

Chapter 1

Socio-Psychological Barriers to Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: An Analysis of Jewish Israeli Society

Eran Halperin, Neta Oren, and Daniel Bar-Tal

The long history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the inability to resolve it peacefully, in spite of the numerous bilateral attempts and third-party interventions, imply that this conflict is vicious, stubborn, and resistant to such efforts. The lack of peaceful resolution can be attributed, to a large extent, to the functioning of very powerful socio-psychological barriers that inhibit and impede progress. These barriers are socio-psychological forces that underlie the disagreements and prevent their resolution by posing major obstacles to beginning the negotiations, conducting the negotiations, or achieving an agreement, and later, to engaging in the process of reconciliation (see review by Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2010). The purpose of the present chapter is to elucidate the socio-psychological barriers in Israeli-Jewish society that play a major role in the attempts to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict peacefully. We note that similar detrimental forces are undoubtedly operating on the Palestinian side, but their analysis is beyond the scope of the present contribution.

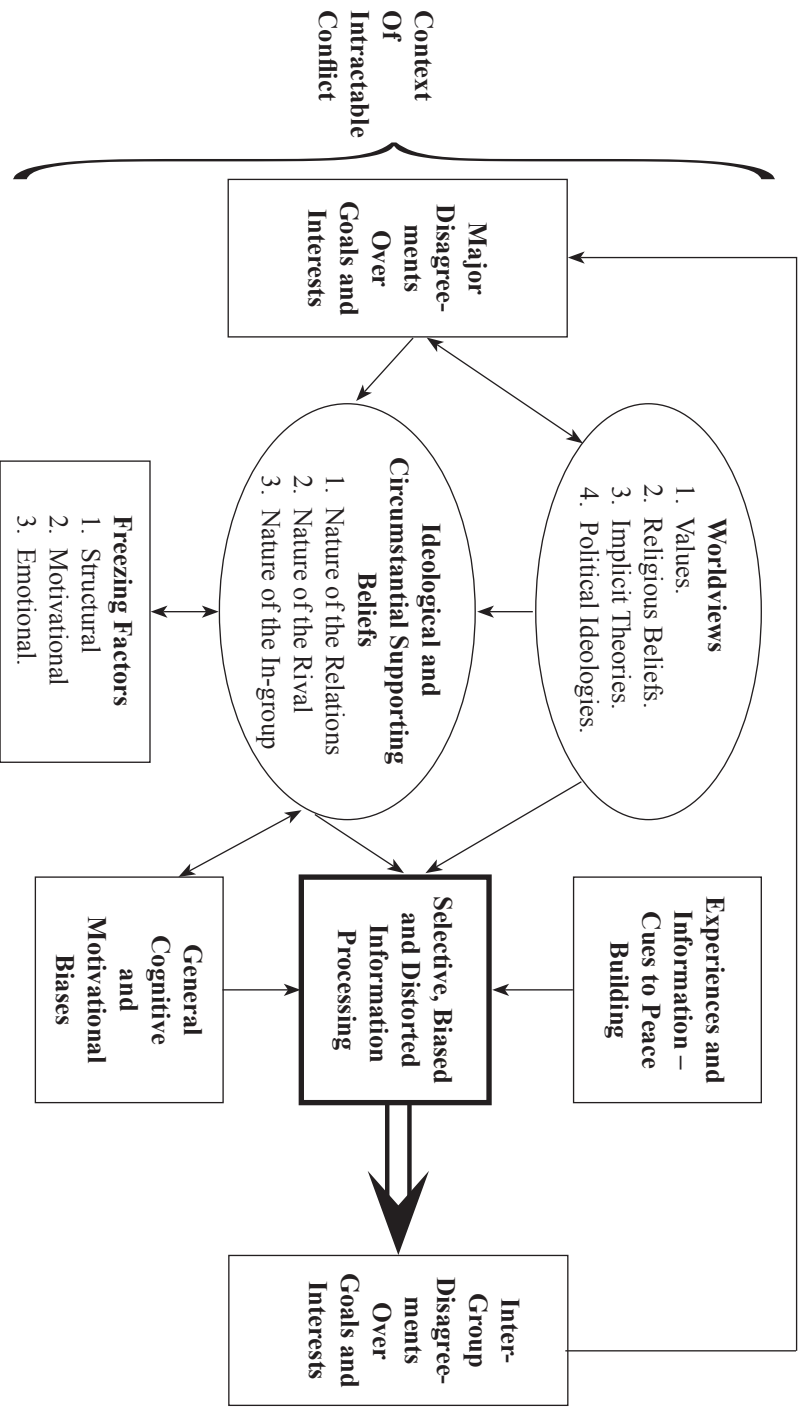
This conflict has lasted over a hundred years and is still one of the most salient and central conflicts in the world. It has gone through various stages and developments during these hundred years, and still it remains unresolved and resistant to peaceful resolution. Our fundamental premise is that the disagreements in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are not easily resolved in part because **socio-psychological barriers** prevent peaceful resolution of conflicts. These barriers pertain to an integrated operation of cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes, combined with a pre-existing repertoire of rigid supporting beliefs, world views, and emotions, that result in selective, biased, and distorted

