked.

Peres' chain of thought is based on the assumption that Israel as such is unwanted in the region, with its neighbors striving for its demise. Peace is only possible if Israel succeeds in commanding respect and convincing the Arab states of its strength and invincibility. And since this is going to be an extended process, Israel has no choice but to build up its arms arsenals "in the meantime."

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76 Ibid. 196; Evron 1987: 19.

77 Cf. interview with Peres: "Alert for prevention of backwardness by power balance," *Davar*, August 24, 1962; weekly interview with Vice Minister of Defense Shimon Peres, "Arms race began already before Shavit 2," *Maariv*, February 27, 1962; Peres' release to the press: "We are entering a difficult era," *Maariv*, August 5, 1962.

78 Peres 1965: 190.

Peace, which was probably almost impossible to imagine for Peres at that point in time, can only be achieved by military strength. Peres' maxim with regard to the "decade of peace" that began in 1990 is this: "The path to Oslo is via Dimona." In the mid-1960s he comments: "If the defense force [the conventional army] is regarded as indispensable, and the deterrent power as an opportunity, then the disarmament can be called a hope. In the State of Israel opportunity and hope go hand in hand."[79]

According to this logic, peace can only come about as a side effect of security. And security is synonymous with the existence of the national state. The development of modern weapons with the goal of becoming militarily superior to the Arab neighbor states is the logical conclusion to this way of reasoning. Thus, in Israel's formative years Peres' perception of political reality in the Middle East was firmly tied to the described security doctrine.

He gets to the heart of it in a May 1962 essay entitled "Lessons for Security Policy."[80] The text was written under the impression of the debate between the "conventionalists" and the proponents of nuclear technology, and against the backdrop of a relative calm on the Israeli borders following the Sinai-Suez War:

> Given the absence [of peace], we have to rely on our [military] power alone. The formation of this power has to proceed in a timely manner for the purpose of achieving maximal [Israeli] independence. But the creation of military power requires considerable endurance, especially in view of the constantly changing political and security-political situation. Accordingly, this task of power buildup [meaning armament] must not be influenced by temporary changes in the political situation. Rather, it needs to be tackled from the perspective of a pessimistic assessment of the situation in order to be able to face one of the most complicated and grave of constellations. Against this background, the relative relief which is achieved by temporary political improvements must be completely ignored. […] We are in a new phase in the history of arms acquisitions. This is not a political, but a technological change. There is talk of a kind of weapon, which we could barely imagine in the past, but which now is introduced into our region.[81]

This text may serve to illustrate another aspect of the security doctrine, namely its depoliticization. In this context, the term "depoliticization" refers to the exclusion of the public from any discussion regarding the issue of non-conventional weapons, hence the security doctrine itself. There is some irony to the fact that by falling back on his coded language, Peres dives into the public debate with the sole purpose of arguing that it is not up for discussion because deterrence power

79 Ibid. 190.
80 Cf. Peres, "Lessons for Security Policy," of May 1962, in: Peres 1965: 146–156.
81 Ibid. 146, 149.

is simply indispensable. Peres' argument that the comparatively peaceful period of 1962 is treacherous and that a pessimistic assessment of the situation is pertinent to upholding security is ultimately an appeal to keep shaping security policy based on the worst-case scenario. Proceeding from this assumption, any political debate seems obsolete to him.

Besides, such a discussion was virtually impossible at that time. After all, the Dimona project was in a precarious phase in the early 1960s. By the end of 1960 the USA gained knowledge of the Dimona reactor. Now Ben-Gurion came under massive pressure from the American government to put the nuclear plant under international supervision and to disclose Israel's plans. But since the Israeli leadership was unwilling to let anyone peer at their cards, it came up with a security-political strategy that consisted of dodging any confirmation or denial of Israel's nuclear weapons potential.

The Policy of Opacity

When asked about the nuclear program, Israel usually fell back on the standard reply: "Israel will not be the first country to introduce nuclear weapons into the Middle East." The Israeli leadership would neither negate their possession of nuclear weapons nor corroborate it. In domestic politics the issue had already been a taboo topic from the 1960s onward. In his book *The Last Taboo*, published in 2005, Avner Cohen deals with the Israeli "policy of ambiguity" which he calls the "policy of opacity."[82]

Cohen depicts this policy as a "case of extreme tension between nuclear policy and democracy." The social tabooing of this topic has been possible because it simply does not exist in the public sphere, i.e., government, *Knesset*, and judicial power. Cohen puts the phenomenon of tabooing nuclear weapons in the context of a "culture of opacity," a political culture which is closely connected to the "Israeli order": "The culture of opacity leads to extreme tensions in liberal democracy, in particular when it comes to the question of supervision."[83]

Avner Cohen ascribes this political culture to the interplay of three factors, namely the taboo as a social code within the Jewish-Israeli "tribe," the military censorship as an instrument used by the state to enforce the taboo, and the policy of opacity as a political strategy. Without the strict military censorship, and later the social tabooing of the nuclear issue, the policy of opacity would not have

82 Cohen 2005.
83 Ibid. 14.

been so successful. And the social tabooing would have been impossible to keep up without the public's recognition that the nuclear weapons policy is a matter of national security.[84]

With the information block-out firmly in place, one may even wonder in how far it can be said that the public has any knowledge of the nuclear program at all. Avner Cohen goes on to points out: "Out of almost mythical fear, the public manages to stay clear of the topic and its actual meaning, to completely block it out and to act as if the serious strategic and moral dilemmas are none of its business."[85]

In Israel, disregarding this social imperative still means becoming liable to prosecution. To break this silence was the objective of *The Last Taboo*, which barely made it past the military censorship.[86] The author offers the following hypothesis: Although the taboo on discussing nuclear weapons might have been forced on the public, the public itself has "a deep-seated desire" to remain oblivious of this delicate topic. The taboo is actually "an echo of the authentic will of the Israelis to not discuss the topic publicly and to leave it completely up to the 'authorized experts.'"[87]

Although Avner Cohen makes a plea for an open debate about Israel's nuclear weapons, he does not really question their necessity. Rather, he sees the "tremendous success of the nuclear endeavor" in how it "has turned Israel into a regional power and has given it standing and prestige among its enemies as well as its friends." With this kind of appraisal, he might be said to hold the same view as Peres, namely that it is (military) strength that inspires (political and diplomatic) respect. What is more, Cohen draws on the presumed consensus in Israeli society that Israel's nuclear weapons serve the national security. At the same time, Cohen points out the deliberate ignorance of the Israeli public in this matter.[88]

But how is such a taboo created? Where does the "putative authentic will" to not want to know come from? How did this social consensus concerning the nuclear issue come about? Is it that the unreserved support of the Israelis as it is hinted at here applies exclusively to the procurement of nuclear weapons? Or does this political behavior also pertain to other aspects of security policy such as conventional armament? First and foremost stands the question as to what position a man of the establishment like Peres took with regard to the "policy of

84 Ibid. 142.
85 Ibid. 141.
86 Ibid. 19–20.
87 Ibid. 142.
88 Cohen 2005: 12–13, 184–187.

ambiguity" when it came to the issue of nuclear weapons, and what contribution he made to the tabooing of this topic, hence to the establishment of a "political culture of opacity."

The culture of secrecy surrounding security questions has its roots in the pre-state *Yishuv*. The principle of secrecy created in British Palestine provided the ideological-cultural basis for the Zionists in representing their own security interests. The first arms purchases as well as the provisional production of weapons in the 1930s and 1940s were subject to utmost secrecy.

The Zionist underground militia, as such illegal, formed the fundament of the secrecy culture. In the 1950s, this element of political culture survived and took root particularly in security policy. Befittingly, Ben-Gurion finalized the decision to buy a nuclear reactor from France with only a handful of people involved and continued to keep the project secret. Ben-Gurion's political mentality of secrecy also found expression in the fact that he was not willing to set any long-term goals. When the USA discovered the nuclear reactor at Dimona towards the end of 1960, Ben-Gurion went on to declare before the *Knesset* on December 21, 1960 that Israel was not developing nuclear weapons and Dimona served exclusively peaceful purposes.

This formal explanation was accepted without discussion or criticism. All too touchy was the issue even for the nuclear weapons opponents in parliament. Ben-Gurion's authority inhibited any resistance.[89] And although most *Knesset* delegates from the big parties were essentially opposed to the armament with nuclear weapons, they – with the exception of representatives of the communist party *Maki* – barely dared to bring it up and challenge Ben-Gurion. He in turn applied his own strategy in order to ascertain the parliament and public remained excluded. To evade any parliamentary debates, the Prime Minister made it possible for every leader of a *Knesset* parliamentary group to turn to him directly.

In addition, a secret commission was formed in late 1962 within the context of the *Knesset* Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee to deal with the financial aspects of Dimona. Avner Cohen observes that this secrecy policy was a "convenient solution" for the legislative and the executive. As for the nuclear weapons opponents within the *Mapai*, they also failed to express their pragmatic and moral reservations within the party. Accordingly, the secrecy imperative extended to the entire parliamentarian system and thus contributed to the depoliticization of the nuclear weapons issue.[90]

89 Ibid. 150–151.
90 Ibid. 192–193.

But still some nuclear weapons opponents did express their protest openly in the hopes of being able to stop the project in time. How did the duo of Ben-Gurion and Peres deal with them? The example of the intellectual Eliezer Livneh (1902–1975), a former member of the *Mapai* party, shows how effective the rules of censorship laid down by the Ministry of Defense were.

Even before the decision as to how the nuclear capacity of Israel was to be used was made, Livneh came out in favor of publicly discussing "the true purpose of the nuclear venture." In an article entitled "The Last Warning," published in *Haaretz* on January 12, 1962, Livneh expressed his concern regarding Israeli security policy. He feared that a security doctrine based on nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles would "nuclearize" the Middle East conflict – a disastrous development for the region.

Some months later he founded a small group that included Israeli personalities such as Martin Buber (1878–1965), Efreim Orbach (1912–1991) and Yeshayahu Leibowitz, as well as former members of the Israeli Atomic Energy Commission Gabriel Stein (1920–1976) and Franz Ollendorff (1900–1981). They jointly handed in a petition to the government seeking to prevent the introduction of nuclear weapons into the region.

Confusion spread in the Ministry of Defense. An official reply was never issued. Instead, the group around Livneh was fought behind the scenes. In order to silence the nuclear opponents they were portrayed as a danger to the security of the state. For this purpose, the Ministry of Defense put the Israeli Journalists' Association under pressure to cancel a press conference on "Nuclear Weapons in the Middle East" announced by Livneh – with success. All this was justified by arguing that Livneh and his supporters compromised national security.[91]

In the summer and fall of 1962, Peres tried to convey his ministry's position through the press. But Peres' statements to the media turned out to be counterproductive. His public statements confirmed the suspicions of the anti-nuclear weapons group, namely that Israel did indeed intend to use its nuclear capacity for the production of weapons. In the summer of 1962, Livneh, Stein, Orbach and others founded the "Committee for the Nuclear Disarmament of the Middle East" with the support of the President of the World Zionist Organization Nahum Goldman (1895–1982). The committee appealed to the political elites of the country to draw attention to the dangers posed by nuclear weapons.

The objective of the committee was to make the nuclear weapons issue a top-priority political topic, and the argument put into the foreground by the group was that the introduction of weapons of mass destruction into the region could

91 Cohen 2000: 188–189.

endanger the entire Zionist project. As they emphasized, given Israel's small size and its disadvantageous geopolitical and demographic situation, it would be exposed to the risk of total annihilation should it come to a nuclearization of the Middle East conflict. In its own best interests the country should seek an absolute ban on the introduction of such arms into the region.

For even if Israel should prove successful in producing technically superior nuclear weapons in the near future, it would not be able to keep up the advantage permanently. The committee advocated opening negotiations with the other states in the region to avert the danger of nuclear armament. Its members further stressed that the acquisition of the weapons as well as the associated secrecy policy were undemocratic.[92] Already then the critical Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz recognized the problem of the nuclear program, which he described as a "state within the state" in the sense that it stands outside Israeli jurisdiction and beyond the public's oversight.[93]

But the nuclear weapon opponents were quickly silenced when the government invoked military censorship. Avner Cohen points out the essential role of censorship in the enforcement of this demand to silence, and later in the consolidation of the policy of ambiguity.[94] The military censorship prohibited any factual references to Israel's nuclear program. It only allowed and still only allows commentary on foreign sources, or publications that are specifically marked as a personal opinion or as hypothetical deliberations of the author. In this way, any basis for a possible public debate is eliminated.

Even today, to publish information about the Israeli nuclear program means making oneself guilty of an offense. And so the anti-nuclear committee was trapped in a Catch-22 situation: In order to be able to pursue their goal, its members put themselves in danger of being accused of betraying state secrets.[95] Indeed, the Israeli media scientist Yoel Cohen points out that Livneh was "summoned and warned by government representatives that he could be indicted."[96]

92 Ibid. 180–191.
93 Cohen 2005: 152.
94 Ibid. 151–152.
95 Cohen 2000: 191.
96 Cohen 1995: 370.

The Vanunu Affair

Following the short and unsuccessful attempt at resistance by the "Committee for the Nuclear Disarmament of the Middle East" in the early 1960s, the policy of opacity became more and more prevalent – even as particularly Peres' position regarding this policy remained inconsistent for decades. According to Avner Cohen, on the eve of the Six-Day War Peres made a proposition to abandon the strategy of ambiguity and disclose Israel's position as a nuclear power to the public. Prime Minister Levi Eshkol rejected the suggestion.[97]

The Israeli historian Tom Segev (1945–) also maintains that in the crisis of May/June 1967, Peres campaigned for demonstrating Israel's determent potential to avoid the impending war.[98] Some years later, in the initial days of the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan was thrown into a state of panic when faced with heavy losses at the southern front. He suggested the deployment of nuclear weapons to Prime Minister Golda Meir, but this time as well Israel made do with its conventional military forces. What is important here, though, is that both Peres in 1967 and Dayan in 1973 believed that Israel could indeed make use of its nuclear weapons in an emergency situation to escape catastrophe.[99]

Only in the mid-1980s did the concept of "opacity" start to show cracks. On October 5, 1986, the London Sunday Times ran an exclusive report on its front page: "Revealed: The Secrets of Israel's Nuclear Arsenal." The article relied on information provided by Mordechai Vanunu (1954–), formerly a technician at the Nuclear Research Center near Dimona where he worked from 1977 to 1985 in a top-secret subterranean bunker system.

The article, the contents of which had been thoroughly vetted by the Sunday Times' research team *Insight* prior to its publication, created a giant stir worldwide. From the evidence and statements offered by Vanunu, nuclear scientists consulted by *Insight* concluded that not only does Israel have the atomic bomb – which had long been speculated –, but also that the country has developed into a major nuclear power. In a nutshell the article said: Israel takes sixth place among the nuclear powers of the world, it secretly produces plutonium in an

97 Cohen 2005: 154.

98 Segev 2005: 347–345.

99 Cohen 2005: 49–54. In the wake of the 1973 war, Israel "tremendously" increased its nuclear arsenal. This took place under the Rabin government of 1974–1977, with Peres as minister of defense. It is by this increase, Cohen says, that Israel became a nuclear world power. Ibid. 54–55.

underground complex, and one hundred to two hundred nuclear weapons have already been produced in Dimona.[100]

In August 1986, the Israeli security service informed Prime Minister Peres that Vanunu had made contact with the Sunday Times. At first the Mossad searched for Vanunu in Australia, but later learned from the British security service MI6 that the technician was in London. On September 21, 1986, Peres decided, together with his deputy, Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, and Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin, to abduct Vanunu and bring him back to Israel.[101]

Given the tensions between the Israeli and the British security services since the early 1980s, Peres is said to have instructed the Mossad to make sure to not violate any British laws when kidnapping Vanunu. As such the Mossad developed a plan to first coax Vanunu out of England, and then bring him to Israel by force.[102] In the end, Vanunu fell into the trap of Mossad agent Cheryl Hanin-Bentov who managed to lure her victim to Rome, from where he was taken to Israel.

Vanunu was put on trial to the exclusion of the public. The charge comprised three items: treason, espionage of a particularly heinous nature and collection of secret information with the intent to compromise state security. On March 24, 1988, Vanunu was found guilty of espionage and treason and sentenced to eighteen years in prison in solitary confinement.[103] Due to international pressure his solitary confinement was lifted after eleven years. Finally, on April 21, 2004, Vanunu was released, but his freedom of movement remains highly restricted to this day.[104]

All decisions reached in the Vanunu Affair were subject to the strictest secrecy and were made by a small group of people, with Peres keeping only a few members of the cabinet of ministers in the loop. He neither informed the *Knesset* nor did he consult with his advisors. Only as late as November 16, 1986 – seven weeks after Vanunu's disappearance from England on the first of October – and only in reaction to international pressure put on Israel to disclose the whereabouts of the persecuted man, was it finally confirmed that Vanunu was indeed in Israel and under arrest.

Yoel Cohen, author of *Nuclear Ambiguity: Vanunu Affair,* is of the opinion that Peres' decision to break the silence was a major mistake. It brought to light that

100 Black and Morris 1994: 631; Cohen 1995: 123–126; *Haaretz*, November 6, 1986, and April 19, 2004.

101 Cohen 1995: 169.

102 Ibid. 177.

103 Ibid. 329–331.

104 Malman 2004.

he had secretly planned the kidnapping within a small circle without taking into account the consequences. Moreover, by publicly confirming a covert operation he committed nothing less than a deadly sin of intelligence work.[105]

Whether Peres really had any chance of permanently keeping under wraps Vanunu's whereabouts and the breach of international law committed by the kidnapping remains controversial. At any rate, he managed to remain silent for several weeks. Or did Peres anticipate that he would have to admit to the kidnapping and had accepted this fact? As Yoel Cohen speculates, Peres had developed "a full-on security neurosis" over the course of the years, and not having any personal experience in intelligence work finally made the decision that would trigger such severe criticisms from the world public and various foreign parliaments.

Another position is that Peres wanted to create a precedent.[106] With this in mind, can the decision to take recourse to such a drastic measure as kidnapping really be attributed to a "security neurosis" which the decision makers were suffering from? Or did Peres merely make use of common practices to preserve the "Israeli order"? This is what Peres, who only rarely comments on the affair, said about the decision for the kidnapping: "Even if Vanunu's information about nuclear weapons is incorrect, Israel should still prosecute him because he does not have the right to talk about such matters. He has betrayed state secrets."[107]

Yoel Cohen labels this a "cosmetic excuse." He argues that patriotism and the imperative to remain silent on state secrets are deeply ingrained in the political culture of Israel as it is, so that setting a cautionary example was not really necessary. Cohen is convinced that Vanunu was kidnapped because Israeli authorities sought to prevent him from betraying even more information.[108] This claim is plausible because the decision to capture Vanunu was finalized before the revelations were made public. The hope was that he could be stopped in time. But can the reason given by Peres, to the effect that the abduction was supposed to set a warning example, really be dismissed as a "cosmetic excuse"? Is this kind of determent not in fact an integral part of the political culture of Israel?

Peres' blunt remark regarding people who divulge state secrets sheds some light on the fundament of the specific "Israeli order," namely its keen sense of security. Any attempt to shake that order is to be resisted tooth and nail. It is assumed that Vanunu had no right to disclose information because no one is jus-

105 Cohen 1995: 250.
106 Ibid. 236, 239–240.
107 Ibid. 240.
108 Ibid.

tified "to talk about such matters" unless they are authorized by the state. Consequently, "Israel" had to go after him.

As for the press, they took Peres' side. The Israeli journalist Gidon Shapiro observes that the Israeli press had defamed and condemned Vanunu with the support of the government even before the beginning of the trial.[109] This in turn confirms the position of the Israeli journalist Akiva Orr that Vanunu would have had no chance to pursue his objective via the Israeli press. Not only would they have refused to publish his information, but also in all probability they would have even turned him over to the authorities straight away. Bearing this in mind, Vanunu's decision to approach a foreign newspaper seemed like the logical way to proceed. "In Israel, the loyalty of newspaper editors is first and foremost to the state." Democracy – or truth, for that matter – is of secondary importance.[110]

Avner Cohen expounds on the severe punishment of the Israeli nuclear informant[111] by stressing the social significance of his actions: Vanunu did not grasp the "actual social function of opacity." Its goal was "to conceal the entire nuclear issue." Vanunu had failed to fully appreciate that "beyond the fiction of opacity, we all know exactly what is going on in Dimona. But we pretend not to know [...] so that we do not have to deal with the strategic and moral dilemmas associated with it." Vanunu had believed "with a naïveté that was very close to stupidity," says Avner Cohen, that his actions could trigger a profound national debate.[112]

Still, in his book *The Last Taboo,* Avner Cohen has himself come out in favor of giving up the "anachronistic politics of opacity," which got him into conflict with the military authorities and the censorship regulations.[113] He explains the non-appearance of a nuclear weapons-debate with the single fact that Israeli society did not want to know about the weapons in the first place. But what Cohen sometimes loses sight of is that this "schizophrenic situation" must be evaluated in closer context to the ban on speaking that is enforced by the Israeli leadership with utmost severity.

This order to remain silent is one of the preconditions for the eyes of Israeli society being so firmly closed. The way that the Israeli government, the security apparatuses and the justice system reacted to the Vanunu Affair shows just how powerful the principle of "not being allowed to speak" really is. The press,

109 Shapiro 1998: 154–155.

110 Orr 1998: 65–68.

111 Amnesty International called Vanunu's detention conditions "cruel and inhumane." Cf. Kimmerling 2004.

112 Cohen 2005: 159.

113 Ibid. 23–40, 246–264.

too, makes sure to observe the prescribed rules. When the imminent publication of explosive material in the Sunday Times came to Peres' knowledge, he turned to the Editors' Committee, an association of Israeli broadcasting and television station directors and newspaper editors.

The Editors' Committee is regularly informed of sensitive military and diplomatic matters by high-ranking cabinet members. In return, it promotes the political line of the government when required. Peres told the Editors' Committee about the upcoming publication in the Sunday Times. Since the foreign media is beyond the reach of Israeli censorship regulations, he appealed to the patriotism of the journalists in asking them to not allow any local reporting and also no comments for a period of forty-eight hours after the article's publication.[114] Moreover, Peres requested that the Editors' Committee refrain from mentioning in their coverage any details about security glitches. He assumed as a matter of course that the Editors' Committee would cooperate. Avner Cohen sees this as confirmation of how firmly the taboo to talk about the nuclear program has taken hold of society.[115]

The press policy validates Avner Cohen's assessment that the political system is schizophrenic. After all, word of the meeting between Peres and the Editors' Committee also reached the *Insight* team of the Sunday Times, who saw this as corroboration of Vanunu's story. But even in the moment when the fiction has been unmasked, Peres and the Israeli press continue to pursue the "policy of opacity." The guardians of the "Israeli order" are the first to pretend "to not know what is going on in Dimona." And society follows suit.

Many years of information-banning policies combined with the cooperation of the press are why the topic is not publicly discussed and why Israelis appear indifferent. The schizophrenia inherent in the "policy of opacity" is based on the discrepancy between being and seeming – a discrepancy that threatens the stability of the "Israeli order" in instances such as this affair. This is the reason why Vanunu is considered a public enemy even now.

In January of 1988, Peres, by then foreign minister, testified in Vanunu's trial. Oddly enough he was summoned as a witness for the defense, because in November 1986 he had announced in a non-public session with *Knesset* members of the Labor Party that the article in the Sunday Times had not caused any serious harm to Israel's security.[116] And refuting the allegation that Vanunu's revelations had damaged Israeli security or that Vanunu had acted with this kind of sinister

114 Cohen 1995: 120.
115 Cohen 2005: 160.
116 Cohen 1995: 319.

intent was precisely what Vanunu's defense attorney Avigdor Feldmann (1948–) built his defense strategy around.

In the trial, though, Peres kept insisting that Vanunu's information had jeopardized the security of the state. He neither gave reasons for this claim nor offered any explanation for his remark before the members of his party, which he had most probably made in order to reassure the persons present and to convince them that Israel's determent power had not been damaged. When making his statement in court, he adhered strictly to the government instructions according to which certain issues were not to be discussed in the courtroom; such as the question as to whether the article in the Sunday Times had caused any damage, or even whether it had actually been true. Peres refused to answer Feldmann's queries, and only repeated that the published information had harmed "Israel's security."[117] In the excerpts from the protocol of the Vanunu trial, published in late 1999, Peres' testimony reads as follows: "The publications of the Sunday Times prompt some Arab states to head into various directions that are undesirable for Israel."[118]

How to verify or refute Peres' allegation of 1988? What is the gauge by which to rate the harm inflicted on national security? Were the Arab states really completely ignorant of the Israeli nuclear weapons arsenal prior to the report in the Sunday Times? Or could the article have even amplified the desired deterrent effect? What exactly are the unwelcome reactions that Peres observes in his Arab neighbors?

To make it possible to publicly ask and discuss such questions was Vanunu's intention, and also the cause taken up by the few members of the "Israeli Committee for the Liberation of Mordechai Vanunu and for A Middle East Free of Atomic, Biological and Chemical Weapons." By criticizing the "policy of opacity" and the continuing information ban as undemocratic, they hoped to initiate a political discussion about nuclear weapons. They assumed that once the Israeli public was informed of what was going on in Dimona, it could be mobilized against the nuclear armament.

Moreover, they were hoping to be able to effect a change in the way of thinking about security, so that weapons of mass destruction would be prohibited. In contrast to Avner Cohen who, in spite of proposing leaving behind the policy of opacity, considers nuclear weapons to be advantageous for the purpose of determent, the Israeli disarmament activists and nuclear weapons opponents of the

117 Ibid. 318–320.

118 Protocols of the Vanunu trial, *Haaretz*, April 20, 2004 (first published November 25, 1999).

1960s saw the mere existence of the Dimona plant as a danger to the Zionist project as well as to the environment.

Israeli law made it easy for the government to declare any concern a state secret. As Vanunu's defense attorney objected during the trial: "Anything that the government wishes to categorize as a state secret is considered a state secret by the law." At the same time it is under no obligation to define what a state secret actually is.[119] But all this only became possible because the *Knesset* acquiesced to the directives and sat still. Its submission is firmly rooted in the political culture. There is a consensus among most delegates to leave certain tasks up to the "security experts." In other words, the parliament cooperates in blocking the debate about nuclear weapons.[120]

Two perspectives on the use of violence in the service of the Zionist project are merged in the "policy of nuclear opacity." For one thing, the ambivalent attitude towards violence, and for another, the justification of the use of violence, even as it takes on extreme features, since it is seen as counterviolence or necessary violence. The policy of nuclear opacity has a paradoxical character, for it denies the factual possession of weapons of mass destruction while at the same time declaring that these weapons are merely for determent as a kind of "insurance policy," and not for actually being used. The possibility of an actual deployment as a last resort is firmly blocked out, for it would trigger too much fear. After all, in the face of Israel's geographic and demographic situation, the deployment of nuclear weapons could very likely mean the end of the Zionist project.

The other aspect incorporated in the policy of opacity is the willingness contained in the concept of determent to actually resort to "extreme means," should it really come to the worst. Domestically, this would be legitimized as a necessity, as counterviolence by the "ultimate victim" in the sense proposed by Fackenheim and Schweid. But let us now look closer into the question of whether the principle of determent is really limited to non-conventional weapons.

Conventional War and the Zionist Project: Lebanon 1982

As is well known, conventional wars are still a bitter reality in Israel, the determent potential of nuclear weapons notwithstanding. The security-political concept that a conventional war can be avoided by means of nuclear determent did not prove successful. War has dominated Israeli everyday life since the estab-

119 Feldmann 1998: 129.

120 Cohen 2005: 163–165.

lishment of the state. Wars of conquest such as the Sinai-Suez War of 1956 and the Six-Day War of 1967; explicit defense wars such as the Yom Kippur War of 1973; "Wars of Attrition" from 1968 to 1970 on the southern border, and from 1985 to 2000 on the northern border; military clashes with the goal of retaining territories, such as the Lebanon War of 1982 or countering the First and Second Intifada of 1987 to 1992 and 2000 to 2004; moreover, those wars in which Israel, though not directly militarily involved, was nevertheless attacked, such as the Second Gulf War of 1991.

The vortex of violence and counterviolence is further intensified by the military occupation of the Palestinian territories and by the acts of terror against Israeli facilities triggering retaliation operations from Israel's side. As has been demonstrated by drawing on the example of the Sinai-Suez War, the notion that war is necessary to preserve the Jewish state has solidified over the course of the years. As such, conventional war has become an integral part of the Israeli order. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon on June 6, 1982 has entered Israel's political and social awareness as the first war that was "freely chosen" by the security-political leadership of the country. Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon sent the Israeli army into Lebanon in a military operation called "Peace for Galilee," which was also the official rationale.

Ian Black and Benny Morris, coauthors of *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services,* view the Lebanon War as a result of two developments. For one thing, Israel interfered in Lebanon because PLO leader Yasser Arafat and his combat units had shifted their main area of activities to Beirut and South Lebanon after having being expelled from Jordan by Jordanian troops in the so-called "Black September" of 1970. The second strand of events is made up of the Lebanese Civil War of 1975, the volatile situation in the country and the Israeli-Falangist alliance.[121]

Israel had been supporting the Christians in Lebanon since the 1950s as part of the so-called Periphery Doctrine, with these connections being referred to as a "natural alliance."[122] In 1982, the Israeli leadership deemed that the right moment to push through a new political order in the region had arrived. Black and Morris count the influx of PLO fighters in the wake of "Black September" among the main factors that led to the gradual disintegration of Lebanon in the first half of the 1970s:

121 Black and Morris 1994: 526.
122 Ibid. 528.

> The PLO influx was one of the factors leading to the gradual disintegration of the Lebanese state and society during the first half of the 1970s. The organization's cross border operations against Israeli frontier settlements brought IDF retaliation against the whole population of southern Lebanon, leading, in turn, to the flight of Shi'ite refugees to Beirut's southern suburbs. These poor Shi'ites were embittered with the Christian-dominated Lebanese establishment and turned increasingly to fundamentalist religion. They became an important element in the destabilization that eventually resulted in civil war. When that began the country's Christian communities, led by the Maronites, and their militias – dominated by the 'Lebanese Forces' of the Phalange Party – were pitted against a loose and shifting coalition of Muslims and left-wingers [...].[123]

Israel supported the Christian Maronites in the 1975 Lebanese Civil War, and Israeli troops marched into Lebanon on March 15, 1978. In the ensuing "Operation Litani," a retaliatory act for Palestinian attacks in the Israeli core country, several brigades comprising a total number of seven thousand men were deployed. The goal was to destroy PLO facilities north of the Israeli-Lebanese border. The plan was to create four enclaves that would be dominated by Israel, and via which military control for Israel's Christian allies, the Free Lebanese Army (FLA) of Major Saad Haddad (1936–1984), was to be ensured.[124]

Since the accession of the second *Likud* government in August 1981, Israel's security policy had been shaped by Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon and Chief of General Staff Refael Eitan (1929–2004). But it was Sharon who was the main driving force.[125] He did everything he could to weaken the PLO at the northern border of Israel so as to make sure his overall strategy would be successful. He believed "that with the PLO humbled, Israel would find it easier to browbeat the now leaderless Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip into accepting Israeli rule, thus paving the way for eventual Israeli annexation."[126]

Once the political-military power of the Palestinians and the Muslims of Lebanon was crushed, Sharon hoped to be able to create a "new" Lebanese state under the leadership of the "Phalange" party with which Israel was prepared to conclude peace. Sharon expanded on the plan that had been drafted in April 1981 by the Israeli military for the invasion of Lebanon, called "Operation Pinetree." In the original plan, the invasion of the Israeli army as far as Sidon was provided; while in Sharon's variant the troops were to advance all the way up to a line north

123 Black and Morris 1991: 364.
124 Black and Morris 1994: 525–526.
125 Landau 2015: 146–169.
126 Black and Morris 1991: 371.

of Beirut. From the beginning, Sharon preferred his so-called "Operation Big Pines" to "Operation Small Pines."[127]

Operation Big Pines included bringing the PLO from Lebanon back to Jordan in order to overthrow the Hashemite royal family and establish a Palestinian state.[128] Black and Morris stress that the Minister of Defense "henceforward proceeded more cautiously, rarely letting his cabinet colleagues see the entire breadth of this thinking."[129] On May 10, 1982, Prime Minister Begin presented the cabinet with a shortened version of Operation Big Pines, which Sharon described as a "limited operation." He and Begin wanted to convince the ministers that the undertaking was an attack in the mold of "Operation Small Pines."

The occasion for an Israeli military invasion into Lebanon came up in June 1982 through an incident in London. The Israeli ambassador to Great Britain, Shlomo Argov (1929–2003), was shot and severely injured by a Palestinian who was a member of the renegade group of Abu Nidal. At that, Minister of Defense Sharon and Prime Minister Begin sent the Israeli army into Lebanon. Begin cited the fight against the "terrorists" as the reason for the military operation. The cabinet and ultimately also the *Knesset*, including the Labor Party opposition under the leadership of Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin, did not put any obstacles in the way of this motion. The goal was to destroy PLO mortar and rocket launchers that were positioned in range of Galilean settlements within a forty-kilometer zone in South Lebanon.

Sharon spoke of a "twenty-four-hour" operation that was to bring about "Peace for Galilee."[130] Following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Yasser Arafat and approximately eleven thousand PLO combatants were evacuated to Tunisia by August 1982. The preparations for realizing Sharon's Big Plan for a "new order" in Lebanon got underway, with Israel helping thirty-four-year-old Phalange leader Bachir Gemayel (1947–1982) win the presidential election through military backing. According to the Lebanese constitution, a candidate had to attain a two-third majority in parliament to be successful, so the Israeli occupation hindered Gemayel's opponents from casting their vote.

On August 23, 1982 Gemayel was elected president of Lebanon with fifty-seven votes of the sixty-two delegates who managed to make an appearance. Already on September 14, 1982 he was assassinated.[131] An escalation was bound to occur,

127 Black and Morris 1994: 538.
128 Shlaim 2000, "Ariel Sharon's Big Plan": 395–400; Benziman 256.
129 Black and Morris 1991: 372.
130 Black and Morris 1994: 543–545.
131 Shlaim 2000: 413–415.

and Sharon feared that the remaining PLO fighters could seize political power in Beirut. He instructed the Israeli army to advance into West Beirut where the PLO still held control. The Phalangists, meanwhile, intruded into the Palestinian refugee camps of Sabra and Shatila in South Beirut to "purge them of hidden terrorists." From September 16 to 18, 1982, the Phalangists unleashed a massacre of the Palestinians, all while in plain sight of the Israeli army. According to Israeli reports, between seven hundred and eight hundred were killed, while Palestinian sources estimated more than two thousand people slaughtered.[132]

War Policy: A Social Political Consensus

When it comes to the question of military operations in the service of national statehood or of security, what is important to remember is the fact this practice traditionally enjoys social and political backing. For all Zionist parties of Israel, war and national-state existence are intricately linked. This could particularly be observed in the war of 1982, when for the first time in Israeli history a "right-wing government" chose to go to war. All military operations carried out up to that point – with the exception of the Litani operation of March 1978 – were decided under the governments of the *Mapai* or Labor Party.

This time, the position of the Zionist Left was represented from the ranks of the opposition. As leader of the Labor Party opposition, Shimon Peres defended the invasion on June 8, 1982 – two days after the war had started –in the face of a no-confidence vote made by the small Jewish-Arab *Knesset* parliamentary group *Hadash* ("Democratic Front for Peace and Equality") against Begin's government and the war decision. Peres' support helped secure Begin the majority in the *Knesset*.[133]

Why did Peres stand up for Begin in the no-confidence vote? And why does the Zionist Left historiography cling to the hypothesis that Peres was "one of the fiercest opponents of the 1982 invasion of Lebanon by the IDF"?[134]

What has to be factored in here is that the Israeli Zionist Left has always had an ambivalent understanding of the use of national-state violence. It deems it absolutely essential for security – though security is exactly what it fails to achieve, even endangering it instead. The escalation potential of the respective missions is denied. Immediately after the invasion, Peres made statements to

132 Ibid. 416.
133 *Maariv*, June 9, 1982.
134 Ben-Simon 1997: 231.

the press about the war that seemed irresolute and scattered. He did not really give the impression that he belonged to the great proponents of the war. This awkward stance shows an ambivalent attitude towards the use of violence: Peres supported the war *de facto*, but would not be frank about it.

Newspaper headlines testify to this fact: "Peres and Rabin Demand: No Strife with Syria"[135]; "Please not Another West Bank"[136]; "Peres: [Begin's] Government Will Have a Reckoning After the Days of Mourning [for the fallen Israelis] and the Return of the Soldiers"[137]; "Israeli Invasion into West Beirut Could Become a Historic Mistake"[138]; "The Invasion into West Beirut Will Come at a High Price, Although the Temptation is Great [to invade West-Beirut]"[139]; "Peres Asks: Why was the Bombing of Beirut Necessary?"[140].

On the occasion of the Lebanon War, Peres himself penned an article entitled, "For the Political Path."[141] Then, shortly after the massacre committed by the Phalangists against Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila on September 16 to 18, 1982, he published the newspaper article "Public Squares and Bulldozers – But No Way Out."[142]

Clearly, Israel's war objective was the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon. Peres stressed that this was not only in the interests of Israel but also for the benefit of Lebanon. He said that the IDF acted in the interest of the Lebanese government that "knows [...] that the destruction of Beirut did not start with the invasion of the Israeli army, but has rather been going on [...] since 1975 on account of the Syrians and the PLO."[143]

Thus, in Peres' argumentation the war is a positive force which helps eliminate injustice in Lebanon. According to Peres, "the Muslim inhabitants of Beirut" would be wise to wish for the expulsion of the "PLO terrorists," even if at this point in time they still feel represented by them. He attributes their support of the PLO to a "lack of judgment" keeping them from recognizing that "the PLO ultimately has no one to blame but itself for their bitter fate." In Peres' interpretation the Israeli army is even rendering the Palestinians in Beirut an important service.

135 *Maariv*, June 8, 1982.
136 *Al Hamishmar*, June 11, 1982.
137 *Haaretz*, June 16, 1982.
138 *Maariv*, June 29, 1982.
139 *Davar*, June 24, 1982.
140 *Maariv*, July 26, 1982.
141 *Haaretz*, July 30, 1982.
142 *Maariv*, September 26, 1982.
143 *Haaretz*, July 30, 1982.

On July 30, 1982, the very day that the UN Security Council called on Israel to cease their siege of Beirut so its people could be supplied with food and medicine, Peres conveyed the events as if the IDF was actually doing a good deed in Lebanon – and quite obviously he actually perceived it this way.[144] Another war objective which Peres mentions is the election of a new president in Lebanon:

> It would be naive to think that all the [Israeli] efforts in Beirut [...] had the removal of terrorists as their only goal. Another aim – an enormously important one in my assessment – is the formation of a Lebanese government, or rather the election of the next president of Lebanon, [...] and that without foreign intervention. Therefore, the removal of terrorists is not a goal in itself, but rather an important means for helping Lebanon sort itself out.[145]

This is not the first time that Peres espouses the view that Israel has the right to exert influence on the formation of new governments in its neighboring countries. Already in the Sinai-Suez Campaign of 1956, one of the goals was to remove the Egyptian president from office. And also when riots broke out in Jordan in 1963, Peres suggested to Ben-Gurion that in the event of King Hussein (1935–1999) being overthrown, Israel should "appoint an Israeli Arab in his stead."[146]

In 1982, Peres stressed that the election of a new Lebanese head of state was to take place "without foreign intervention." Was he aware of the inconsistency of his statements? Perhaps in his mind the Israeli army was so positively connoted that he would never refer to its actions as a "foreign intervention." Or maybe he was of the opinion that Israel's intervention on the grounds of their alliance with the Lebanese Christians – a group belonging to the ruling stratums in the country – was in some way nothing more than helping them help themselves. What is certain though is that his focus was solely on Israeli interests, which in 1982 were to be preserved by a military invasion of the neighboring country. Even as he stuck to diplomatic rhetoric, what can be gathered from the article is that he regards the military as an essential instrument in the shaping of regional politics.[147]

So what position did Peres take towards Sharon's actual war aim, namely the solution of the Palestinian question in Jordan? Sharon's plan provided the expulsion of the PLO leadership into Jordan, where they were to establish a state. The

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144 On August 1, 1982, the IDF seized Beirut International Airport and bombarded the southern parts of the city. On August 4, 1982, western Beirut also fell into Israeli hands. Gal and Hammerman 2002: 14–15.