information processing. This processing obstructs and inhibits the penetration of new information that can help facilitate the development of the peace process.

The applicable theoretical framework, which integrates various past approaches to psychological barriers for the resolution of conflicts, has been extensively discussed in some of our recent contributions (Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009, 2010; Bar-Tal, Halperin & Oren, 2010), and its detailed description is beyond the scope of the current work. In a nutshell, it suggests (see Figure 1) that two content-related clusters of beliefs (i.e., the conflict-supporting beliefs and the general worldview beliefs) combine with negative intergroup emotions to provide a prism through which individuals perceive and interpret the reality of the conflict. This is selective, biased, and distorted information processing that reflects an integrated operation of cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes. The consequence of this processing is preservation, and even reinforcement, of the basic disagreements, as well as of the conflict-supporting beliefs. It obstructs, for example, the penetration of peaceful gestures initiated by the adversary, new proposals raised by third parties or by the other side, and/or new information about the other side's willingness to compromise. Under these circumstances, overcoming the basic disagreements is a very difficult challenge.

The current chapter focuses on the application of the abovementioned theoretical framework to the Middle-Eastern conflict, particularly from the perspective of Israeli Jewish society. We will describe the main socio-psychological barriers of Israeli Jewish society that serve as inhibitive forces to possible peaceful resolution of the conflict, focusing on the views of the Israeli Jewish public, of the political parties, and of the political leaders. First, we will elaborate on the conflict-supporting beliefs that consist of the ideological beliefs supporting the conflict, and the circumstantial conflict-supporting beliefs. Both feed the continuation of the conflict and prevent its peaceful resolution. Subsequently, we will discuss the emotional factors that operate as barriers. Because of space limitation, we will sidestep the discussion of other socio-psychological barriers, such as general worldviews and general cognitive and motivational barriers.

Figure 1: Socio-Psychological Barriers to Peaceful Conflict Resolution



Socio-Psychological Barriers to Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In discussing the ideological conflict-supporting beliefs, which reflect the ethos of conflict,² we will focus mainly on those beliefs that are found to be central in fostering the disagreement and preventing peacemaking. These beliefs include themes that pertain to the goals of the conflict and their justification, de-legitimization of the Arabs in general, and of the Palestinians in particular, a sense of collective victimhood, collective self-presentation, and a theme that describes the essence of peace (see the study by Gopher, 2006).

We would like to note that, in principle, the ideological societal beliefs that support the conflict provide the epistemic basis for the rejection of any compromise on the core issues that underlie the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They reject any compromise that would divide the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea between the two nations. This basic idea comes from at least two main sources, which are not mutually exclusive. One source is religious-national and bases its justifications on a combination of religious dogma and national-historical premises, while the other is based on existential security considerations intertwined with national needs (see Magal, Bar-Tal, Oren, and Halperin, in preparation). Both sources provide foundations for the societal beliefs that constitute parts of the ethos of conflict and therefore should be viewed as ideological conflict-supporting beliefs. In addition, we will outline the circumstantial beliefs that appeared during the period investigated. These beliefs develop in a particular context and later disappear. For example, a particular