145 Peres 1982.

146 Segev 2005: 200.

147 Peres 1982.

international pressure on Israel to withdraw from Palestinian territories would then subside, or so was the hope.

On the Israeli Right this plan was known by the slogan "Jordan is Palestine."[148] But Sharon did not say what was to happen with the Palestinians living in *Eretz Israel*/Palestine, should his plan be successful. Would they have to move to Jordan? At any event, Sharon did not believe that Israeli military occupation could be kept up for long in the Palestinian zones. And giving up any territories was completely out of the question.

It also remained unclear by which means Sharon intended to secure the consent of the PLO and the Jordanian Royal Family. Even if Arafat should cooperate, it was to be expected that the realization of the plan would result in considerable tensions at the Israeli-Jordanian border.[149] At the time Peres penned his article on the "political path," Sharon's plan had not yet been made public. For this reason the leader of the opposition had to be very cautious in taking up a clear position regarding the connection between the Palestinian question and the war in Lebanon, and so he took refuge in coded language:

> I don't see in the future any Israeli mandate based on which anybody can decide in Israel's name to force a withdrawal from the territories of 1967, to divide Jerusalem and to create a Palestinian state. This state would attempt to sometimes unsettle Israel, sometimes to rule Jordan. Especially since we have a much more convincing alternative, namely to negotiate with elected representatives of the territories and with Jordan. With this in mind, it is unfortunate that the European initiative seeks to adjust the [UN] resolutions 242 and 338 to PLO caprices. Resolutions such as 242 and 338 could be revoked, but it is unlikely that an acceptable alternative can be found for the Arab as well as the Israeli side. [...] Thus, the European intervention not only complicates American mediation, but also adds unnecessary fuel to the fire of the PLO's wishes.[150]

Peres is careful to not directly link the war to the Palestinian question or Sharon's suggestion for a solution. Like Sharon, he disapproved of UN Resolutions 242 and 338. He was critical of the supporters of these motions, such as the European Union. The said resolutions stipulated an Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian territories, and this is exactly what Peres tried to avert in 1982. But he does not discuss in how far the expulsion of the PLO from Lebanon serves this territorial interest. He also ignores the nexus between this war in Lebanon and *his* solu-

148 Landau 2015: 195 seq.
149 Shlaim 2000: 412.
150 Peres 1982.

tion of the Palestinian question, at the same time remaining unclear whether he would even support the idea of a Palestinian state in Jordan.

But Peres does clearly express his actual goal: No Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian territories. Even as he has little to offer by way of a concrete suggestion regarding the solution of the Palestinian issue, his concluding sentence does reveal something about the unspoken connection between the war in Lebanon and the Palestinian question:

> The Israeli army has fulfilled the immediate mission of liberating northern Israel from PLO terrorism. The time has now come for great politics: for the liberation of Lebanon from the Gordian knot of its uninvited guests and for the comprehensive solution of the Palestine question, and namely by peaceful means.[151]

Three years after the commencement of the war, the Israeli army partially withdrew from Lebanon. This was pushed through by Prime Minister Peres in early 1985, against the resistance of the *Likud* coalition partner in the cabinet. In the retreat plan presented by Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin, a gradual pullout from the country was provided, wherein a "narrow security zone" in South Lebanon along the Israeli-Lebanese border was to remain under the control of the Israeli army; notably in cooperation with the army of South Lebanon under the command of General Antoine Lahad (1927–2015).[152]

This plan was carried out by June of 1985. The "security zone," as it is called in Israeli parlance – a military occupation from the Lebanese point of view –, *de facto* meant a continuation of the Lebanon War. The Islamic-Lebanese organization Hezbollah, which was founded in the wake of the Israeli invasion and was financially and ideologically supported by Iran, took up a guerrilla war against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanon. After eighteen years of relentless fighting, it managed to force Israel into a so-called "unilateral retreat" from Lebanon. In the year 2000, Prime Minister Ehud Barak (1942–), leader of the Labor Party, followed through with a full withdrawal from the region against vehement protests from the leadership of the Israeli army.[153] Up to this point, skirmishes had been occurring regularly in the "security zone." One of these military missions had been approved in the spring of 1996 by Peres himself during his second term in office as prime minister.

151 Ibid.
152 Shlaim 2000: 427.
153 Pedezur 2006.

The Escalation Potential of the "Security Zone" in South Lebanon

Peres' contribution as prime minister in 1984 to 1986 towards containing the damage created by the Lebanon War led by the *Likud* government is generally viewed as a positive one.[154] However, what is not properly taken into account in this context is that the plan he pushed through in 1985 provided only a *partial* withdrawal. He kept holding on to the "security zone." In 1984, when he was still leader of the opposition, Peres delineated his security-political solution for the ongoing war in the neighboring country in his article "Lebanon – A Different Policy."[155]

Even though according to the article Israeli troops were to withdraw from the greater part of the country, Israel's military dominance was still to be kept up. Peres wanted that "the [Israeli] Air Force continues flying in the sky over Lebanon and the [Israeli] navy keeps patrolling its coasts. The armed forces [of the Israeli allies under the leadership] of Haddad [Major Saad Haddad (1936–1984), predecessor of General Antoine Lahad] shall also be bolstered to protect as a regular force the villages in South Lebanon from the return of the terrorists." Basically, Israel would "regard South Lebanon as flexible territory."[156]

As Peres goes on to explain: "As long as this [region] is free of terrorists, the IDF will not interfere. But if they [the terrorists] entrench themselves there [in South Lebanon], the IDF will [have to] cross the border for a limited time to chase them out." Peres claims that the security of Israel can be guaranteed by his defense strategy, even without "the IDF having to act on foreign territory." In order to clear up any misconceptions, the leader of the Labor Party stressed that the Israeli army was "a defense force, by no means an occupying army," so there would be "no real occupation" in South Lebanon.[157]

Based on this plan of "active defense from outside," the "security zone" was finally firmly established. It would determine Israel's Lebanon policy up until May of 2000. The fighting in the "security zone," led with varying intensity, became routine in the course of the years. But the situation escalated in July of 1993 when Hezbollah combatants killed six Israeli soldiers. The government of the Labor Party under Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin launched a military operation that was put into action on July 25, 1993, under the name of

154 Shlaim 2000: 427–428; Azoulay-Katz 1996: 122–123.
155 *Hadashot*, March 4, 1984.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid.

“Payback.” The IDF, under Chief of General Staff Ehud Barak, bombarded villages in South Lebanon. The goal was to make the inhabitants of the villages flee north and put the Lebanese government under pressure to disarm Hezbollah. By the ceasefire of July 31, 1993, approximately 300,000 South-Lebanese had fled their homes. One hundred and eighteen Lebanese civilians and eight Hezbollah fighters – “more than fifty,” according to Israeli reports – were killed.

On the Israeli side, two civilians and one soldier died as a result of Hezbollah missile strikes on northern Israel. The seven-day clash devastated South Lebanon, until finally American mediators were able to achieve an armistice regulation in which all sides declared they would cease fire. Syria promised to not support Hezbollah and the Palestinian organizations in the event of an attack on Israel.[158] The “security zone” remained in place. The fight between Hezbollah, the South Lebanese and the Israeli army continued, though less intensively.

This hot spot was ultimately the reason for Peres’ operation of 1996. In the spring of that year, shortly before the start of operation “Grapes of Wrath,” Prime Minister Peres declared why the “security zone” in South Lebanon needed to remain:

> There have been attempts [by Hezbollah] to reach the [Israeli-Lebanese] border. Without the security zone, everything that happens over there would happen at the border. After all, many infiltrations have been avoided [through the security zone]. The situation is still tense, but there is no solution for the war [of Hezbollah] which is actually a guerrilla war. This is a war that will continue on unless there is a comprehensive political solution. Lebanon is Israel’s largest field for experimentation in the fight against terrorism. We have tried everything, from an invasion to peace with Lebanon. None of this has worked. The final true remedy is peace.[159]

Peres’ dilemma still stood unsolved. He invoked military strength, which did not really amount to anything, but was somehow still considered vital and thus continued to be used. The circle is almost inescapable. In this case, military strength was demonstrated by occupying South Lebanon while being understood as “defense.” The “security zone” was also part of the defense strategy, which is why the military occupation had to be kept up.

At the same time, this occupation was the reason for Hezbollah to lead a guerrilla war against the IDF. The result was a war of attrition. For Israel, Hezbollah (and for many years also the PLO and later Hamas) was a “terrorist organization.” Negotiations with it remained unimaginable because it was allegedly pursuing

158 Shlaim 2000: 560–561.
159 *Maariv*, April 3, 1996.

the goal of obliterating Israel. Therefore, a political solution was not even on the radar.

What we have here is the logic of perpetual warfare, which is at the heart of Zionist Israel's dilemma. War becomes routine. It took civilian Israeli resistance against the Israeli presence in South Lebanon, the "Four Mothers Movement," to prompt Israel's government to "unilaterally retreat," which occurred only as late as 2000. But the Israeli army continues to stick to the opinion that their withdrawal has tarnished Israel's determent power.[160]

Security and the Policy of Targeted Killings

The operation "Grapes of Wrath" in Lebanon on April 1996 was Israel's reaction to another escalation of violence. On January 6, 1996 the Israeli domestic security service Shin Bet killed the Palestinian Yahya Ayyash (1966–1996). Israel held him responsible for several Hamas suicide attacks in the years 1994 and 1995. At that time, suicide attacks were a new form of fighting against Israel. They were a response of religious-political Palestinian movements Hamas and Islamic Jihad to the massacre of twenty-nine Palestinians at prayer, committed in February of 1994 by the Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein in Hebron. Goldstein's deed had in turn been directed against the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks that had been taken up in late 1993. The massacre itself had all the features of a suicide attack. Goldstein shot blindly into a group of people before he was finally overpowered and beaten to death by survivors of the massacre.

The political scientist Avi Shlaim ascribes the murder of Ayyash to the Chief of Shin Bet Carmi Gilon (1950–) wanting to end his term in office with a "spectacular gesture." It also served to divert attention from the security gaps which his intelligence agency was responsible for and which had allowed the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin to occur on November 4, 1995. Ayyash, who had been hiding in the Gaza Strip, was finally killed on the orders of Peres.[161]

Straightaway Hamas declared Ayyash a martyr. After Ramadan ended, a revenge campaign began which shook Israel in the spring of 1996. In the months of February and March, sixty Israelis were killed and many more injured in Hamas suicide attacks in Jerusalem, Ashkelon and Tel Aviv. In reaction to this, Peres terminated peace talks with the Palestinian Autonomy Authority under the

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160 Pedezur 2006.
161 Shlaim 2000: 556.

leadership of the PLO and ordered the closure of the borders to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Why did Peres give permission to liquidate Ayyash so shortly after the murder of Rabin that the country was still reeling from? Shlaim surmises two motives behind this. For one thing, the Prime Minister had thought of the retaliation as "tough justice." For another, he felt like he was acting "in the service of the morality of the nation and of the security forces."[162] Indeed, at first Ayyash's execution was welcomed enthusiastically in Israel.

But Peres himself told the American journalist Robert Littell (1935–) that the killing was to be understood as a preemptive strike. As he stressed, there was proof that "Ayyash was actively preparing another attack. It wasn't a matter of revenge. The decision to liquidate him prevented this terrorist attack."[163] Peres denies payback as a motive. He maintains that Israel did not do this for reasons of vengeance "although he [Peres] is satisfied that a Jew killer has disappeared."[164]

This understanding nipped any public debate in the bud because the killing of Ayyash was cast as a necessary defense of Israel. Peres did not question this policy. In keeping with his security doctrine of using retaliation as a means of determent, he continued to pursue the liquidation policy of his predecessors as a matter of routine.[165] Despite the spiral of violence and counterviolence that this practice keeps triggering, its security-political benefits remain undisputed to this very day.

But how did Peres not have any scruples to execute Ayyash in view of the upcoming elections and the starting Oslo Peace Process? Obviously "tough justice," the biblical principle of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," and the nationalistic element of the "morality of the nation" and the security apparatuses had priority. Rabin's murder not only created tension within the Shin Bet, but also divided Israeli society. Now a convincing strike against a "clearly identified enemy of Israel" was meant to reunite the Jewish people within the country. After Ayyash's killing, a patriotic mood spread in the entire country, accompanied by a feeling of satisfaction regarding the capabilities of the guardians of the Zionist project. But are wars led by Israel really only for national-state or security-political reasons?

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162 Ibid. 556; Azoulay-Katz 1996: 238.

163 Peres and Littell 1998: 87.

164 Ben-Simon 1997: 216–218.

165 Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin authorized the execution of Islamic Jihad leader Fathi Shikaki. The Mossad carried out this order on October 25, 1995, on the island of Malta.

The Military Operation Grapes of Wrath of April 1996

The suicide attacks in the spring of 1996 shook Peres' government and darkened his prospects of being reelected. US President Bill Clinton (1946–) tried to save the Oslo Peace Process and Peres' government, initiating an antiterrorism summit that took place on March 13, 1996 in Sharm el-Sheikh. But the international summit did not have the desired effect. The prime minister's drop in popularity remained drastic.

Regarding this point, Peres' biographer writes: "Peres still hadn't understood that international conferences had no influence on Israelis; a single military operation against the terrorists would have been much more effective."[166] Did Peres hope to improve his chances for reelection with the military operation in Lebanon? According to Shlaim, Lebanon was a "tempting retaliation target" against the background of the terror wave in Israel so close to the parliamentary elections. After all, the Israeli public was longing for a reprisal.[167] But whether the Israeli public really wanted another military operation in Lebanon has to remain open. As for the security-political elites in the military, government and the media, they were ready to enter what was referred to as "the next round."[168]

The army leadership and some ministers of the cabinet, in particular Foreign Minister Ehud Barak – who had been chief of general staff and the architect of operation "Payback" in July 1993 – advocated another military action against Hezbollah in South Lebanon, given the tensions in the "security zone." Passivity, so went their assessment, would damage Peres' security-political standing. But other voices in the government warned Peres, also with a view to his prospects for being reelected, that "we all [in the Zionist Left] will come to regret a war."[169]

166 Bar-Zohar 2007: 467.

167 Shlaim 2000: 559.

168 Cf. press releases such as: IDF assessment: "Inhabitants of the security zone assisted in the killing of an Israeli soldier by the Hezbollah," *Haaretz*, March 11, 1996; "Rumors of imminent IDF military action in Lebanon," *Haaretz*, March 18, 1996; "Hezbollah announces: Should IDF attack Lebanon, we will bombard settlements in northern Israel with Katyusha rockets," *Haaretz*, March 19, 1996; "Katyusha rockets hit Galilee in reaction to IDF bombardment in which two Lebanese were killed," *Haaretz*, March 31, 1996; "110 terrorist attacks committed against the IDF in South Lebanon since beginning of the year," *Haaretz*, March 17, 1996; Yoel Markus asks: "Is a second Lebanon War imminent?," *Haaretz*, March 19, 1996; Ehud Oshri observes the "Combativeness of TV media," *Haaretz*, April 2, 1996.

169 Ben-Simon 1997: 230.

Peres went ahead with it anyway, authorizing the military operation "Grapes of Wrath." It was supposed to be directed only against Hezbollah fighters.[170] However, the military leadership as well as Foreign Minister Barak pushed for air raids to force the majority of the civilian population of South Lebanon to flee north so that the Israeli army could deal the local Hezbollah a massive blow. Further, it was hoped that the Lebanese refugees would put their government under pressure, and together with Syria it would restrain Hezbollah.[171] The air strikes on South Lebanon, Beirut and the Beqaa Valley began on April 11, 1996. Approximately 400,000 civilians fled the area. Nevertheless, Hezbollah succeeded in firing Katyusha rockets into northern Israel. Some of the Israelis living there were also forced to flee.[172]

Statements Peres made to the press on the eve of the war reveal how the prime minister promoted the escalation of the war by rhetorical means: "Iran smuggles weapons and explosives to Hezbollah through diplomatic mail"[173]; "Syria thinks that it is clever to provoke us. We will not tolerate the escalation in the north."[174] A couple of days before the battle began, Peres publicly pointed out "the IDF intelligence service has new evidence that Iran is about to overthrow the 'peace government' [Peres' government]."[175]

What sort of practical effect did the head of the peace government see in the war? Peres did not enlighten the Israeli public on the specific political goals of the new operation in Lebanon, "in order to avoid high, unattainable aspirations."[176] A long fight might become necessary in order to achieve a sustainable solution, he said. He asked his people for resilience and patience.[177]

The clashes finally ended on April 27, 1996 as a result of American pressure. On the domestic front, the Labor Party, and thus Peres' "peace government," lost the elections; not least because it had failed to take into account the Israeli Palestinian votes it had lost because of the fighting in Lebanon. It was a heavy blow for the Zionist Left, and consequently for the Oslo Peace Process. From a military standpoint, the 1996 operation ended without result. Israel had neither managed

170 Ibid. 231.

171 Shlaim 2000: 560.

172 Ibid. 560; Ben-Simon 1997: 231.

173 *Haaretz*, March 24, 1996.

174 *Haaretz*, March 21, 1996.

175 *Haaretz*, April 8, 1996. On June 8, 1996, just a few days before the fighting began, the inhabitants of northern Israel were called upon to seek shelter in bunkers. Cf. *Haaretz*, June 9, 1996.

176 *Haaretz*, April 14, 1996.

177 *Haaretz*, April 16, 1996.

to consolidate its presence in South Lebanon, nor had it won the support of its inhabitants for such a presence.[178]

Hezbollah had not been crushed and their guerrilla war continued up to the retreat resolution of the Ehud Barak government in 2000. The military criticized this decision as a "major curtailment of the deterrence power" of Israel, and blamed it for the eruption of the "Second Intifada" that same year. There was a crack down on the Palestinians with the goal of regaining the determent objective. On these grounds alone, the military got its way and was authorized to carry out another operation in Lebanon in the summer of 2006, again triggered by an incident with Hezbollah at the northern border.[179]

In late 2008, Barak – this time as the leader of the Labor Party and Minister of Defense in the government of Ehud Olmert who led the *Kadima* party, a party of the center that had been newly formed in 2006 – sent Israeli troops into the Gaza Strip which had been controlled by Hamas since 2006. The other decisive armed encounters in the new century – 2000 to 2004, 2006, and 2008 to 2009 – were likewise the result of decisions made by a "Zionist Left government" in Jerusalem. And as for the clashes of 2012 and 2014 in the Gaza Strip that were led by the *Likud* government, these too had the Zionist Left's unshakable consent.

Conclusion: Of War and Jewish Statehood

How may this perpetual state of war be explained? Why has it been tolerated by Israeli society for so many years, despite the fact that the war policy has proven to be counterproductive over and over again? The answer to this question may be found in the fact that historically Israel has come to presuppose a close connection between military strength and national-state existence. And as a consequence thereof, and especially in the face of the Jewish catastrophe in Europe, an internalized understanding of Zionism as a guarantor of Jewish existence or as the only answer to the so-called "Jewish question" has evolved.

Already in 1948, in the first war over Palestine, the implementation of the Zionist project in *Eretz Israel* proved to be utterly dependent on the operational readiness of the military. A military defeat was equated with the disintegration of the *Yishuv*, while a military victory – as would turn out to be confirmed – with the birth of a national state.

178 Shlaim 2000: 561; Bar-Zohar 2006: 665; Azoulay-Katz 1996: 247.
179 Bar-Josef 2006.

The Jewish state was born out of war. It was thanks to the war of 1948 that Zionism managed to come much closer to achieving its national-state goals than UN Resolution 181 of November 29, 1947 was prepared to allow. Through other wars – particularly that of 1956 – Israel built up its deterrent effect, and it also succeeded in expanding its state territory as a result of the war of 1967. In this sense, war has a positive connotation. It secures Jewish statehood.

But since Israel did not settle the question of its state territory in 1949 but rather was intent on expansion, and also because in 1949 no peace deal but only a temporary ceasefire agreement with the neighbor states could be reached, no solution to the question of Palestine was arrived at and various conflicts continued to ignite. Gaining and keeping territory has turned out to be a central motive of the military operations undertaken over the course of the years. Not only the wars of conquest (1948, 1956 and 1967), but also the less glorious wars of attrition (1967–1970, 1985–2000) as well as the defense wars (such as 1973) were ultimately fought over land.

But the armed encounters of 1956, 1982 and 1996 show how closely the territory is linked to the military task of defense in the Israeli understanding. And defense stands for security, which in turn stands for national-state existence. For this reason security has become a central social code, the "Security Code"[180] represents a way of life to which there is no alternative. In Hebrew, the expression "*Ein-Breira*" (no choice) was popularized as a social code for the necessity of war for the purpose of self-defense.

What the Security Code spells out is this: Security is a guiding principle of the social order. But because security has not yet been achieved and keeps ending up back on the political agenda, the state has no choice but to revert even more resolutely to a war policy with the conviction that it ensures national statehood. This happens with the support of society.

Over time, Israeli militarism has become a taken-for-granted fact. The historical development of Israel's state apparatus, social structures and political culture has unfolded accordingly. The Israeli collective is fixated upon war institutionally (politics, military, society, economy, industry and legal system), as well as mentally and politico-culturally. In dialectic relationship to the notion that war is an integral part of reality in the Middle East, the security doctrine of determent has been established. This became apparent from the formative years on, as the worst-case scenario was constantly invoked. This included the assumption that the Arab neighboring states of Israel are its archenemies. And this in turn gave birth to the conviction that an invincible Israeli military power is a necessity.

180 Kimmerling 2001.

The doctrine of determent was soon framed in terms such as "activistic defense," "preemptive war," "retaliation" and "determent." The "demonstration of strength" was supposed to neutralize the hostile potential of the enemy. If only the military strength of Israel could be made obvious, the feared attacks would be averted. But this doctrine does not only entail perpetual armament. It also means a ceaseless demonstration of military power. As a consequence, non-conventional weapons and disproportionate military operations are likewise legitimized in domestic policy. The deterrent effect cannot be allowed to lessen, even if in parallel peace is being negotiated.

The flipside of such a security doctrine based on determent is the state of panic into which politics, army and society are thrown every time cracks appear in the deterrent effect. Whenever the Israeli army suffers a defeat – even against clearly inferior powers such as Hezbollah or the Palestinian resistance of first the PLO and later also Hamas – the urge to rebuild the deterrence power through the military grows stronger.

To political Israel, deterrence power is equivalent to its military hegemony in the region. This is to be achieved not only through a well-equipped conventional army, but also through the exclusive regional possession of non-conventional weapons. And while Israel is still not admitting to its nuclear capacities, it fully understands that its national state security is closely coupled to being the only nuclear power in the region.

This is why it cannot let its Arab neighbor states, perceived as mortal enemies, ever come into possession of nuclear weapons of mass destruction. Accordingly, so-called preemptive wars also form a part of the security policy where the goal is to prevent the nuclear armament of neighbor states. This became obvious in the case of Iraq in June 1981 and Syria in September 2007, when the Israeli air force destroyed nuclear reactors in these countries. The ongoing debate concerning Iran's nuclear program has also been ranking at the top of Israel's security-political agenda for some years.

The prospect of Iranian nuclear weapons is a source of great concern to Israel, because through the 1980s and 1990s this Islamic republic has become an increasingly important ally of two political-military organizations with Muslim-religious orientations, namely the Palestinian Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah. Both of these have become declared archenemies in these decades from the Israeli point of view. And since Israel accuses Iran as well as Hamas and Hezbollah of having the strategic goal of annihilating Israel, Iran being a nuclear power poses a danger to the Jewish state. It would challenge Israel's hegemonic military position in the region, and in doing so possibly also jeopardize its national-state existence. Or so goes the Israeli fear. Thus, political Israel sees the preclusion of a nuclear Iran as an integral part of its security policy that is based on the security doctrine of determent through Israel's military superiority.

It is obvious that this doctrine entails escalation and keeps intensifying the respective conflicts instead of diffusing them as the determent policy promises. Despite this fact, it has barely lost any of its potency. How does such an overwhelming social consensus on a war policy based on this doctrine come about? An explanation may be found in the already discussed civil militarism. Israeli militarism is a product of the depoliticization of security as it has been practiced from above for many years. The state (and its apparatuses of violence) claims the exclusive power of decision in security matters, thus effectively excluding society, i.e., the public and their representatives in the *Knesset*, from the actual decision process.

De facto it is the executive powers – the security cabinet and the security apparatuses – that make all the decisions regarding security policy. Through the exclusion of society from this entire area, the executive has plenty of room to maneuver. It can stick to a repeatedly failed security policy without really being forced to expose it to scrutiny. This domestic political procedure has been established over the course of the years to become an essential feature of Israel's political culture. In opposition to the strength and autonomy of the state stands a society that is deprived of power as a result of its depoliticization.

The fundament for this depoliticization of security was already laid in the early years of the State of Israel, when Prime Minister and Minister of Defense David Ben-Gurion held enough power and authority to segregate the complex of security policy from political routine and debate. In the formative years, the actual decision process did not take place in the *Knesset* or the *Mapai* party. Instead, a small circle within the Ministry of Defense exclusively decided issues of war and armament. In this way, Ben-Gurion set the course for a political culture of the depoliticization of security. His protégé Peres would later reinforce these structures. While the state strengthened its executive power by relieving it from any obligation to account for its security policy, the new immigrant society was weakened "from above" as this entire field was effectively placed out of its reach.

The first Israeli "war of opportunity" is a good example of the process of the depoliticization of security. In 1956, it was three individuals on the Israeli side who prepared the war against Egypt: David Ben-Gurion, Army Chief Moshe Dayan and Director-General in the Ministry of Defense Shimon Peres. The latter two took a vanguard role in politically paving the way for Ben-Gurion. Neither the *Mapai* party nor the *Knesset* or even the government, not to mention the public, had a say in any of it.

The entire endeavor had to remain strictly secret at the time, not least because the actual backdrop to the war, namely the stabilization of the military alliance with France, would have been difficult to communicate. Even as it was beyond debate to Peres that the war was led in the interest of Israel and that the alliance with France was only necessary during the embargo, he knew how to mask the actual background in order to achieve consensus in Israel.[181]

More importantly, even years later Israeli society was still not informed of the true motive. Therefore, the Sinai-Suez War remained an undisputed necessity, a defense war in the collective awareness. This rendered domestic political debate a moot point. The narrative according to which "the enemies want to annihilate us and we have to defend ourselves," can neither be proven nor refuted. It has, however, been passed on and become firmly institutionalized in an unreflective process carried on over many years.

And so the security question was ideologized and ultimately depoliticized. In this way the concrete circumstances of any war appear to be of secondary importance. They are ultimately blocked out. Accordingly, any serious discussion or effective criticism fails to emerge. The scenario of 1956 repeated itself in 1967, on the eve of the Six-Day War. The war was portrayed as an existence-securing measure as the country was seized by a downright fear of annihilation. Behind the scenes, the decision to go to war was forced on politics by the military.[182] Israel scored a military triumph, which led to victory euphoria. Here, too, any substantial public debate about the reasons, the course, the goals or the devastating politico-demographical and geopolitical results of the war failed to materialize. Settlement of the new territories commenced immediately afterwards.

Another contribution to the depoliticization of war and thus to the consolidation of civil militarism was made by civilian politician Peres in 1982, when he was in the opposition. In the beginning he did not only agree with the government's decision to send the Israeli army into Lebanon, but he also supported the political architect of the Lebanon war by practically smothering any public debate about the aims of the war before it even began. This was again fueled by the conviction that war was a necessity, but it also arose from the fact that disclosing to the public the actual motivation for this bold military operation in the neighboring country was out of the question.

The Lebanon plan ultimately failed, exposing Israel to an even greater threat from the country's northern border. Despite this fact, the war of 1982 was still considered a defensive war by the political-military leadership, and this is why it would continue for eighteen years. Although in 1983 Israeli society actually did come to the point where it forced the resignation of war architect Ariel Sharon

181 Amar-Dahl 2010: 225–250.

182 Golani 2002: 197–203; Segev 2005.

through a state investigation committee, it no less than its political leadership still maintains the view that this war was an act of defense. This is why it would go on to entrust itself to the same security-political leadership for so long afterwards. Shimon Peres and Ariel Sharon would try to keep the Palestinian territories under Israeli control for many more years, before finally making the decision in 2005 to pull out of the Gaza Strip.[183]

The depoliticization of security becomes most apparent in the question of nuclear weapons, where the inception of the Israeli nuclear program was decided to the exclusion of the public and its representatives. The "policy of opacity" carried the day. This policy is not only geared towards keeping the Israeli nuclear program out of international control, but also towards preventing it from being discussed domestically. Peres played a central role in these developments, starting in the mid-1950s with the acquisition of the infrastructure, and leading up to the assertion and ultimately the consolidation of the policy of opacity in the political culture.

This depoliticization of security forms the basis for the civil militarism that has taken such a firm hold in the political culture of the country. The genesis of this political culture is rooted in the disciplining of an immigrant and settler society for the ultimate goal of national statehood, as it is understood by the political-military leadership and enforced by the state. For the sake of its secret warfare, the state secures its own political maneuvering room by reverting to military censorship, emergency laws, the policy of denial and the exertion of control over the military-industrial complex.

All these measures carry an important domestic-political function in effectively stifling public debate of the security question. As things stand, Israeli society is *de facto* all but completely at the mercy of the state when it comes to matters of security. This understanding of state and society has evolved not least because the country's political leadership failed to clarify the question of state territory, leaving it to the military instead. And so the question of Palestine continues to play a decisive role in Israel's quest for peace.

183 Landau 2015: 344 seq.

5 Jewish Statehood and Regional Peace

> The now fifty years of my public life can be divided into two halves. The first half of my work has been dedicated to defense, the second to peace. [...] For me, crossing over from the domain of defense to the domain of peace was like leaving the real world in exchange for an unreal one.[1]

This remark by veteran politician Shimon Peres, made in the late 1990s, provides a telling insight into the political culture of Israel – and, for that matter, into its prospects of ending the century-long conflict over Palestine. Peres succinctly describes the fifty years following Israel's establishment as a balancing act between the conflicting priorities of defense and peace, security and reconciliation. It is in this difficult terrain that he, Peres, had to move and find his bearings throughout his entire political career. War remains indispensable for Israel's existence, but since the state of war is excruciating in the long run, peace needs to be aspired to. However, it is to come about strictly as a consequence of security, and is only feasible after the Jewish state has been secured. In other words, existence as a national state has to precede reconciliation.

But what exactly should this reconciliation look like? This is what Peres had to say with regard to this matter five decades after Israel's establishment and following several years of peace talks with the Palestinians, but still before the final failure of the Oslo Peace Process in October 2000: "Peace is like a dream: It still lingers as I awaken, even if it is only pale and blurred like the dusk, but as the day is dawning and the hours pass, reality gets the upper hand."[2] Is "reality" as it presents itself roughly half a century after the founding of the state not suited for peace in the eyes of Israel's last remaining founding father?

Since the mid-1980s, the bearer of hope for peace and leader of the Israeli Labor Party had been increasingly putting himself out for an initiation of peace talks. And it was his party that popularized the formula of "peace and security" (*Shalom ve-Bitahon*). In numerous speeches over the years, Peres mentioned these two terms in one breath. His voice was increasingly perceived as a call for negotiations to solve the Palestinian question. Up to this point, any such thing had been unimaginable in Israel.

In 1985, Peres, as prime minister in the grand coalition, pushed through the partial withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon against the resistance of most *Likud* cabinet members. This decision was preceded by the peace settlement with

1 Peres 1999: 57, 61.
2 Ibid. 61–62.

DOI 10.1515/ 9783110498806-006,

Egypt in 1979, by which the danger of war in the south was averted for the time being, as well as by the failed attempt of 1982 to solve the Palestinian question by waging war in Lebanon. Peres' policy created a feeling of relief in Israel, which had maneuvered itself into a hopeless war.

The leader of the Labor Party distinguished himself as a responsible, level-headed politician, as the "liberator of the Israeli army from the Lebanese quagmire," and this in spite of the fact that a "security zone" had been created in South Lebanon and a guerrilla war with Hezbollah had ensued there. Peres increasingly positioned himself as a proponent of the peace process. His conciliatory demeanor was in clear contrast to the blockade mentality of the *Likud* that balked at peace talks, given its commitment to the ideology of the "promised land."

Yitzhak Shamir, head of the *Likud* and prime minister in the period from 1986 to 1992, soon turned out to be Peres' main political rival regarding this question. The debates over peace finally led to a split into a Zionist Right and a Zionist Left. Foreign Minister Peres (1986–1988) initiated talks with Jordan's King Hussein with the goal of solving the Palestinian question. But the result, the "London Document" of 1987, was blocked by the *Likud* in the grand coalition and was never ratified.

Finally, in 1990, Peres started working on dissolving the grand coalition in the hopes of being able to form a "small government" together with the party of religious peace advocates *Shas*. The leader of the Zionist Left justified this strategic move in the name of peace: "So far, big decisions could only be made by small governments."[3] The formation of this "peace government" occurred only as late as 1992 under the leadership of the Labor Party. Thus, for the first time in history, Israel had a political constellation that made direct negotiations with the Palestinians possible. The Oslo Peace Process was set in motion by the Zionist Left government only a short time later.

What was this government hoping to achieve in this process? What kind of peace did the Israeli peace camp strive for? And why did the only attempt to solve the conflict over Palestine ultimately fail?

Zionist Left: The Language of Peace

Let us first take a closer look at four catchphrases used by Israeli scholarship to describe the manner in which the Zionist Left conceives of peace: "peace ideology," "imaginary peace," "security myth," and "peace without Arabs." These

3 *Al Hamishmar*, April 9, 1990.

terms were coined as a reaction to the Oslo Peace Process, or the failure of it, as the first serious attempt undertaken by Israel to tackle the Palestinian question by diplomatic means. The reconciliation process of 1993 was considered a political victory of the Zionist Left over the Zionist Right.

Moshe Zuckermann speaks of a "psycho-collective fear of peace" inherent in Israel's political culture. Using the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian talks of 2000 as an example, he shows that while Israel kept evoking the "longing for peace" in an emotionally charged manner, it proved to be utterly unable to realize this aspiration by politically legitimizing peace in its own society. Zuckermann refers to a "peace ideology," i.e., a depoliticized understanding of peace that has been prevalent since the founding era. He observes that there is constant talk of "peace" and the "peace wish," and also of "wanting to live with the neighbors in peace."[4]

Such avowals of peace are also ubiquitous in songs, political rhetoric and Israeli diplomacy, "so that one may speak of a fetishistic relationship to the term of 'peace' and peace ideology." Zuckermann interprets this as a "false consciousness about the actual intent." In terms of collective conceptions as well as the actual policy, in Israel "peace is on everyone's lips, but nobody has ever really put it to the test, that is, shown the willingness to bring it about by paying the necessary price." Even as alternative approaches to the peace question have gained in significance over the years, the depoliticized peace ideology has remained dominant in Israel.[5]

For Zuckermann, the "peace ideology" represents the flipside of the "security question." As he sees it, the "security question" serves as "cement for the conflict-laden society."[6] Over time it has engendered the Israeli-Jewish unit matrix, an undisputed consensus regarding the borders and developments of Israeli society and its political framework.[7] The central function the "security question" or the "security myth" has for the cohesion of Jewish-Israeli society only became fully apparent when its unifying effect seemed to wane, namely at the moment when a deep rift appeared in Israeli society as a result of the peace process with the PLO.

> One does not have to believe that the Israeli-Palestinian political talks initiated in 1993 even needed to bring about actual peace in order to threaten the 'unity' effect which depends on the ideologization of the 'security question.'[8]

4 Zuckermann 2001: 159.
5 Ibid. 142.
6 Zuckermann 2003: 105.
7 Zuckermann 2001: 177–191.
8 Ibid. 186.

This weakening can be seen in the unprecedentedly scathing criticism that was directed by the Israeli Right against the security politician Yitzhak Rabin of all people, who, however hesitantly, dared to tread the path of peace. As a result, he was vilified as a "traitor" and "murderer of Zionism." On the other side, the reaction of the Zionist Left to Rabin's assassination is likewise an indication of the central function of the "security question." Shortly after Rabin's murder on November 4, 1995, it was depoliticized to such an extent that the debate about the deed and its political background shifted to the question of the "split of Israeli society" or the "unity of the Jewish people." According to Zuckermann, this represents an attempt to keep the divergent ethnic, socio-economic, religious and political powers of Israeli society from surfacing.[9]

A similar connection between the ideologization of the security question, Israel's peace [in]ability and the schisms inherent in Israeli society is also discerned by the Israeli sociologist Lev Grinberg (1953–) in his examination of the Oslo Peace Process: *Imagined Peace, Discourse of War*.[10] According to Grinberg, the "myth of security" has an indispensable regulating function for inner-Israeli as well as for Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. He defines the "security myth" as the belief that the new hostile relations with the Arab world are an incarnation of Jewish history, one that is conceived of as a history of suffering and persecution. It is a perception that had already been solidified in the founding period as a consequence of the Holocaust and the "War of Independence" of 1948.

This notion contains the fear that the *Goyim's* intention – in any historical epoch – is the annihilation of the Jews. Accordingly, the ethnic-national army is stylized as a "defensive army" in order to legitimize its use of violence, among other things. As a result of the security myth, the conflict is depoliticized as it is traced back to an unredeemable archenemyship of the "new *Goyim*" towards the Jews:

> The security myth sprang from the sense of being under an existential threat that is deeply rooted in Jewish history, and in particular from the experience of anti-Semitism dominated by the Holocaust, which is why the security myth stands in the way of a debate on Israel's realpolitik situation, including the concrete dangers it involves.[11]

The security myth is not always being accepted without resistance, however. Against the backdrop of the Palestinian uprising from 1987 to 1992, for example,

9 Ibid. 186–187; id. 2003: 105.
10 Grinberg 2007.
11 Ibid. 44–45.

doubts arose in society, politics and the army as to whether the Intifada was really about the annihilation of Israel, and whether it can be kept in check by military means. Such doubts shake the legitimation of military violence and damage the belief in the security myth.

An alternative to the security myth is the myth of "peace and security." This myth is propagated mostly by the Zionist Left in the hopes of escaping the consequence of perpetual warfare as it is contained in the security myth. Pursuant to the myth of peace and security, the occupation of the Palestinian territories of 1967 is only temporary, with these areas merely representing a trump card for future negotiations or a pawn that can be used in exchange for the desired peace.[12]

What makes this declaration of "peace and security" a myth is the fact that championing this combination of peace and security does not keep its proponents within the Zionist Left from politically supporting Jewish settlement in the Palestinian territories, even if only by implication. And this is clearly done out of conviction, since the Zionist Left no less than its opponents pins its politics on the Zionist vision of a Jewish state in *Eretz Israel*.

Grinberg demonstrates in how far this fundament of "peace and security" has posthumously turned out to be a myth. He uses the expression "imagined peace" – included already in the title of his book *Imagined Peace, Discourse of War* – to refer to the tension between peace and security that is contained in said myth. What he means by "imaginary" peace is a depoliticized, ahistorical understanding of peace. Thus, peace is imagined as separate from any concrete political action. On the one hand, a symbolic gesture like the signing of the Declaration of Principles on September 13, 1993 (Oslo I) is enough to spark peace euphoria, as if the peace would arrive by virtue of a ceremony at the White House alone. On the other hand, the Oslo Peace Process is conceptualized in such a way that the core questions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remain untouched for the time being; one first has to focus on building trust with the new Palestinian dialogue partner, after all.