² The ethos of conflict, which provides a dominant orientation to a society in the present and direction for the future, consists of eight themes of societal beliefs (Bar-Tal, 2000). They include: **Societal beliefs about the justness of its own goals**, which, first of all, outline the goals in conflict, indicate their crucial importance, and provide their explanations and rationales. **Societal beliefs about security** refer to the importance of personal safety and national survival and outline the conditions for their achievement. **Societal beliefs of positive collective self-image** concern the ethnocentric tendency to attribute positive traits, values, and behavior to one's own society. **Societal beliefs of the society's own victimization** concern self-presentation as a victim, especially in the context of the intractable conflict. **Societal beliefs about delegitimizing the opponent** concern beliefs which deny the adversary's humanity. **Societal beliefs of patriotism** generate attachment to the country and society by propagating loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice. **Societal beliefs of unity** refer to the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements during an intractable conflict in order to unite the forces in the face of external threat. Finally, **societal beliefs of peace** refer to peace as the ultimate desire of the society.

leader of the rival group is perceived as weak and therefore is considered unable to implement the potential peace agreement. Finally, we will also describe the emotions that play a role as barriers to peacemaking. We will carry out this analysis by focusing on the recent period of 2000-2009 – a period during which the conflict escalated, and the beliefs and emotions supporting the continuation of the conflict became stronger and more widespread.

Ideological Beliefs Supporting the Conflict

In earlier works we have studied the Israeli ethos and the way it has changed since 1967 (Bar-Tal, 2007b; Bar-Tal and Oren, 2000; Oren, 2005; Oren and Bar-Tal, 2006; Oren, 2009). We found that during the intractable period of the conflict (until 1977 and the visit of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem), most of the central societal beliefs that composed the Israeli ethos of conflict were dominant. That is, they were held by least 75% of the society, frequently served the political leadership in justifying and explaining policies, constituted the core narratives of the conflict in school textbooks, and often appeared in mass media and were expressed in various cultural products. Subsequent research has found significant changes in the Israeli ethos of conflict over the years, especially during processes of conflict transformation – after the peace treaty with Egypt and during the period of the Oslo Accords. These changes generally included a decrease in the dominance of the societal beliefs about the ethos of conflict. The events of 2000, with the eruption of the second *Intifada* and its violence, reversed the trend and led to the reinforcement of some of these societal beliefs (see Bar-Tal, 2007b; Bar-Tal & Sharvit 2008; Oren, 2009). In what follows, we will elaborate on the ethos of conflict in its recent period (2000-2009).

Beliefs about the Israelis' and Palestinians' goals

Since the 1980s, the societal beliefs that denied Arab rights to the land and refused to recognize the existence of a national Palestinian movement and of a Palestinian entity ceased to exist as a societal belief within Israeli society. For example, the findings of a recent Peace Index survey show a solid majority of 61% among the Jewish public who see the Palestinians' claim to an independent state of their own as justified (Peace Index, November 2008). In addition, 62% of the Israeli

Jewish public in June 2009 recognized the existence of a Palestinian people (32% oppose this and the rest do not know) (Peace Index, June 2009). In addition, all recent Israeli prime ministers, including the current, Netanyahu, accept the idea of a Palestinian state, and public polls indicate that most Israeli Jews accept the two-state solution. Presumably, this change indicates the removal of a significant barrier to conflict resolution with the Palestinians.

A closer look at the current Israeli beliefs about Israeli and Palestinian goals, however, reveals that the changes to previously held Israeli beliefs about ethos are less fundamental than they seem at first glance. There are many indications that agreement with the two-state solution does not suggest any recognition of the Palestinian narrative of the conflict or abandonment of the Jewish claim to the West Bank territories that were captured in the 1967 war. Furthermore, there are indications that the level of resistance to the Palestinian narrative has been growing in recent years within Israeli society. For example, in a 2008 poll, a majority of the Jewish public described the West Bank as “liberated territory” (55%) and not as “occupied territory” (32%). This is a change compared to 2004: in August 2004, 51% regarded the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as occupied territories, and 39% thought – or were sure – that they were not (Peace Index, March 2008). Accordingly, a Peace Index survey found that the majority of Israelis describe settlements that are clearly located in the territories as, “settlements that are not in the occupied territories” (Peace Index, August 2004).

Similar trends appear in the rhetoric of key Israeli politicians. For example, in a 2004 interview, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said, “We insist on the historical right of the Jewish people to the whole of *Eretz Israel* [the Land of Israel]. Every hill in Samaria, every valley in Judea, is a part of our historical homeland. We do not forget this fact, even for one moment.”