This constellation creates a situation where it becomes possible to cherish the illusion of a continuously approaching peace, since it is now possible to point to ongoing political talks. But at the same time there is no progress whatsoever in the modification of the old political order of military occupation, including the expansion of settlements. Grinberg speaks of a peace discourse in which peace is thought of in abstract terms, without any concrete changes occurring or any real political solutions being discussed.

12 Ibid. 54.

The occupation is deemed to have ended, with the borders of 1967 representing the final state lines. Especially in the constellation of the Oslo Accords, the old occupation practices and the necessity of decolonizing the Palestinian territories are not only allowed to be ignored, but are being even further solidified. In addition, the Zionist Left's discourse of the depoliticized "irreversibility of the peace process," which is conceived of in messianic terms, leads to a shift in the debate. Now it is no longer centered on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that indeed remains to be settled. Instead, it moves from a conflict-laden to a post-conflict-laden agenda. As a result of this shift

> Israelis succeeded in imagining peace, in turning it into an illusion, because they managed to 'disconnect' themselves from what had really happened behind the Green Line [the borders of 1949–1967]. But for three groups it was all but impossible to disconnect and indulge in the illusion of peace: the Palestinians, the [Jewish] settlers and the Israeli army.[13]

Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin speaks of a "principle of separation" as a characteristic feature of the understanding of peace across the entire Zionist-Israeli political spectrum. According to this notion, the separation of the two collectives is the goal of any peace.[14] Based on the traditional perception of the Zionist project as an apolitical utopia, detached of the concrete space and very real people and actual history of Palestine, Raz-Krakotzkin describes the separation principle inherent in the Zionist consciousness also in connection to its understanding of peace. The Zionist vision of peace is based on a separation of the two peoples, which is why Palestinians and their rights are given little attention, even as many Israelis sincerely believe in the end of the occupation. Thus, the categorical elimination of the Palestinians from the Israeli consciousness remains unchanged also in the context of the act of the Oslo Process.[15]

The "principle of separation" certainly becomes apparent in the fact that it was particularly in the Oslo era that the policy of locking down Palestinian territories was reinforced. The passport system, introduced in 1991 for Palestinians living in the occupied territories, signalized the end of a relative freedom of movement for Palestinians on Israeli state territory. Despite some restrictions for security-political reasons, the policy of "economic integration" that had been pursued by Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan from 1967 on at least conceded Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza the fundamental right to freedom

13 Ibid. 339.
14 Raz-Krakotzkin 1998: 59–76.
15 Ibid. 65.

of movement within Israel, mostly for work purposes. In contrast to that, the Oslo Process brought the implementation of the passport system by which the freedom of movement of the Palestinian population was considerably restricted, and became a privilege that was granted on a case-by-case basis by Israel or the Palestinian Autonomy Authority.[16]

Raz-Krakotzkin interprets this lockdown policy as the result of a mindset fixed on separation even in the act of peace. Another consequence of this way of thinking is that neither the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict nor the different political positions were actually discussed in the Oslo Process. In the groundwork of the Oslo Accords (Oslo I and II), the core questions of the historically grown conflicts are indeed excluded from negotiations and ultimately also from public debate. True to the precept that confidence has to be built first, these questions are postponed to a later point in time. But peace can hardly be achieved without revising one's own understanding of it. A change in perception that is indispensable for peace cannot be realized without the reappraisal of the historically developed subject matter of the conflict.[17]

But how is it that this kind of historical consciousness evolved? And what understanding of the conflict or of peace is it based on? How may the collective fear of peace[18] with the Palestinians be explained? And why is it still so hard for Zionist Israel to imagine such a peace even in the second decade of the twenty-first century?

The Young Israel: Jewish Statehood without Peace

After the devastating war of 1948 had come to an end, it became clear to the Israeli leadership that it would be possible to manage peace with the Arab neighbor states only if two complexes of problems could be settled, namely the question of state borders and the problem of Palestinian refugees. But the Israeli leadership excluded any compromise in both of these matters.[19]

For David Ben-Gurion, a political settlement was impossible at this early stage. A statement he gave to the New York Herald Tribune concerning this issue went around the world: "I am prepared to get up in the middle of the night in order to sign a peace agreement – but I am not in a hurry and I can wait ten

16 Hass 2006: 13–34.
17 Raz-Krakotzkin 1998: 66–68.
18 Zimmermann 2010.
19 Shlaim 2000: 49–51.

years. We are under no pressure whatsoever."[20] True to this statement, Ben-Gurion initially opposed peace talks with the Egyptian King Faruq (1920–1965) in September 1948, as well as with the Syrian President Husni Zaim (1894–1949) in the spring of 1949.

According to Avi Shlaim, Ben-Gurion was convinced that Israel's starting position in the negotiations would improve at a later point in time. The time factor played an important role for the father of the nation. Surely, in 1949 he was still in the process of intellectually digesting such enormous demographic and geopolitical changes. Israel's interests as a national state could initially be preserved even without peace. But at the same time, Ben-Gurion makes recourse to the language of the peace ideology, such as for example in a debate of the cabinet on May 29, 1949:

> It is true that these things should not prevent us from accelerating the peace, because the issue of peace between us and the Arabs is important, and it is worth paying a considerable price for it. But when the matter is dragged out – it brings us benefits, as the mufti helped us in the past. […] But in general we need not regret too much that the Arabs refuse to make peace with us.[21]

Likewise, Shimon Peres, Ben-Gurion's right-hand man in the Ministry of Defense for the first decade, hardly knew what to make of the terms "peace" and "reconciliation." Peres' main focus in these years was the armament of the young state. The security myth dominated his view of Arab-Israeli relations. His essay "Reconciliation Does Not Mean Security"[22], published on September 29, 1955, is one of his few early comments on this topic. At this point the political debate between the Ministry of Defense and the Foreign Ministry on war and peace, retaliation and rapprochement had reached a climax. The protagonists of the controversy were Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett (1949–1956). In his short term in office, Sharett, who was also Prime Minister in the period from December 1953 to August 1955, tried to initiate a dialogue with Nasser.

But Israeli-Egyptian relations perceivably deteriorated following Ben-Gurion's return to the Ministry of Defense in February 1955. With the support of Ben-Gurion, Chief of General Staff Moshe Dayan pushed through his aggressive political plans against Prime Minister Sharett. Already on February 28, 1955, the Israeli army in Gaza carried out "Black Arrow"; one of its most devastating

20 Shlaim 2000: 52; quoted from Ben-Gurion's Diary, July 18,1949.

21 Shlaim 2000: 51–52; quoted from the Cabinet Protocol of May 29, 1949.

22 Peres 1965: 16–24 [hereafter: Peres, September 29, 1955].

retaliation operations.[23] Egypt's President Nasser used this occasion to recruit Palestinian refugees from the Gaza Strip, the Fedayeen, which he then deployed against Israeli facilities.[24]

Another consequence of the retaliation operation was the Egyptian-Soviet arms treaty of September 1955, which in turn threw Israel into a state of panic and prompted it to buy arms through France. "Black Arrow" also put an end to the unofficial talks between Nasser and Sharett that had been taken up in early 1954. Although the Lavon Affair of July 1954 and its consequences had already made the continuation of these meetings difficult, it was the Israeli retaliation operation that finally led to Nasser cutting off talks with Sharett.[25]

In these years the Western Powers did not give up in their attempts to bring peace to the Middle East. Two plans, the "Alpha Plan" and the "Johnston Plan," provided some material for discussion. With the Alpha Plan of February 1955, Great Britain and the USA pursued the goal of safeguarding their strategic interests in the Middle East by means of a peace settlement between Israel and its Arab neighbors. The following points were proposed in project "Alpha": The creation of a land bridge between Egypt and Jordan, wherein Israel was to give up two thirds of the Negev – without, however, having to abandon its connection to Eilat; an allocation of the demilitarization zones as they had been stipulated in the armistice agreement of 1949 between Israel and its neighbors; the return of a limited number of Palestinian refugees and the payment of compensations to others; a treaty concerning the distribution of Jordan's water; the lifting of the Arab economic boycott against Israel; and a security guarantee by the West for the new borders. Israel categorically refused.[26]

The objective of the 1955 Johnston Plan – named for Eric Johnston (1896–1963), the personal representative of American President Dwight D. Eisenhower – was to regulate the distribution of the water reserves of the Jordan Basin amongst the states of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Israel based on the model of the "Tennessee Valley Authority." It provided for the development of an irrigation network to the benefit of all states. The project also intended to turn the West Bank into fertile land in order to support the Palestinian refugees that were living there. The Johnston Plan was based on the hope that the regulation of water distribution could create a fundament for solving the border question and thus a reconcilia-

23 Shlaim 2000: 124.
24 Ibid. 128–129.
25 Ibid. 127.
26 Ibid. 146–147.

tion process might be initiated. This is how Shlaim describes the Israeli reaction to the Johnston Plan:

> The attitude of the defense establishment was typically negative and suspicious: it was believed that Johnston's purpose was to look for incriminating evidence against Israel and to curtail its rights. Sharett's attitude was characteristically flexible and constructive. He mastered the water brief as only he knew how to, and he conducted the negotiations himself.[27]

Sharett was hoping to secure several advantages by supporting the plan. He also assumed that a settlement of the water dispute with American support could facilitate further talks with the neighboring Arab states. For one thing, he held the view that the allocation of the water resources, as provided by the plan, was consistent with Israel's requirements. For another thing, considering the limited water resources available to Israel, this project was supposed to give Israel more flexibility with regard to the further development of water plans. As a third aspect, Israeli cooperation would secure greater economic support from the US. And fourthly, the Johnston Plan could serve as a basis for cooperation with the Arab states.

Although the security establishment under Pinchas Lavon had in principal rejected the first draft of the plan of June 1954, Sharett nevertheless finally succeeded in making the plan palatable to the cabinet. In the end, it was the Arab heads of state that rejected the Johnston Plan. According to Shlaim, this was because consenting to it would have meant recognizing Israel.[28] Other interpretations assume that the Arab League turned down the Johnston Plan for the reason that its approach sought to solve the water question and the refugee problem separately.[29] Israel eventually took an ambivalent stance toward the Johnston Plan. It did not openly agree to it but did not explicitly reject it, either.[30]

In the early 1950s, the security establishment and the Foreign Ministry were repeatedly facing each other as political opponents in the vehement quarrel about the Johnston Plan and other security-political questions, such as the border war, the retaliation policy and the arms purchases. This was due to two different points of view regarding the complex political realities after 1949. A year after he had to leave the Foreign Ministry, Sharett reflected on this dispute in his 1957 article

27 Ibid. 109.
28 Ibid. 109–110.
29 Polkehn, http://www.ag-friedensforschung.de/regionen/Palaestina/wasser.html. (Ger.)
30 Shlaim 2000: 110.

"Israel and the Arabs – War and Peace: Reflections on the Years 1947–1957"[31]. He examines the various political camps in Israel; the Israeli security establishment among them:

> One point of view assumes that the language of power is the only thing the Arabs understand. The State of Israel is so small and isolated; it is so weak in the geographical and demographic sense that it has to double its power by conspicuous military operations [namely retaliation policy] in order to preempt the dangers arising from its weakness. Therefore, from time to time, Israel must clearly show the Arabs that it is strong and capable of exercising its power efficiently and relentlessly at all times. If Israel did not do this, it could be razed to the ground. According to this point of view, peace is doubtful and far off anyway. It can only arrive if the Arabs are convinced that the state is invincible. It is more likely that it arrives as a result of the persuasive power of Israeli violence than by virtue of the sincere conviction that Israel truly wishes for peace. As long as the day-to-day security problem has to be solved with violence, peace cannot even be considered. When retributive actions keep fueling hate there is no reason for determent, for the flame is fanned anyway. If we avoided retributive actions to mitigate the fire of hate, we would lose. In addition, if we take the following factors into account – namely the general human tendency to fight back, the particular vulnerability of the Jews that have historically always been considered weak, and the recentness of the great victory of the Israeli army [1948] – we will understand in what kind of atmosphere and in what kind of *zeitgeist* this position has been fostered.[32]

Sharett goes on to contrast this position of the security establishment to "the other stance" towards peace, which he himself shares and according to which

> we have to be incessantly aspiring to peace. This is not only based on a political consideration. It is a decisive security-political consideration in the long-term perspective. We have to understand peace as our basic interest and drastically curb our retaliatory reactions accordingly. After all, the question as to whether retributive acts really solve the security problem still remains open.[33]

As Director-General in the Ministry of Defense, Shimon Peres (1953–1959) held the view of the conflict as it was propagated by the security establishment in the young Israel. Peres' voice may be considered to be representative here. In those years, Peres rarely made any statements about peace, but when he did, it was only to argue that it was utterly impossible for the time being. His 1955 essay entitled "Reconciliation Does Not Mean Security" opens with the words: "Israel's security problem has essentially remained as acute and unique as it was imme-

31 Sharett 1957.
32 Ibid. 8–9.
33 Ibid. 9.

diately after the War of Independence." And he concludes the essay with the following postulation: "Israel's security neither depends on reconciliation with the [Western] world nor on reconciliation with the Arabs. Rather, our security lies in our willingness and ability to defend what we have achieved with much blood."[34]

Two central elements of the security myth are contained herein: Firstly, the text is based on the assumption that the Jews or the State of Israel are exposed to the threat of annihilation. While the "Western World" is accused of willfully jeopardizing Israel's interests for the sake of "Arab demands" and is therefore met with suspicion. Secondly, it bears witness to the conviction that, true to the maxim that "the world is against us," Israel can only rely on itself. According to this understanding reconciliation is impossible, with negotiations with the Arab world – regardless of whether they are carried out with the help of the Western Powers or not – not really being conducive to the Israeli "willingness and ability" to protect itself. At the time he authored this text, Peres was worried more about the Great Western Powers than his Arab neighbors:

> The demands [made by the Great Powers] for [Arab-Israeli] reconciliation overlook the fact that only one side is responsible for the conflict. By directing the demand at Israel and the Arab states, the distorted impression is created that the enthusiasm for peace (or lack thereof) exists on both sides alike. But any unbiased party can clearly see that the factors of tension in the Middle East are these: the arms buildup by the Arabs for a targeted 'second round' [another regional war]; organized as well as sporadic intrusion [of Palestinian refugees into the Israeli state territory]; blockade of sea routes [for Israeli ships] in Suez and Eilat; frustration of the development of Israeli water sources; [Arab] economic boycott against the State of Israel; and the non-recognition of Israel's state borders [the armistice borders of 1949]. If the Great Powers actually tried removing these factors of tension, Israel's position would doubtlessly be as follows: Israel would be willing to avoid a 'second round' [sic]; Israel would open its sea routes and ports [to Arab states]; Israel would commit to refraining from imposing economic boycotts against Arab states; Israel would take responsibility to make sure that Israeli infiltrators [sic] do not intrude into Arab states; Israel would be willing to recognize the state borders [of the Arab states]; and finally, Israel would also be willing to help solve the question of Arab refugees and take up diplomatic relations with the Arabs. But strangely, these demands are not made. This is because peace is not the main goal. Rather, placating the Arabs seems to be the actual objective of these demands for contentment.[35]

Peres rejects demands for reconciliation because in his view any kind of compromise would endanger the demographic and geopolitical achievements of 1948. In addition, he sees the Arab opponents as the only party responsible for the con-

34 Peres, September 29, 1955: 16, 24.
35 Ibid. 17–18.

flict. Entirely in accordance with the security myth, he ascribes the antagonism to ahistorical aversions of the Arab world, and even the world in general, against the Jews. In this way the conflict is separated from its historic and political context. It is described as a result of ultimate hostility, dismissing the political and historical developments of 1948. For Peres, it is Israel that is the victim in this situation, which is why concessions are excluded. Peace is only possible if the ill will towards Israel is laid to rest. But an end to this enmity is simply unimaginable for the security-political leadership in the mid-1950s. And within the logical system of the security myth, this legitimizes the taking up of arms.

This attempt to paint Israel as being some sort of military giant in the fragile situation of 1955 ends up casting some light on the actual powerlessness of Israel in its state of isolation. It has to live in the constant fear of a peace dictated by the Great Powers. So now the language of peace ideology is invoked to create a domestic consensus in order to avoid any compromises as outlined in the Alpha Plan. The actual problems of borders, territory, refugees and water are not approached. It can hardly be a coincidence that neither the Alpha Plan nor the Johnston Water Plan is mentioned. Rather, the question of guilt is brought to the foreground: Who is responsible for the factors of tension? Who is striving for another war? Who is boycotting whom? Who refuses to recognize whom? Peres' rendering of the conflict relies on blocking out all the complications that have led to the political development in Israel since 1948. In 1955, the country is described as an undisputed political entity that has always been in existence:

> In a conciliatory world [with regard to the endeavors of the Great Powers to achieve peace in the region] Israel is in a strange situation: The point is not only that the [Western] world does not demand that Israel's neighbors remove the obstacles on the way to peace; the Great Powers actually contribute to piling these obstacles even higher. For by supplying the Arabs with weapons, their target being none other than Israel, they inevitably encourage the Arabs to pursue a policy of non-peace. Therefore, Israel is unable to take the path it wishes to take, namely the path of peace. For the demands for reconciliation [made by the Great Powers towards Israel] are aimed more at being liked by the Arabs than at peace.[36]

Here, the security myth, which presumes that the world as such is a source of danger for Jews, meets the peace ideology, according to which Israel is longing for peace despite all political and historical realities. At the same time Israel fears peace, for it also means having to compromise. Peres had a difficult time considering territorial concessions throughout his career. Especially in the 1950s, giving up any territory was taboo. To the contrary, the security establishment openly

36 Ibid. 19.

talked about expanding the state territory even further. For Peres, peace almost amounts to capitulation on the part of Israel:

> In this way [through the willingness to compromise], an absurd situation is created in which, on the one hand, the spirit of reconciliation strengthens the will of one side [the Arabs] as it strives for war; on the other hand, it intensifies the appeals for peace directed towards Israel, which come across more like conditions such as are usually imposed on the defeated side in a war.[37]

Thus, the "spirit of reconciliation" is treacherous because it may cause Israel to lose what it has gained in 1948 at great sacrifice. Israeli sovereignty remains the first priority: "[…] the entire Negev is part of the state territory of Israel, and nothing […] can bring the Israeli military to restrict its freedom of movement in its own state."[38] By this route, Peres arrives at his main hypothesis that reconciliation cannot lead to security:

> This situation forces us to return to the starting point, namely Israel's security: We should count out the illusionary notion that outside parties or certain situations in the greater world [historical constellations] will ever be the saving anchor for Israel. Instead, relying on our own power is and will remain our realpolitik security policy.[39]

Not peace, but the Israeli military is needed. Peres makes no secret of his resentment of the peace initiatives by the West and the United Nations here. Especially the ceasefire of 1949 that is controlled by the UN is a thorn in the side of the security establishment, as the treaties between Israel and its neighboring states stipulate that UN observers have to be present at the contested borders as mediators.

Peres' standpoint is that observers should keep out of the Arab-Israeli relations, since the armistice agreements did not actually result in the conclusion of peace as it was originally foreseen. He shares the position of army commander Moshe Dayan who openly demands that more freedom of action be given to the Israeli military at the borders, and he acts accordingly. "The ceasefire regulation," says Peres, "involves a danger for Israel's sovereignty." After all:

> The UN resolved the free passage in the Suez Canal [for Israeli ships], but this is not observed by Egypt. The UN resolved the release of the four Israeli soldiers [who were arrested during an act of espionage in Syria]. This, too, is not observed by Syria. But the UN observers create the impression as if there was no difference between the attackers and the attacked. More

37 Ibid. 19.
38 Ibid. 20.
39 Ibid. 19.

> than reinforcing the spirit of peace by virtue of their mere presence in the region, they actually become a burden of a special kind and a big political problem for Israel's security.[40]

Peres argues that UN observers are "not too worried if a couple of Jews should die, they are more concerned about Nasser's regime." Once again Peres reaches the conclusion: "The reinforcement of our [military] power is an absolute, by no means relative matter."[41] The bottom line is that thinking about peace creates discontent. It remains a foreign, hazardous terrain that it is better to stay clear of. The hypothesis that peace is impossible to realize although Israel is longing for it is also held up by Peres in his 1965 article entitled "Disarmament and Peace."[42] About nuclear weapons he offers the following thought:

> The actual question is not what we want – nuclear disarmament or armament. Rather, the real question is what is possible and realistic for us. If we talk about 'what we want' it is quite clear that all of us in Israel want disarmament of nuclear as well as conventional weapons. We do not only want conventional disarmament, but also the elimination of the horrible hostility. In short, we want peace. But the situation is completely different once we leave the area of academic language and turn to the complicated reality in which a very real [political] choice has to be made.[43]

The text is informed by the rhetoric of the peace ideology. The longing for peace is never questioned, even presupposed as a self-evident fact. Nevertheless, Peres is still not able to imagine peace even in 1965, all too unrealizable as it seems in the face of the political reality. The main reason for peace remaining out of reach is the assumption that Israel has no dialogue partner in the Arab world. Peres still holds this position in 1970, even after the territorial victory of 1967 with its great geopolitical significance:

> The Six Day War brought an acute relevance to the subject of the relations with the Arabs: how to translate military victory into the language of normal, logical and peaceful co-existence. I have long taken the view that any realistic appraisal of the prospects must take primary account of the relationship and not of the phrasing of formulae. What is really required to reach a peaceful settlement is not a *road* to peace. There have been frequent suggestions in the past about 'roads' and 'paths' to peace, but they have remained deserted routes, with none to ply them.

40 Ibid. 19.
41 Ibid. 20.
42 Peres 1965: 129–134.
43 Ibid. 129.

> If there were really anyone among the Arab States prepared to make peace, this very fact itself would pave the way to peace. The countries beyond our cease-fire lines – and cease-fire is all we have; there is not even armistice – refuse even to talk about, let alone act towards, a settlement by peaceful means.[44]

Furthermore, Peres asserts that even if there were a potential dialogue partner in an Arab state, they would hardly be able to politically enforce peace given the instability of the Arab world. As he sees it, Jordan's King Hussein is too weak, barely being in a position to represent his own population, and is met with distrust in the Arab world.[45] And as for Egypt, it is unlikely to make peace with Israel "even though the great need for peace is blatant for Egypt as well as for Israel."[46] In Peres' assessment, Nasser is not able to bring about peace "even if Israel gave back the entire territory. Because it is not territory, but prestige that Nasser has lost and is trying to regain."[47]

Whether Peres' arguments were brought forward for purely tactical reasons with a view to excluding negotiations, or whether he was sincerely firmly convinced there was no credible, peace-desiring dialogue partner on the Arab side, we cannot know. But what is important here is that three years after the historically decisive war of conquest of 1967, the debate is shifted away from the central point of conflict, namely the territory, to the question of a dialogue partner. The claim that there is no such partner becomes one of Israel's important standard formulas over the course of the years. Thus, a political solution seems impossible. What is applied here by Peres is a "discourse of separated contemplation." He disconnects interrelated facts to better fit them into his line of reasoning. As he postulates, for Nasser it is not really about the territory, i.e., the Sinai Peninsula that had been seized by Israel, but merely about his loss of prestige.

Peace Treaty with Egypt 1978–1979: Peace Work of the Zionist Right

The Sinai Peninsula turned out to be the price Israel had to pay for their first peace treaty with an Arab state. It was concluded by Israel after the *Mapai* – later the Labor Party – had ceded the government to the *Likud* in May of 1977 after three decades in power. It was none other than the newly elected Prime Minister

44 Peres 1970: 258.
45 Peres 1970: 259. (Hebr.)
46 Ibid. 218.
47 Ibid. 218.

Menachem Begin, the leader of the *Likud* party and open proponent of the myth of the "promised land," who ended up signing the first peace treaty with an Arab state in which Israel gave up part of the occupied territories.

Shortly after he assumed office, Begin let American President Jimmy Carter (1924–) know that he was willing to take up peace talks with the Arab neighboring states, and especially with Egypt. In the course of the negotiations that ensued, Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat even visited Jerusalem on November 19, 1977, a step that was interpreted as a hopeful sign everywhere. The following summit at Camp David (September 5–17, 1978) finally concluded with the signing of the "Camp David Accords" in a celebratory ceremony at the White House. *The Framework for Peace in the Middle East* includes the following points: Firstly, "a process for Palestinian self-government in the West Bank and Gaza"; secondly, "a framework for the conclusion of a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel"; and thirdly, "a similar framework for peace treaties between Israel and its other neighbours."[48]

As a first step, Egypt, Israel, Jordan and representatives of the Palestinians were to jointly solve the Palestinian problem in all its aspects. An agreement was to be negotiated in three phases. Initially, it was provided that the conflict parties conclude an agreement about a freely elected Palestinian self-regulatory body in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and about its competences. Then, a transitional period was to begin in which Israel was to withdraw from the Palestinian territories and terminate its local military government and civil administration. Security zones for Israel, the geographical extent of which was still unclear, were to be created. Lastly, in a third phase, the final settlement was to be reached. "The solution from the negotiations must also recognize the legitimate right of the Palestinian peoples and their just requirements."[49]

As a second step, to be carried out within three months of the signing of the Camp David Accords, Israel and Egypt were to negotiate a peace treaty, to be implemented within two to three years. The treaty was to contain the following items: Withdrawal of Israel from the Sinai Peninsula which had been seized in 1967; recognition of Egyptian sovereignty over this territory by Israel; demilitarization of the Sinai Peninsula; deployment of UN troops for the purpose of guaranteeing demilitarization as well as freedom of navigation [for Israel] in the Gulf of Suez, the Suez Canal, the Gulf of Aqaba and the Strait of Tiran; and finally, the peace agreement was to normalize relations between Israel and Egypt.[50]

48 http://www.britannica.com/event/Camp-David-Accords.
49 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camp_David_Accords.
50 Shlaim 2000: 375.

The peace treaty became effective in March 1979, with the main point of conflict in the negotiations being the Palestinian question. The Egyptian president sought to attach the settlement of this problem to the conclusion of peace with Israel, as provided in the Camp David Accords. In this way, Sadat also wanted to avoid putting Egypt's position in the Arab world at risk. In contrast, for Israel's prime minister the primarily goal was to conclude a separate peace treaty with Egypt, which Israel considered to be the most dangerous Arab state. Begin prevailed, and the Palestinian question remained left out.

The peace agreement between Israel and Egypt stipulated that Israel retreat to beyond the internationally recognized southern border, so that Egypt could regain its sovereignty over the Sinai Peninsula. Diplomatic relations between the two states were to be taken up as soon as the first phase of withdrawal of Israeli troops was concluded. Further items concerned the regulation of security in Sinai, stationing of UN troops and navigation, among other things. In an accompanying memorandum, Israel was warranted oil supplies for the next fifteen years by Egypt, and also American support in the event of a breach of contract on Egypt's part. Moreover, Israel was to receive military and economic help from the USA. After the Israeli cabinet had agreed to the peace treaty, the *Knesset* ratified it in a twenty-eight-hour session on March 22, 1979, with ninety-five yeas and eighteen nays. On March 26, 1979, the first peace agreement between Israel and an Arab state was solemnly signed at the White House and even implemented for the most part over the course of the years 1979 and 1980.[51]

Egypt met with harsh criticism in the Arab world for its solo action with Israel, however, and was excluded from the Arab League. Although Begin and Sadat had committed to the American president to also take up negotiations concerning Palestinian autonomy – as stipulated in the Camp David Accords, as a part of the negotiations following their agreement – Begin was extremely reluctant. According to Shlaim, the prime minister was not interested in successful talks regarding Palestine. In keeping with the myth of the "promised land," he sought to maintain Israeli sovereignty in the Palestinian territories – meaning Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip – even after the provided five-year transitional period.[52]

As it became obvious that Begin was not seeking any further negotiations, Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan and Minister of Defense Ezer Weizmann (1924–2005) resigned. Subsequently, Yitzhak Shamir became foreign minister, while Begin himself took over the defense department. After his re-election in June

51 Shlaim 2000: 380–381.
52 Ibid. 381–382.

1981, Begin appointed the former General Ariel Sharon as Minister of Defense. With these two people at the top of Israel's government, he formulated his plans regarding the question of Palestine.[53]

In giving up Sinai, however, Begin had reached the limits of his capacities for compromise. To relinquish Jewish sovereignty in parts of *Eretz Israel* was completely out of the question for Israel in the 1980s. After a failed attempt by the new Minister of Defense to create a new order in the Middle East and to solve the Palestinian problem by engaging in a war in Lebanon in June 1982, already Begin resigned by September 1983. This meant the end of his political career.

Nevertheless, Begin went down in history as the first Israeli politician who dared aspire to an agreement based on abandoning a claim to territories, and finally accomplishing a conclusion of peace that was even realized for the most part. The once notorious leader of the underground militia *Etzel*, a national military organization known for its terrorist operations in the founding years of Israel, was in the opposition for almost three decades. Until shortly after his electoral victory in 1977 he successfully concluded a historic peace treaty, and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize together with Sadat.

The Oslo Peace Process 1993–1996: Peace Work of the Zionist Left

As is well known, the Syrian and Lebanese fronts as well as the inner front of the Palestinian question remained on Israel's domestic and security-policy agenda even years after the peace agreement with Egypt. What was happening on these fronts in the course of the 1980s can hardly be called a reconciliation process. There was the 1982 attempt to solve the Palestinian question by waging war in Lebanon, the ensuing eighteen years of Israeli presence in the "security zone" in South Lebanon, the Jewish settlement of the Palestinian territories and Syrian Golan Heights conquered in 1967, and finally the Palestinian uprising of 1987 to 1992. All of this contributed to an extremely volatile relationship between Israel and its neighbors.

During this period Israel was ruled by a *Likud* cabinet (1977–1984; 1990–1992) and a grand coalition (1984–1990). Then in 1992, the Zionist Left came back into power. This government of the Labor Party, again headed by Yitzhak Rabin (as prime minister and minister of defense) and Shimon Peres (as foreign minister), made an attempt to achieve regional peace. To be mentioned in this context are

53 Ibid. 382–383.

the Madrid Peace Conference, forced on the *Likud* government by the Americans in 1991, and also the Israeli-Palestinian breakthrough in the Oslo Peace Process of 1993. In 1994, the Israeli government succeeded in concluding peace with Jordan. And over the course of 1995 there was promising progress in Syrian-Israeli negotiations, which, however, suffered a severe setback with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995, and ultimately failed.

The 1990s are often called an "optimistic peace decade" in the Arab-Israeli conflict. For the first time in its history Zionist Israel dared tackle the Palestine question by political means. This made it look like the longed-for normalization of Arab-Israeli relations was within reach. Although the rights of the Palestinian people were recognized pursuant to the 1978 Camp David Accords – with this agreement also providing the establishment of Palestinian autonomy – the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations about this very topic had ended without result in the beginning of the 1980s when the question of sovereignty over the Palestinian territories could not be agreed on.[54]

Was the autonomy to apply only to the people or also to the land, the territory on which they live? This was a decisive question for the Oslo Peace Process. In Begin's autonomy plan, this issue was approached as follows: "Israel stands by its right and its claim of sovereignty over Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District. In the knowledge that other claims exist, it proposes, for the sake of the agreement and the peace, that the question of sovereignty in these areas be left open."[55]

This meant maintaining the status quo of military occupation in the Palestinian territories as had existed since 1967. The Zionist Right as well as the Zionist Left, within the framework of the grand coalition of the 1980s, both massively supported Jewish colonialization of these territories for historical-religious (the myth of the promised land or the myth of *Eretz Israel*) as well as for security-policy reasons (the security myth or the myth of defendable lines). Retaining their military dominance over the entire country was absolutely essential to both political camps of Israel when it came to negotiating the Palestinian question. After all, it is inseparably linked to the other core questions of the conflict: the Israeli state territory, settlements, water, Jerusalem and the question of return for the Palestinian refugees. Political Israel of the 1980s was not willing to discuss any of these questions.

Two different state myths provided the basis for the respective positions of the opposing camps: the "myth of the promised land" for the Zionist Right or Religious Zionism, and the "security myth" for the Zionist Left. While the first myth

54 Grinberg 2007: 50.
55 Shlaim 2000: 365.

barely leaves any political negotiating range since it rules out giving up any territories in *Eretz Israel*, the "myth of security" does not completely exclude peace negotiations as long as security remains guaranteed. Thus, in the course of the 1980s, the "myth of peace and security" (*Shalom ve-Bitahon*) was successfully cultivated as an alternative for the Zionist Left camp under Peres' leadership. And so the Labor Party, together with the other Zionist Left civil rights parties *Meretz and Shinui,* evolved to become "the peace camp."

And yet, not only was the first Arab-Israeli peace treaty obtained by a right-wing government – at an inopportune time for the Zionist Left, namely shortly after the historic transition of power in 1977 –, but it was also concluded at the price of the *entire* occupied Egyptian territory. This clear conclusion – the entire territory in exchange for a peace settlement – ran counter to the Zionist Left's myth of "peace and security" since, at a single stroke, it surrendered the "trump card" that is part of this myth, namely the territories won in the war. Many Israelis saw this loss as an endangerment of security because the returned territories did not only serve as territorial resources for the settlement project, but also as "lines of defense."

The negotiation tactics inspired by the myth of "peace and security," which the Oslo Peace Concept was based on, was that of "small steps." Although this left some room to take up negotiations, the political goals remained unvoiced, and ultimately were left to the respective *power* relationships of the negotiating parties. Peres' peace efforts at the end of the 1980s, undertaken within the framework of the grand coalition and vigorously obstructed by the *Likud* coalition partner, may offer an in-depth look into the understanding of "peace and security" as the Zionist Left upheld it.

In April 1987, secret talks took place in London between Foreign Minister Peres and Jordan's King Hussein. Peres sought to realize his own ideas of peace under the terms of the "Jordan Option." The negotiated "London Document" essentially provided that a peace process would be set in motion under international auspices. It contained the following items: Firstly, the UN secretary general was to appeal to the five permanent members of the Security Council and the parties involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict to negotiate a settlement based on the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, and namely "with the object of bringing a comprehensive peace to the area, security to its states, and to respond to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people."[56]

Secondly, the London Paper provided that the respective conflict parties be invited to form bilateral groups in this conference in order to lead the negotia-

56 Shlaim 2000: 444–445.

tions. The third part contained the agreement that, firstly, no solution and no veto may be imposed on the parties from outside this negotiation network; secondly, that the negotiations were to be lead in the bilateral groups; thirdly, that the Palestinian question was to be addressed in talks between a Jordanian-Palestinian and an Israeli Delegation; fourthly, that the Palestinian representatives be allowed to participate as a part of the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation; fifthly, that participation in the conference required the acceptance of the UN Security Resolutions 242 and 338 and also the rejection of violence and terrorism; sixthly, that each multilateral group was to negotiate independently; and finally, the London Document stressed the multilateral character of this power-neutralized international conference. Other matters were to be determined within the framework of an agreement between Jordan and Israel.[57]

The London Paper was based on the Jordanian Option insofar as the Palestinian Option, meaning the creation of a Palestinian state and the recognition of the PLO as a dialogue partner, was categorically excluded. Instead, the Palestinian question was to be treated exclusively in connection with Jordan. Another peculiarity was that although the framework for the conference was provided by an international sponsorship, the UN was not allowed to influence the negotiations or their results when it came to their specific content, with the regulations having to be worked out in bilateral negotiations between the respective delegations.

As for content, the London Document made barely any statements about the core points of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These, too, were to be clarified in bilateral negotiations. What prospects the London Document might have had, had its realization not been frustrated by the coalition partner *Likud*, we can only speculate. Peres exhibited extreme indignation towards his political rivals who stood in the way of his peace mission of 1987. He was firmly convinced that his initiative would have had realistic chances of success, had it been implemented.[58]

But history did grant Israel's Zionist Left another opportunity. Since the change of government in June 1992, Peres was once more in a position to influence the political process, namely as foreign minister in the so-called "Second Rabin Government." At that time the bilateral talks conducted in Washington in 1991 between the Israeli and the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation within the context of the Madrid Conference quickly turned out to be fruitless. The differences between the parties on the autonomy question remained unbridgeable. While the Palestinians wanted to negotiate based on a Palestinian state, the Israelis cleaved

57 Ibid.
58 Peres 1995: 385. (Ger.)

to a vague concept of interim agreements with the goal of maintaining their military dominance in the Palestinian territories.[59]

The futility of the Washington talks gradually increased public pressure on the new prime minister to make good on his pre-election promises of peace. Ultimately, the Israeli leadership under Rabin, Peres and Vice Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin (1948–) made the historic decision to take up direct negotiations with the PLO, which had always been considered a terrorist organization. This made the breakthrough possible.

The "Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements," also called Oslo I, which was signed by Israel and the PLO on September 13, 1993, was pre-eminently a mutual recognition of the rights of both peoples, a declaration of intent for the cessation of the conflict and for a historic reconciliation, and thus for a life in peace, dignity and security. In addition, the creation of a Palestinian Authority (PA), which was to be appointed in free elections and was to gradually take over the tasks of Israeli civil and military administration, was provided by Oslo I within the period of five years. For this purpose, this new authority was also to negotiate with Israel about permanent solutions based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338. This included core questions that had been excluded from the declaration of principles for the time being, such as the borders, Jerusalem, refugees, settlements and security regulations.

According to Oslo I, the negotiations about permanent regulations, which were to be brought into force five years after Oslo I, were to be taken up as early as December 3, 1995. The declaration of principles defined the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as a territorial unit over which the PA was to be given responsibility, with the exception of matters regarding security regulations and foreign affairs, which were to be Israel's domain. Israel was directed to withdraw its troops from Gaza and Jericho, namely as part of a treaty that was to be signed by December 13, 1993 and implemented by April 13, 1994. Provided within nine months of Oslo I – in July 1994 – were free elections for a legislative council in Gaza and the West Bank. They were to take place under international supervision and with the help of the Palestinian police.[60]

The "Agreement on the Autonomy of the West Bank," also referred to as Oslo II, was signed on September 28, 1995. Oslo II marked the conclusion of the first phase of negotiations between Israel and the PLO. The agreement foresaw, among other things, the election of a Palestinian council and transfer of legislative authority to

59 Ibid. 509.

60 Grinberg 2007: 78; Shlaim 2000: 516–517.

the same, the retreat of the Israeli army from "the Palestinian centers" and the division of the West Bank into three control categories A, B and C.

Category A comprised the Palestinian cities and small towns that were in the judicial district of the Palestinian Autonomy. Category B referred to the Palestinian villages and sparsely populated areas of the West Bank considered non-military judicial districts, with security control remaining with the Israeli army. Category C covered the rest of the West Bank and included the land seized by Israel that was designated for Jewish settlements and roads. Zone A comprised four percent and Zone B twenty-five percent of the West Bank. In the Gaza Strip, Israel would keep more than thirty-five percent of the land for settlement purposes, military bases and road construction.[61]

Oslo II also passed only by a narrow majority of sixty-one to fifty-nine votes in the *Knesset* on October 5, 1995. The Oslo Peace Process aroused massive protests from the Zionist Right and national-religious opposition against the Labor Party government. On November 4, 1995, an extremist named Yigal Amir murdered Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The sociologist Lev Grinberg points out three processes that were at work in Israeli society, taking place in the military, the economic and the political areas, which contributed to the Oslo Peace Process. The backdrop to this was particularly the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation order that had been persisting since late 1987. The Intifada made discontent within the Israeli military leadership grow, as they were being faced with the frustrating task of smashing Palestinian resistance. The security policy elite gradually recognized the necessity of a political change. Grinberg interprets a statement made by Chief of General Staff Dan Shomron (1937–2008), to the effect that there is no military solution for the Intifada, as shaking up the constitutive security myth.