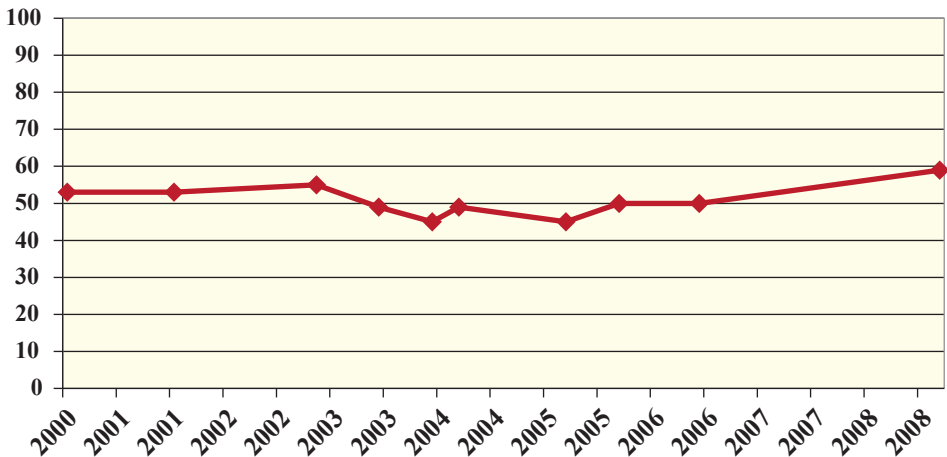
Netanyahu, the current Israeli prime minister, repeated the idea of the territories as “Israeli Land” in his June 2009 speech at Bar-Ilan University: “The connection of the Jewish People to the Land has been in existence for more than 3,500 years. Judea and Samaria, the places where our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob walked, our forefathers David, Solomon, Isaiah and Jeremiah. **This is not a foreign land; this is the Land of our Forefathers...**”

There is no doubt that the prevailing view that the West Bank is not occupied serves as a major barrier to conflict resolution. The perception of the majority of

Jews in Israel and a significant segment of the political system – namely that the West Bank belongs exclusively to the Jewish people and is now liberated – leads to rejection of the notion of compromise on this land, to difficulties in leaving this territory, and to the feeling that the Jewish people are the only side that contributes tangibly to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see Magal, Bar-Tal, Oren and Halperin, in preparation, for extensive elaboration of this point).

In addition, public opinion polls indicate strong opposition to any attempt to recognize or teach the Palestinian narrative. For example, in a 2009 poll, a majority of the Jewish public (56%) opposed Israel taking even partial responsibility for the suffering caused to the Palestinians by the 1948 war, including, for example, the creation of the refugee problem, even if the Palestinians were to officially accept part of the responsibility for the 1948 events (Peace Index, June 2009). In addition, as can be seen in Figure 2, the majority of Israeli Jews oppose adopting a school curriculum that recognizes the Palestinian state and abandons the aspiration to regain parts of the homeland that are in the Palestinian state, even in the context of a peace agreement with the Palestinians and the establishment of a Palestinian state that is recognized by Israel.

Figure 2: Percentage of Israeli Jews opposed to adopting a school curriculum that recognizes the Palestinian state and to abandoning the aspiration to regain parts of the Jewish “homeland” that are in the Palestinian state



(Source: JIPP data – see <http://truman.huji.ac.il/polls.asp>)

In light of the common perception of the territories as Israeli land and the resistance to the Palestinian narrative, it is not surprising that most Israeli Jews oppose major Israeli withdrawal from the territories, oppose any compromise on Jerusalem, and oppose the return of even a small number of Palestinian refugees to Israel, despite the widespread Israeli agreement with the vague principle of the two-state solution (Bar-Tal, Halperin & Oren, 2010). They view the solution as one-sided, involving only Israeli concessions without significant contributions by the Palestinians to resolution of the conflict.

Image of the Arabs

While the change in beliefs regarding the goals in the conflict appear to be somewhat (partly) irreversible, changes in beliefs about the Arabs from the period of the peace process with Egypt and the Oslo Accords seem to be reversible. Since 2000, public opinion polls and political platforms have reflected the return of old perceptions regarding the Arabs and the Palestinians. First, as we indicated above, during the years 1977-2000, Israeli perception of the Arabs changed from a perception of them as a single homogeneous group united in their enmity to Israel into a more differentiated perception that distinguished among different Arab nations (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). As evidence of this change, it is possible to note the portrayal of friendly Arab countries, such as Egypt and Jordan, in the election platforms of the Israeli political parties during the 1990s. After 2000, the focus shifted again to the idea of one Muslim coalition that aims to destroy Israel (Oren, 2010). Often the tendency is to refer to a big homogeneous group—the “axis of evil.” Thus in a 2006 Joint Israeli-Palestinian Poll (JIPP) poll, 78% of respondents agreed with the statement: “The Muslims in the region will never accept the existence of the state of Israel.”