Shomron's insight increasingly undermined the legitimation for deployment of the military against the Palestinian uprising. The security myth lost persuasive power in the sense that its basis – the fight and victory of the Jewish side as a precondition for the existence as a national state – was weakened. It was the military in its function as an important political security authority, says Grinberg, which signalized to the political level that a political process was indeed a legitimate approach. As Grinberg argues further, the former General and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin did in fact fear the army would be worn out by having to perform policing tasks related to the occupation.[62]

61 Shlaim 2000: 528–529.

62 Grinberg 2007: 54.

Apart from the security-political motive, Grinberg identifies the economic elite as another driving force for a reconciliation process. As the Intifada was turning out to be an economic burden, the ideal scenario of a Palestinian market as a source of cheap labor, well-controlled by Israel and aligned to the benefit of its economy, and at the same time as a controlled importer of goods, failed to materialize. With the transformation of international politics, the business elites of Israel turned their attention to globalization processes. Eager to unlock global markets, including those of the Middle East, to Israeli economy with its neoliberal orientation, the economic sector urged politics to solve the local conflict. In Shimon Peres, Grinberg discerns the political sponsor of this line of thought.[63]

Furthermore, Grinberg describes a party-political process initiated in the early 1990s by which hopes for a reconciliation process with the Palestinians were fueled. He speaks of a democratization or renewal process within the Israeli Labor Party, which was an important mass party at that time. The party members got more say in the selection of their representatives, with primary elections taking place for the first time. Moreover, politically relevant content was included into the party program. Under the slogan "Change in National Priorities," the focus of national interest was to be shifted away from the settlement of occupied territories, which had been massively sponsored during the 1980s, to social policy in the core country of Israel. In general, after fifteen years under the leadership of Peres, a new language and a new image for a new era seemed to be called for.

Grinberg interprets this democratization process as a first signal that the Labor Party was turning away from the "old-style" paralyzing left-right debate of the national myths. Now more emphasis was placed on addressing "normal" everyday political issues faced by the average Israeli. The electoral campaign of 1992, in which Yitzhak Rabin challenged the old Prime Minister and *Likud* leader Yitzhak Shamir, was conducted under the banner of these changed priorities. In this political constellation, Grinberg also sees a political alternative to the maintenance of Israeli dominance over the occupied territories.[64]

But the question still remains whether the same leading personalities of the 1970s and 1980s, i.e., Rabin and Peres, who have decisively shaped the Israeli political order with regard to security as well as settlement policy, were actually able to point to a real alternative. Was the Israeli Zionist Left of the 1990s really capable of ending the conflict over Palestine?

63 Ibid. 56.
64 Ibid. 57–59.

The Oslo Peace Process: The Palestinian Option

In the Oslo Peace Process, Baruch Kimmerling detects a connection between the "routinization of war and conflict" as it is reinforced in Israeli society and the ideological-religious motivation of maintaining dominance over the Palestinian territories:

> In the course of the state's crystallization, Israeli immigrant settlers developed war- and conflict-oriented as well as compromise-oriented values and groups, with their accompanying rhetoric. Owing to the routinization of war and conflict, however, an all-embracing militaristic metacultural code developed to blur the distinctions between peace and war, and between rational military and ideological religious 'reasons' for keeping the occupied territories. The first 'peace in exchange for territory' agreement with Egypt was made in order to increase control over the components of *Eretz Israel* dubbed 'Judea and Samaria' and was immediately followed by the 1982 war in Lebanon, fought for the same reason. The Oslo Accords with the Palestinians were agreed to by Israel primarily in order to shed responsibility for densely Arab-populated areas by establishing indirect control using Arafat's Palestinian Authority as subcontractor, but without giving up 'overall security responsibility' for any part of *Eretz Israel*. This came about only after political and military elites had reached the conclusion that there was no acceptable military solution to the Palestinian problem (not all Israeli Jews were, however, in agreement). The making of *de facto* peace with the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan was aimed at weakening Palestinian political and military strength.[65]

Kimmerling explains the motives for the Oslo Peace Process as follows:

> The existential anxiety built into Israeli collective identity and collective memory simultaneously fuels civilian militarism and reinforces 'military militarism' and the military-cultural complex, creating a vicious circle that always leads to self-fulfilling 'worst case' prophecies. Even the main motives for peace-making are driven either by xenophobic feelings of separateness or instrumental manipulation of improved control over 'the other side' and preservation of 'our' ultimate military might.[66]

The recognition of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people was a watershed in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Up until 1993, Israel and the PLO were at war. In Israel's eyes the "Palestine Liberation Organization" was nothing more than a terrorist organization pursuing the goal of dissolving the Jewish state. The announcement of the PLO, founded in 1964, that they would free the whole of Palestine – meaning the entire state territory under Israeli

65 Kimmerling 2001: 227–228.
66 Ibid. 228.

supremacy – can hardly be reconciled with the Zionist claim to *Eretz Israel* for the Jewish people.

Over the years, Peres used his position as vice president of the Socialist International to deny the PLO recognition on the international stage. In doing so, he repeatedly came into conflict with European leaders who increasingly saw an inclusion of the PLO as the key to solving the Palestine question. In 1985, the *Knesset* under the government Peres enacted a law prohibiting talks between Israelis and representatives of terrorist organizations; annulled only in 1993 for the Oslo Process. According to Peres' biographer Michael Bar-Zohar, the weakness of the PLO lay in the motif for its recognition. He assumes that the only reason Peres opted to take up negotiations with the PLO is because it had lost considerable political and financial influence in 1991 in the wake of the Second Gulf War. It was an opportune time to "conclude a deal" with a weakened PLO.[67]

But in how far did the new government *politically* stand behind the Palestinian Option that provided the basis for the Oslo Peace Process? In the years 1992 to 1996, the Zionist Left was in a very precarious situation regarding the peace process. Following a yearlong political stagnation brought about by the governing coalition with the *Likud*, it managed to achieve a breakthrough in 1993. The Oslo Peace Process, which is regarded as a historic turning point, is for the most part considered to be the merit of the Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and his Vice Minister Yossi Beilin.

They convinced the hesitant Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin of the necessity to take up the difficult direct negotiations with the Palestinians, which would include having to recognize the PLO. Thanks to their willingness to accept the PLO under the leadership of Yasser Arafat as a dialogue partner, Rabin and Peres paved the way for a historic breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian history. For this, all three political leaders were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994.

But while the Jerusalem peace government scored a lot of praise internationally, in Israel itself it was confronted with a particularly tough political and intellectual challenge as it had to defend the peace process against the highly active and well organized political opposition of the Zionist Right, or religious Zionism. But at the same time it was no less skeptical than its political rivals of a solution to the Palestine question in terms of the Palestinian Option. At least the specific concept of Oslo I would leave the political-military situation essentially unchanged *for the time being*. A declaration of intent marked the beginning of

67 Bar-Zohar 2006: 616.

a process of “small steps,” with further development hinged on the course the negotiations would take.

But since Israel objected to arbitrators and, what is more, sought to defer tackling the core questions until later, to a time when negotiations for a permanent provision would take place, much was determined by the power relations between the two parties. A hybrid situation arose that was characteristic for the Oslo years, namely while negotiations were taking place the usual occupation practices were continued with the necessary modifications. In accordance with the preliminary assumption of Oslo that the core questions of the conflict would be resolved only later anyway, Israel gained more maneuvering room to keep creating facts in its own interest.

This happened despite the fact that due to its recognition as negotiating partner the PLO’s position was not as powerless as it had once been. The situation in which civil competences and thus the responsibility for the Palestinian population were conferred to the Palestinian Authority (Oslo II), while Israeli military dominance still remained in place is characterized by a leftist Oslo critic’s hybrid phrasing: “Oslo as continuation of occupation by peaceful means.”

The Labor Party government did not even dare start decolonializing the occupied territories. To the contrary, it looked for ways to keep up and even expand the settlement projects *in spite of* Oslo. On the one hand, the hybrid “Oslo Regime” facilitated the separation of the two collectives with the help of the military. Here it was especially the lockdown policy that considerably limited the Palestinian’s freedom of movement and worsened their living conditions. On the other hand, the continuation of the Jewish colonialization of Palestinian territories ran counter to the separation of the two peoples that Oslo had been envisioning.

It is particularly under the pretext of this peace process that Israel brought its Zionism-backed separation policy more strongly into accordance with the colonialization, as the Oslo Regime parceled out the Palestinian territories and thus segmented Palestinian society. Amira Hass draws attention to the fact that the number of settlers in the occupied territories (excluding East Jerusalem) doubled between 1991 and 2000, rising from 91,400 to 198,300. For East Jerusalem, 141,000 settlers is quoted for 1992, and 173,000 for 2000.[68]

The Oslo concept created an open situation. On the one hand, the pressure of the international community on Israel decreased perceivably and Israel’s image was strongly improved after five years of Palestinian Intifada. Both of these factors helped colonialization and occupation to continue without disturbance. On the

68 Cf. Hass, Amira, “Israeli Colonialism Under the Guise of the Peace Process (1993–2000),” in: Hass 2006: 194–209, 208; Grinberg 2007: 129.

other hand, the Zionist Right was fighting the progressing peace process, supposedly heading towards a Palestinian state, while in actual fact the settlement policy was still being actively pursued. For the Zionist Right also opposed the option of a Palestinian pseudo-state controlled by Israel. It feared negotiations that may lead to Israel having to yield up territories in *Eretz Israel*.

In contrast, the leadership of the Zionist Left was looking to find a middle ground: negotiations and reconciliation *in order that* settlement and security may be further ensured. Israel explicitly quoted the fight against terrorism, especially against the religious Palestinian groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad, as a motivation for the negotiations. At this, the Palestinian Authority was to serve as an auxiliary power and relieve the Israeli army from this task.

As far as the Israeli government was concerned, the political goal as it presented itself from the perspective of the Palestinians, namely a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, was in no way a done deal in the years from 1993 to 1996. Thus Peres was in a political predicament. He was held responsible for the peace process, which was associated exclusively with the political goal of a Palestinian state. At least the Zionist Left desired that this goal be reached and the world community expected it, even as the proponents of *Eretz Israel* battled against it. But of all people, it was actually the leader of the peace government who did not stand behind this aim.[69]

The Zionist Left Trapped between Eretz Israel, Security and Peace

As the architect of Oslo and leading politician, Peres had to support the peace process before the domestic public even though he was against a Palestinian state. Therefore, Peres' own way of dealing with the ongoing peace process seems absurd at times, especially when he came into a situation where he had to defend it against the combative Right.[70] It was problematic that the political goals of the process were not transparent and thus could not be discussed.

So how exactly was Peres hoping to achieve peace? It is telling in this context what aspects he chose to emphasize in a public talk about the Oslo Peace Process on March 25, 1994 with the Jewish-religious Israeli philosopher Yeshayahu Leibowitz – a fierce critic of the occupation policy since 1967. Leibowitz brought the foreign minister face to face with the fact that "the violent Israeli occupying

69 Amar-Dahl 2010: 336–366.
70 Ibid. 366–370.

power has not been removed even following Oslo [I]; we have not retreated even by a centimeter [from the territories in the Gaza Strip and Jericho, according to Oslo I].” To which Peres replied, “I think, the Oslo Accords will be implemented within a couple of weeks. We also intend to negotiate about other territories. [...] But we have to proceed cautiously, as we always have to win over the majority [of the Israeli-Jewish population] and at the same time have to fight [Palestinian] terror.”[71]

Leibowitz countered the terror argument in reference to the Palestinians as follows. “I know what terror means: two hundred and sixty children, the oldest ones fifteen, were killed by Israeli soldiers. That is the meaning of occupation policy.” As for Peres’ reasoning, it was meant to take into account the wishes of the “Israeli broad center”: “This is why we want to get out of there. This is one of the reasons why we do not want to be the policemen of the Palestinian people.” But Leibowitz was skeptical of Peres’ statement of intent and confronted him with political reality: “But we still are [the policemen of the Palestinian people].” Peres responded that negotiations are in fact being conducted “in order to get out of there.” Leibowitz, who stuck to his point of view that “we have not retreated even by a centimeter,” had to put up with the following argumentation brought forward by Peres: “But we can’t retreat like thieves in the middle of the night, can we. After all, the Arabs [meaning the Palestinians] are killing their brothers over there, sadly. Innocent Arabs are being killed by Arabs.”[72]

At this, Leibowitz objected that “this empathy with the Arabs is nothing but hypocrisy.” And then he, a proponent of the two-state solution within the borders of 1967, got to hear from the foreign minister what he really thinks about the Oslo concept: “Just like you, I would be in favor of a permanent solution, but I just don’t see any possibility of the two parties agreeing about the lines [...]. This is why the Oslo concept is initially focused on creating a better climate [for negotiations] in the hopes that it will be possible to draw a map which is acceptable to both parties in the course of five years. [...] At this point in time, I cannot commit to a permanent solution.” In Peres’ mind, the borders of 1967 were just no basis for a solution. Instead he brought up his preferred confederation concept. Leibowitz’ prediction from 1994 is telling here: “The things you say are not sincere. Because what this factually means is the continuation of occupation of Palestinian people. [...] We are going to continue pursuing [the occupation] in a sham package of lies and hypocrisy. [...] This is sick hypocrisy.”[73]

71 Cf. “Thus Said the Angry Prophet to the Peace Architect,” *Maariv*, March 25, 1994.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.

But this “hypocrisy” does in fact follow its own logic if one keeps in mind what a Palestinian state would mean for a Jewish nationalist and security politician of many years. Such a state had been a taboo topic for security-political and political elites of the country since the founding of the state and the war of 1948. In Peres’ eyes it is a danger for Zionist Israel, also in the mid-1990s.[74]

Ultimately, even the Zionist Left “peace government” cannot relinquish military dominance in the country, which would be dissolved by a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Instead, by the mid-1990s, it was inefficiently looking to close the abyss between the three maxims of security, *Eretz Israel* and peace, as these proved to be mutually irreconcilable. An understanding of security in which military dominance and the Zionist tenet of *Eretz Israel* as the land of the Jewish people are assumed to be fundamental necessities renders peace based on a two-state solution impossible.

Because Israel could not liberate itself from its two founding myths – the security myth and the myth of the “promised land” – even under the leadership of the Zionist Left, peace had to remain an unfulfilled dream. Nevertheless, the Zionist Left keeps clinging to the peace process even years later because it is still trapped in the peace ideology or the myth of peace and security. It is not able to reflect on the contradictions between its Zionist goals and reality.

The actual difference between the two main camps of the Israeli political spectrum is the belief in the compatibility of peace with one’s own conception of the state. While the Zionist Right and religious Zionism do not aspire to peace because they are not willing to pay its territorial and identity-political price, the Zionist Left cleaves to the old Zionist ambition to normalize the relations between Jews and non-Jews, founding myths notwithstanding. But this peace ideology results in a depoliticization of peace: If the process of working towards peace is perceived as something that takes place essentially in isolation from Israel’s policy (which is seen as being in the interest of Zionist Israel, thus remaining untouchable and unquestioned) and that hinges solely on the willingness of “the Arabs” to recognize Israel, there really is little that can be done from the political point of view. One can only keep hoping that the hostility of “the Arabs” will disappear, while continuing to imagine peace and fight terrorism – by military means, mind you.

74 Amar-Dahl 2010: 328–387.

Exit of the Zionist Left

Peres' depoliticized understanding of the Oslo Peace Process and his rejection of the Palestinian Option proposed therein became obvious the moment he had to take over the leadership of the state. Between the murder of Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995 and the voting out of the Labor Party in late May 1996, it became clear in how far the Zionist Left under the leadership of Peres really represented an alternative in the question of Palestine.

In October 1995, on occasion of the signing of Oslo II, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Peres gave his assessment of the situation before the *Knesset*: "The permanent solution will not result in a Palestinian state, but rather will be based on new ideas." He poses the rhetorical question:

> Does autonomy [as stipulated in Oslo II] mean a Palestinian state? Not necessarily. It may be a template for many things – for regulations, or demilitarized and even domination-free [sic] territories. I believe that the permanent regulation will not be based on an existing foundation [Oslo II], but on a series of completely new ideas.[75]

Even at this point in time, standing before the Israeli Parliament, the Foreign Minister did not feel the need to elaborate on the actual content of his "new ideas." He also did not say which legal status he was planning to confer on the Palestinian autonomy or the vacated Palestinian territories. Rather, he shifted the focus to his actual objective: "Without Oslo II, Israel would have slipped into the danger of a bi-national state which would not even have included coexistence. Israel cannot and will not be an apartheid state."[76]

Stressing Israel's military and economic strength in this *Knesset* speech, Peres went on to conclude that the decision for Oslo II was opportune at that point in time. He points out that the Israeli army was the only one between Jordan and the Mediterranean, and that the fight against terrorism was not only in the interest of Israelis, but also of Palestinians: "The Palestinian Authority is well aware of the fact that if it does not smash terror, it would be infiltrated by it."[77]

Here, Peres makes his security-oriented understanding of the Oslo Process very clear. On the one hand, the future of the Palestinian autonomy remains vague, with no word being said about it. On the other hand, a clear task is given

75 *Davar I*, October 24, 1995.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.

to the Palestinian Authority already in advance, namely to fight the Palestinian terrorism directed against Israel so that it may not itself be destroyed by it.

Shortly after Peres took office as acting Prime Minister in November 1995, he declared which points he wanted to give weight to in the peace process.[78] In the beginning, Peres assumed Rabin's former double position as head of state and minister of defense. But instead of giving the Foreign Ministry to his Vice Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, the man so strongly committed to the work on Israeli-Palestinian relations, he conferred it to the former Chief of General Staff Ehud Barak, a man who had taken a critical stance towards the Oslo Peace Process in his position as army commander.

Soon Peres announced his plan: a regional peace between Israel and the entire Arab world. For this reason he wanted to turn to Syria in the next months, since "it is not pressing for now with the Palestinians." The approaching elections also played a role in this change: "Another peace ceremony in Washington [like the one on September 13, 1993] – so it is assumed – would make the election campaign superfluous."[79] Assuming that by turning to the Syrian-Israeli scene Peres pursued the goal of bringing his New Middle East closer, he was not successful. The Syrian-Israeli negotiations in Maryland (USA) in January 1996 soon hit a dead end. On this front, too, the territorial question remained the main obstacle.

That Peres did not actually wish to achieve peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by making more territorial concessions is also suggested by his attempt shortly after the assassination of Rabin, i.e., before the implementation of Oslo II, to include no other than the national-religious party *Mafdal* into his coalition. Due to its adherence to the ideology of the "promised land," *Mafdal* took a very hostile stance towards the Oslo Peace Process.

What was Peres' motivation for such a "rightward shift"? Grinberg attributes it to the fact that Peres construed the murder of Rabin as well as the peace process itself as a danger to the "unity of Israeli-Jewish society." He promised the leaders of *Mafdal* to not vacate any settlements, but nevertheless failed to win it for his coalition. From then on, up until he was voted out by a narrow margin in the end of May 1996, his actions were determined by the struggle to appease the opponents of Oslo by dissolving the already vague political differences between the proponents and critics of the peace process. Thus, the political debate was shifted from the reconciliation process with the Palestinians to the question of "national unity" and the risk of a "disintegration of Jewish-Israeli society."

78 *Haaretz*, November 8, 1995.
79 "The Leader of the New Middle East," *Haaretz*, December 5, 1995.

Peres' overtures to *Mafdal* so shortly after Rabin's murder lead the Israeli publicist Jacob Jona to ironically label this closing of ranks a "hysteric alliance" – by which he alludes to the party-political so-called "historic alliance" between *Mapai* and *Mafdal* in the first three decades of Israeli policy. In this context, Jona criticized Peres' lack of collegiality towards his "natural political allies" for peace, such as the Zionist Left party *Meretz*, Reform Judaism and the Israeli Palestinians.[80] Whether Peres really saw these avowed supporters of the peace process as his "natural allies," and whether he sought the coalition with the national-religious camp out of "hysteria" and not due to an ideological closeness (possibly in order to have an alibi to back down should it look like territorial compromises were looming in the peace talks) can be deduced from his policy.

In December 1995, Peres withdrew Israeli troops from Palestinian cities in the West Bank, as stipulated in the Oslo II Accord. Regions A and B, comprising the twenty-seven percent of fragmented territorial dominions in the West Bank, were transferred to the Palestinian authority, while Region C (seventy-three percent) remained under Israeli dominance. The Jewish settlements remained in place with the consent of the PA, and the Islamic resistance was neutralized by Arafat, who even convinced its representatives in the Palestinian territories to accept the Oslo Accords. As for Peres, he got moderate representatives of the Jewish settlers to consent to Oslo II, promising to upgrade their bypass road network and expand existing settlements in return.

Thus, Oslo II was mostly realized by December 1995. In January 1996, Peres admitted elections for the presidency and the Palestinian Counsel in the Palestinian territories, which, although provided in Oslo I Accord, had been repeatedly postponed. Thereby another important precondition for entering into the last phase of the negotiations that was to bring about a permanent solution was met.

Peres also remained true to his concept of "soft borders" with regard to the question of a boundary wall, and stopped the construction project that was already underway.[81] The idea of building a boundary wall had come up in reaction to a deadly attack by the Islamic Jihad on Israeli soldiers within the "Green Line" in January 1995. The pressure from the Israeli public to actually realize the separation of both peoples, as it is aspired to in the Oslo Peace Process, was mounting. In addition to the lockdown policy being pursued in the occupied territories, the Rabin government was also considering the construction of a boundary wall with the objective of increasing the consciousness for the borders that had been fading since 1967. Despite considerable resistance from the settler leadership,

80 Jona, Jacob, "The Hysteric Alliance," *Maariv*, December 11, 1995.
81 *Davar* I, November 26, 1995.

Rabin increasingly endorsed the re-erection of the borders, even if they should not correspond to the borders of 1967.[82]

However, there was a difference of opinion between Israel's business elites, who were adverse to any separation of the two economic areas (a position that is reflected in Peres' idea of "open economic borders of the New Middle East"), and the "security elites" under Rabin's leadership that gave priority to "defense borders."[83] How pronounced the dichotomy really was between these two elites regarding the boundary wall question is debatable, though. For not only is it more than doubtful whether the military leadership really shared Rabin's position as he increasingly promoted the separation solution and whether they really did approve of the withdrawal from the territories, it is also unclear whether the "economic factor" was really all Peres had in mind when he invoked the unity of the country.

After all, as the business elites were anxious to hold on to their dominance over the Palestinian market, military control over the entire country was indispensable if the interests of that business elite were to be upheld.[84] Accordingly, Peres had to insist on military dominance, even if the economic aspects and interests of the Israeli business elites really were the only thing he was focused on. And this point of view does not really allow for a dividing wall.

According to Grinberg, Rabin had resolved to build a boundary wall along the "Green Line" of 1967 since any other location would have meant breaching the agreement with the PLO. The re-establishment of the borders of 1967 would not only have meant a premature regulation of the border issue, but would have made the question of settlement even more explosive. Thus, a boundary wall would frustrate the intended blurring of the borders, and as such go against Israeli dominance in the Palestinian territories.

The new prime minister surely did not wish to determine the "permanent borders" too early in the game, and he ordered the halting of preparations for the construction of the separation wall as early as November 1995. Peres described in flowery language the "creation of 'industrial parks' in the 'areas around the border lines'," particularly for the purpose "of creating employment opportunities for the Palestinians, which would result in good neighborly relations."[85]

Ultimately, Peres' political decision to not recognize the borders of 1967 was in the interests of both elites that were supposed to stand behind the Oslo Process

82 Grinberg 2007: 133–134.
83 Ibid. 135.
84 Grinberg 2007A: 38–45.
85 *Davar I*, November 26, 1995.

in 1993. The business elites were eager for the closure of the borders between the Palestinian autonomy and Egypt and Jordan in order to avoid the import of cheap goods. This in turn conformed to the goals of the military leadership that saw the control over the Palestinians and the isolation of their territories from all sides as a security-political priority in facilitating the fight against Palestinian terrorism.[86]

This overlaps with the interests of the settler movement that had traditionally been supported by Peres. And with the political level under the leadership of Peres likewise rejecting a Palestinian state in the West Bank, the Palestinian Option did not really stand a chance. Already in the turbulent days after Rabin's assassination, Peres offered the following comment:

> I have always said that peace with Jordan would arrive – and that is indeed the case. I have always said 'Gaza First' – and that, too, has come to pass. Also, I have always said, a 'functional confederation solution' should be realized in the West Bank. You have to believe me that this will ultimately happen as well.[87]

In any case, in his short time in office as the head of government Peres took several measures to push through his solution concept for the West Bank, even if neither "industrial parks" were created in the process, nor could there be any talk of "good neighborly relations." By the end of 1995, the political reality increasingly started to resemble the well known "old security order" – and that despite the implementation of Oslo II.[88]

The acting prime minister quickly took a "security-political position" and made two central military decisions that would soon dominate the less than peaceful atmosphere in the country in the first half of 1996. In January 1996, Peres ordered the killing of the Palestinian terrorist Yahya Ayyash, triggering a wave of terror that swept over Israel in the months of February and March. Then, in April 1996, the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense authorized a military operation in Lebanon.

Grinberg interprets Peres' war policy as a failed attempt to imitate the ultimate "man of security," former General Rabin, who had forced through a similar operation in Lebanon in the summer of 1993, and under whose power of command the leader of the Islamic Jihad was liquidated in October 1995, shortly before Rabin himself was assassinated. In how far Peres actually stood behind this strategy of distinguishing himself as a "man of security" with a view to the approaching

86 Grinberg 2007: 139.

87 Galili, Orit, "Beilin in Search for Bonds, Peres Walking Backwards – Words One Cannot Say Before the Elections," *Haaretz*, November 29, 1995.

88 Grinberg 2007: 161–162.

elections, and whether he possibly agreed to it under the influence of bad advisers, it is hard to say.

However, the fight against terrorism by means of targeted killings and military operations is no exception in Israel's security policy, and is instrumentalized also for the purposes of electoral campaign. What is striking here is that the leader of the peace camp did not want to pin his re-election on the continuation of the peace process, but rather on his military stance. These two security-political decisions – which ultimately led to an electoral defeat – are the flipside of the depoliticization of the peace process.

In his election campaign, Peres focused on covering up the political debate between the peace camp and the Oslo opponents while quietly discontinuing the Israeli-Palestinian talks. He led a depoliticized electoral campaign in which neither the Israeli-Palestinian relations nor the political assassination of Rabin that was directly related to it were addressed.[89] Confident about his re-election, Peres even chose to see the electoral campaign itself as a depoliticized matter. Not only did he avoid discussing the position of the Labor Party concerning peace, he also pursued his "strategy of ignoring" in a televised debate with his challenger Benjamin Netanyahu (1949–) on the eve of the election. He simply dodged political confrontation.[90]

Peres' tactics included a decisive political move in the peace process. He refused to begin negotiations with the Palestinians about a permanent solution before the election. At this point in time, Peres could not take up the agreement in principle for a permanent solution that had been secretly negotiated by Yossi Beilin and the Palestinian representative Mahmud Abbas (1935–) in Stockholm, let alone make it the basis of his peace policy.

In a nutshell, the Beilin/Abu-Masen Paper provided for a demilitarized Palestinian state that was supposed to comprise ninety-four percent of the West Bank, wherein the remaining six percent (seventy-five percent of which were Jewish settlements) were to be compensated for by a region in southern Gaza. The Muslim holy sites in East Jerusalem would get an exterritorial status, and the Palestinian capital would have been allowed outside the city limits of Jerusalem as determined by Israel. According to Shlaim, this paper, called the "coup of the century" by the Palestinian negotiating partner Hussein Agha, was rejected because "Peres could not be persuaded to endorse the plan, for three main reasons: he wanted

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89 Peres' closest advisor Uri Savir even stresses that the discussion of the differences with the Palestinians regarding the pending permanent solution involve the danger of the Labor Party not being re-elected. This is why the talks were shifted to Syria. Cf. Galili 1995.

90 Bar-Zohar 2006: 666.

future relations between Palestine and Jordan spelled out, he regarded the ideas on Jerusalem as inadequate, and he wanted to retain the Jordan Valley as Israel's strategic border."[91]

Conclusion: Israel's Founding Myths and the Question of Palestine

For the first time in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the peace process of the 1990s opened up a time window that could have led to a political settlement of the Palestine question. The domestic-political development that took place in Israel in 1992, i.e., the changeover of power in Jerusalem and the formation of a government willing to negotiate peace, was one of the reasons for this historic moment. Without the readiness of political Israel to face up to the question of Palestinians and of Palestine, the breakthrough of 1993 would not have been possible.

The electoral defeat of the Labor Party in 1996 is generally seen as a harsh setback for the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians. It was hoped that as a main instigator for the breakthrough that had been achieved in Oslo, the candidate of the Labor Party and thus of the Zionist Left was a "man of peace" – in contrast to his challenger, *Likud* leader Benjamin Netanyahu. Hence, Peres was also seen as the man who could have brought to a close what had already been started, namely a solution entailing the creation of two states.

Accordingly, Oslo advocates regretted the narrow poll defeat. Whereas Oslo opponents saw the duo of Peres and Beilin as the chief culprits for the so-called "Oslo catastrophe," above all because it carried the possibility that a resolution might take the form of the country being divided between the two peoples. Given the extremely unstable security situation on the eve of the election, great hopes were set on the Nobel Peace Prize laureate that he might steer the ship safely to shore.

Yet as a diehard security politician and figure who is representative of Israel's conflict-laden political order, Peres was simply not the right man. It would turn out that Peres advanced the peace process only very hesitantly at a time when the conditions for completing it were most favorable. In the end, he even chose to quietly discontinue it. As of November 1995, "the man of peace" found himself in a unique situation: After Rabin's assassination, Peres held an unparalleled amount of power and authority within a broad range of political and social circles

91 Shlaim 2000: 555–556.

due to his influential double function as prime minister and minister of defense, and also because of his position as "tribal elder."

After Rabin's death he could have mobilized the Israeli public for the peace process. The Zionist Left as well as the so-called "broad center" would have doubtless supported him. At that point, the right-wing opposition had been highly weakened as the public held it responsible for the outrageous deed of one Jew killing another. The preconditions for making headway in the peace process were therefore extremely advantageous, and that not only with regard to the domestic-political situation. For with the PLO there was a dialogue partner who was recognized by Israel, the United Nations, as well as the Palestinians themselves, and in cooperation with whom a lot had already been achieved by the end of 1995. Not only had an interim agreement been reached and partially implemented, but also a "permanent solution" had already been formulated. The Beilin/Abu-Masen document, which was based on a division solution, had been negotiated shortly before Rabin's assassination and would have been welcomed by the Palestinian leadership.

The factor of age is of no small importance here either. In 1996, Peres was in his mid-eighties. Had he really wanted the two-state concept he should have seized this chance. "There are such unique fate-changing moments in history," noted Israeli publicist and peace activist Uri Avneri (1923–) in late November 1995 with regard to the political situation of the acting prime minister, "when all becomes possible that cannot be realized either shortly before or shortly after. [...] The greatness of a historic leader is in recognizing such moments and seizing the opportunity."[92]

Yet Peres did not seize the opportunity to complete the peace process with the Palestinians by political means, because even in the mid-1990s the prominent statesman did not see the two-state concept as a viable solution in the interests of Zionist Israel. A peace with the Palestinians that was based on officially giving up any Israeli claims to parts of *Eretz Israel* would also mean bringing up the question of Palestine not only *politically,* but also *ideologically*, just like in the time before the founding of the state. But for the Zionist Leftist Peres and for Zionist Israel, *Eretz Israel* is not up for political debate. As the "land of the forefathers" it remains the "promised land," the country of the Jewish people. This is the foundation of Zionism as it is being realized in Israel.

And it is just this realization of the Zionist project in *Eretz Israel* that Peres has been fighting for throughout his entire political career. It is what he regards as his life's work: immigration, settlement and security as the first principles of

92 Avneri 1995.

Israeli policy. But since the land was and ultimately still is settled by another collective, a conflict-laden political discourse emerged as the dominant mode over the course of the years; a discourse that was not oriented towards peace, but toward security.

A statement made by Peres in the days shortly before the onset of the Second Intifada is revealing in this regard: "For me, crossing over from the domain of defense to the domain of peace was like leaving the real world in exchange for an unreal one."[93] Even for a supposed proponent of peace and bearer of hope, peace is hard to imagine. He, too, thinks of the historically grown political order as absolutely essential.

The bottom line is that the political order of Zionist Israel is based on two founding myths: the myth of *Eretz Israel* as the land of the Jewish people and on the safety myth. These two lines of thought form the core of the Palestine question, and therefore epitomize the key issues of the historically grown Middle East conflict. Both myths stand in the way of a political resolution of the conflict with the "Arabs of *Eretz Israel*." After all, Israel's insistence on the myth according to which *Eretz Israel* is the land of the Jewish people also means that it cannot acknowledge the self-determination rights of the Palestinians living in this territory.

For this reason, Israel cannot allow the formation of a Palestinian state in any part of the country. The alternative of naturalizing all Palestinians would equally force Israel to revise its *raison d'état* as a predominantly Jewish state for the Jewish people in *Eretz Israel*. Since Zionist Israel neither can/wants to split the land nor sees a bi-national state as a real option, the status quo of the Palestinians remains that of an "out-group," in effect that of the displaced enemies of Zionist Israel.

Not only the Palestinians are considered to be the enemies in Israel's political culture, however. The neighboring Arab states are as well. Already in 1948 they intervened in the conflict over Palestine and have been involved in several conflicts with the Jewish state since. From the Israeli perspective, the strife over *Eretz Israel* is very closely linked to the conflict in the Middle East region. This extremely sensitive question of the nation state is associated with the civilian militarization of society that has occurred over the course of history, and thus ultimately with the establishment of the second myth.

The safety myth is based on a perception that has sprung up from the history of Jewish suffering and assumes that the hostile relations between Jews and *Goyim* can never be fully resolved. This is accompanied by the notion that an invincible

93 Peres 1999: 61.

military power is absolutely essential, and it is justified time and time again in domestic policy as a means of protecting the Jews against their ever-present foes.

For the Jewish state, “the Arabs” have taken over the function of the “great opponent” at least from 1948 on, which is why military strength could be depicted as the guarantor for the nation state’s existence as early as during the 1950s. So it is that security became the central pillar of Israeli order, a social code of security. And as the country was being shaped by a political security culture, security forces were elevated to become one of the most powerful state elites. This civilian militarization of Israeli society was accompanied by an increasingly prevalent view that it is not so much through negotiations or compromises but rather thanks to favorable power relations that peace would ultimately be brought about. In the eyes of many Israelis, an advantageous balance of power is the prerequisite for the existence of the nation state. After all, it was the Israeli army who conquered the land in two wars (1948 and 1967) and now guarantees the protection of the Jewish state.

Consequently, peace is deemed possible only if the existence of the nation state is ensured. This in turn means that military control over *Eretz Israel* and its “Arabs” must be maintained: The military administration before 1967 as well as the occupation policy afterwards are examples of this attitude. But because of this fixation on security and control stands in the way of reconciliation, a peace ideology has established itself in the course of time alongside the myth of safety.

The peace ideology habitually points to the tension between the “peace-seeking” Israel and its “unruly” Arab environment. It claims that despite Israel’s unreserved wish for reconciliation, “the Arabs” are simply not up to the task of making peace with the Jewish state. Based on this understanding, negotiations seem pointless since there is “no dialogue partner” for peace. This serves to reinforce Israel’s self-image as a peaceful and just state – an extremely important domestic-political source of power for a political order that is based on violence.

Moreover, the peace ideology also serves as a veil in pressing one’s own interests, which are understood as interests connected to the Jewish statehood and therefore as indispensable. The fact that Zionism, which is construed as historically just, has ultimately been accomplished sword-in-hand must be duly blocked out. It is this very contradiction present within the peace ideology – it draws on the peaceful self-image of the Jewish people on the one hand while appealing to a strong enemy image on the other – which has facilitated the continued existence of the conflict-laden order on the domestic front for so many years.

In this order, the peace ideology and the myth of safety are resorted to as crucial codes of the Israeli-Zionist discourse. To the same extent they are the reason for and the expression of the inability to truly deal with the conflict, including its political and historical origins. In other words, a fundamental obstacle when it comes to facing up to the question of Palestine. Indeed, both the peace ideology and the safety myth lead to a depoliticized understanding of the conflict. It is conceived of as belonging to a sphere that lies beyond any concrete political and historical development, and attributed to a hostility that is aimed at Jews in general.

Arising from the notion that the concrete struggle over *Eretz Israel* is not really about resources (such as the territory), but is rather to be understood within a broader context of the history of the persecution of Jews, what evolved over time is a political culture in which not politics but the military is seen as the party which is ultimately responsible for handling the conflict. This depoliticization of the conflict is the consequence of the two founding myths.

On the one hand, the sacralization of the country made sure that the "Holy Land" was kept off the negotiating table for many years, thus making the "Judaization of the country" possible. On the other hand, the myth of safety served to promote an "ideologization" of security, thus leading to its depoliticization. In this way, security could be retained in an exceptional position as the prime principle – and that despite the fact that Israel's actual security policy has repeatedly proven to be counterproductive, and at the end of the day is responsible for maneuvering the conflict over Palestine/*Eretz Israel* into the dead end it is currently locked.

Depoliticization of the conflict, however, inevitably leads to the depoliticization of peace. An understanding of the conflict based on inexplicable hostility does not permit reconciliation. A notion of peace that draws on the internalized logic of the peace ideology remains conflict-laden because it assumes that the core of the conflict lies somewhere else than politics. Consequently, it cannot possibly be one's own policy or the order it is based on that needs to be subjected to negotiation, but rather a motive that lies beyond (one's own) political actions.

This view has eventually also taken root in the Zionist peace camp. Here, peace turns into a compulsion to get rid of the Palestinian "enemy"; it becomes a means for bringing about a separation from "the others" in order to finally be able to make the desiderated Zionist vision come true. But since the Israeli order (including the two founding myths) remained substantially intact during the peace process of the 1990s, real peace could not prevail. Rather, it had to be "imagined."

Blocking out one's own history is the reaction to the many key questions remaining politically unsolvable, even for Israel's Zionist Left. Lying at the very core of the numerous entanglements of the regional Middle East conflict, Israel's fought-over state territory and the status of Palestinians in the Jewish state remain the Achilles' heel of Zionist Israel. In every compromise, in every retreat from what has already been achieved, political Israel fearfully suspects a seed that may contain the failure of the entire Zionist project. From its inception, this project has been advanced "at the expense of the Arabs" in either one way or another, no matter how vehemently this fact is repressed and denied. Now any noteworthy concession may prepare the groundwork for the next one, any yielding may be equated to weakness and could be the beginning of the end.

This kind of reasoning results in an existential *angst* and a sense of being isolated. Since the outbreak of the Second Intifada in October 2000 and the escalation of the conflict with the Palestinians that followed, the Jewish state has entered a highly precarious historical phase. After more than half a century of successful policy as seen from the vantage point of the Zionist reason of state, Israelis were faced with the fact that history is no longer on their side. Despite the regional-military hegemony Israel hinges its existence on, and a still considerable amount of support from the West, it has become more and more obvious during the last decade that the political order of Israel cannot be permanent.

The demography in Palestine defies the myth of *Eretz Israel,* and the continuing state of war perceivably demoralizes Israeli civil society, increasingly weakening the domestic political significance of the myth of safety. Military strength cannot resolve the conflict over Palestine. Neither can the use of violence in the name of Jewish statehood provide the desired security, not to mention any sort of normalization or peace. And although international pressure on Israel is growing daily, Israel keeps clinging to its founding myths and conflict-laden order. For the deep-seated insecurity regarding one's own future goes hand in hand with a fear of facing the past. Based on its historical experience, political Israel has developed the strategy of waiting things out, of entrenching itself and fighting, at whatever front it deems necessary. And so the Middle East conflict remains the inescapable price Israel has to pay for Jewish national statehood – or at least that is what she has been conditioned to believe.

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