Second, there are indications that negative stereotyping of the Palestinians has become more common since 2000. For example, in 1997, 39% of Israeli Jewish respondents described the Palestinians as violent and 42% as dishonest; by the end of 2000, the figures were 68% and 51%, respectively. Similarly, in November 2000, 78% of the Jewish public agreed with the statement that Palestinians have little regard for human life and therefore persist in using violence despite the high number of their own casualties (Peace Index, November 2000). A recent study,

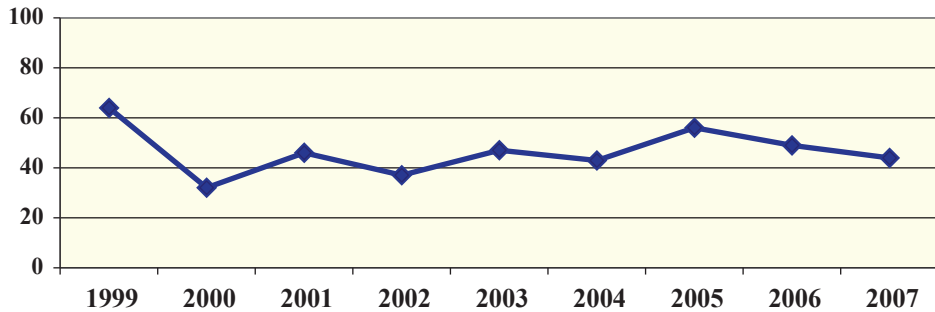
undertaken in 2008, presented similar findings: 77% of the respondents thought that the Arabs and the Palestinians have little regard for human life, and 79% agreed with the statement that dishonesty always characterizes the Palestinians and the Arabs (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2009).

In addition, while there was some tendency before the Oslo Accords (especially in Labor platforms and among Labor voters) to perceive Israeli actions in a more critical light and to recognize Israel as also responsible for the “political deadlock” in Arab-Israeli relations, since 2000 Arabs are again unanimously blamed for the continuation of the conflict and for intransigently rejecting a peaceful resolution. For example, the 2003 Labor platform states that “the [Israeli] hopes for ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were dashed as a result of the waves of hatred, incitement, extreme violence, and terror unleashed on Israel under the patronage of the Palestinian Authority....”

This theme is expressed more strongly in the 2009 Likud platform: “We do not believe that the Palestinians are ready for the historic compromise that will end the conflict. There is no evidence that the Palestinians are ready to accept even the minimal demands that are demanded of any Israeli leader. They have rejected unprecedented concessions that we, the Israelis, proposed eight years ago, and their stance has neither changed nor been moderated to date.” Netanyahu repeated this idea in his June 2009 speech at Bar-Ilan University: “Why has the conflict been going on for over 60 years?... The simple truth is that the root of the conflict has been and remains the refusal to recognize the right of the Jewish People to its own state in its historical homeland... The closer we get to a peace agreement with them, the more they are distancing themselves from peace. They raise new demands. They are not showing us that they want to end the conflict... With Hamas in the south and Hezbollah in the north, they keep on saying that they want to ‘liberate’ Ashkelon in the south and Haifa and Tiberias. Even the moderates among the Palestinians are not ready to say the simplest things: The State of Israel is the national homeland of the Jewish People and will remain so.”

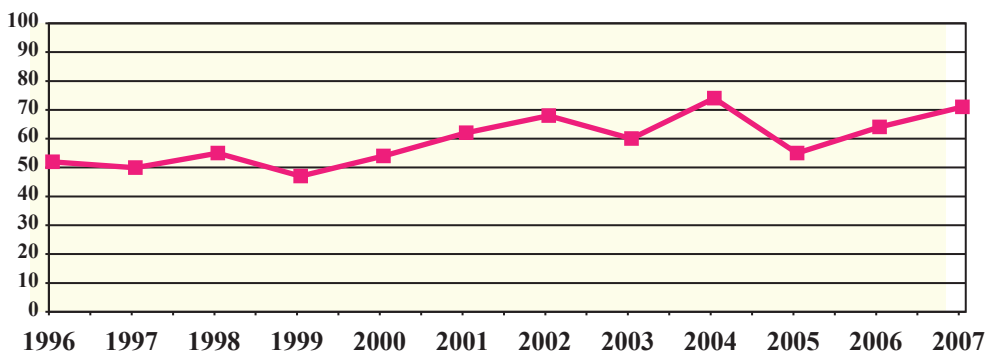
Public opinion polls indicate that most Israelis share these sentiments: in 2007 only 44% of Israeli Jews believed that the majority of Palestinians want peace, compared to 64% who thought so in 1999 (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of Israeli Jews who believe that most Palestinians want peace



Accordingly, public opinion polls indicate an increase in the percentage of respondents who think that the ultimate goal of the Arabs is to eradicate the state of Israel, from 50% who thought so in 1997 to 71% who thought so in 2009 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Percentage of Israeli Jews who think that the ultimate goal of the Arabs is to eradicate the state of Israel, 1993-2007



Again, these shared negative beliefs about the Palestinians and the high level of mistrust can explain why Israelis react negatively to the idea of a Palestinian state and do not support most proposals to compromise with them.

Self-victimization

Since 2000 there has also been a return of old perceptions of victimhood within Israeli society. This feeling emerged in the wake of the second *Intifada*. As noted, the majority of Israeli Jews blamed the Palestinians for the eruption of the violence and thought that the Palestinians were entirely – or almost entirely – responsible for the deterioration in relations between them and the Israelis (Bar-Tal & Sharvit, 2008). This was not, however, the only cause of the deep feeling of victimization that seized most Israeli Jews. This feeling was intensified by the repeated suicide-bombing attacks, which claimed many Jewish lives, most of them civilian. A feeling of victimization became pervasive among Israeli Jews because every attack against them was perceived as an act of terrorism and received immense exposure as such in the media (Wolfsfeld & Dajani, 2003).

Contemporary examples of this belief include the following: in a nationwide representative sample we conducted in November 2007, 80.8% of Jewish Israelis agreed with the statement that “Despite Israel’s desire for peace, the Arabs have repeatedly imposed war” (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2009). More specifically, in a survey poll taken in August 2008, 61% of the Jews in Israel expressed at least some agreement with the position that throughout the years of conflict, Israel has been the victim while the Arabs and the Palestinians have been the perpetrators (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori and Gundar, 2009).

In their speeches Israeli politicians emphasize the suffering of Israeli civilians while portraying the Palestinian civilian casualties as victims of the Palestinian leadership’s acts. An example of this view can be found in Olmert’s speech of 17 January 2009, following the Gaza War that resulted in the death of 1166 Palestinians, many of them civilians: “Israel, which withdrew from the Gaza Strip down to the last millimeter at the end of 2005 – with no intention of returning – found itself under a barrage of missiles. Hamas violently took control of the Gaza Strip and began attacking the communities in the South more intensely. Hamas’s methods are incomprehensible. It placed its military system in crowded residential neighborhoods, operated within a civilian population that served as a human shield, and operated under the cover of mosques, schools, and hospitals, while making the Palestinian population a hostage to its terrorist activities, with the understanding that Israel – as a country with high moral standards – would not act... I also wish to say something to the people of Gaza: even before the military

operation began, and during it, I appealed to you. We do not hate you; we did not want and do not want to harm you. We wanted to defend our children, their parents, their families. We feel the pain of every Palestinian child and family member who fell victim to the cruel reality created by Hamas, which transformed you into victims.”

In this sense Israel itself becomes a victim of the Palestinian leadership that “forces” Israel to kill Palestinians. An old example of this perspective can be found in a quote that is attributed to former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir when she approached Anwar Sadat, the Egyptian president: “We can forgive you for killing our sons. But we will never forgive you for making us kill yours.”

Victimization beliefs within Israeli society expand beyond the Arab-Israeli relationship into the perception of Israel as a victim of a hostile world, including western states and international organizations such as the UN. In a survey conducted in November 2007, 88.6% of Israeli Jews agreed that “the Jewish people have been under existential threat throughout history” (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2009). The Israeli leadership propagates this view effectively. An example is the speech of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2009: “We will not allow the Holocaust deniers to carry out another Holocaust against the Jewish people. This is the supreme duty of the state of Israel. This is my supreme duty as Prime Minister of Israel.... The world sounds a weak voice against those who advocate erasing Israel” (*Haaretz*, 21 April 2009).

The views of the public and the leadership described above reflect the well-entrenched siege mentality that characterizes Israeli Jewish society. Two thousand years of Diaspora – viewed as one long period of persecutions, culminating with the Holocaust as national trauma – have left their mark on the collective psyche. The belief that the whole world is against us is well connected to the ideological beliefs supporting the continuation of the conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007b; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992).

Positive self-image of military and moral superiority

During the years 2000-2009, there was also a reinforcement of positive beliefs regarding Israel’s military superiority over the Arabs. For example, in 1993, 58% of Israeli Jews believed that Israel had the ability to wage war successfully against

all of the Arab states. This percentage dropped to 48% in 2000, and then rose to 67% in 2004 and to 72% in 2005.

The confidence in Israeli superiority over the Palestinians and Israel's ability to cope with the second *Intifada* is also very high. For example, in an October 2007 survey, 70% believed that if the current situation continues, Israeli society could hold out longer in terms of its internal fortitude than the Palestinian society. Similarly, 63% assessed that currently, Israeli society is in better shape than Palestinian society (Peace Index, October 2007). In addition, in a June 2009 JIPP survey, 42% thought that Israeli society will be able to endure the price toll that the conflict with the Palestinians imposes on it "forever," 17% thought that Israel will be able to endure it for "several more decades," and 15% for "another 10 years."

This growing confidence in Israeli society's resilience and strength may decrease the motivation of Israelis to end the conflict in the near future because these beliefs show that Israel can make do with a status-quo of enduring the protracted conflict.

The view about military strength is complemented by the self-image of being moral. The Israeli prime minister, the president, and the chief of staff have emphasized in public speeches their views that the Israeli Army is "the most moral army in the world" (see for example, an interview with Israeli Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, *Haaretz*, 5 April 2009).

The public seems to hold similar beliefs. For example, a majority of the Jewish public (64%) discounts the testimonies of soldiers who took part in the 2009 Gaza War that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) forces harmed, on orders, Palestinian civilians and structures (Peace Index, March 2009).

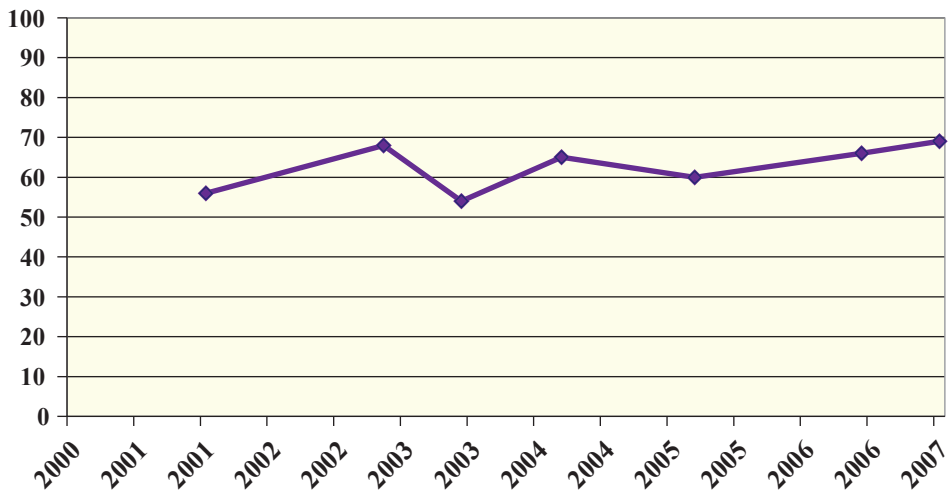
Peace beliefs

Since 2000 there have been many indications that peace beliefs have become less central in Israeli society. For example, in contrast to previous years, peace is seldom mentioned in the 2003, 2006, and 2009 Likud and Labor election platforms, while the third largest party in the 2009 Israeli parliament, Israel Beytenu, explicitly declares in its platform that peace is not its main goal, and

that it is secondary to other goals, such as security and the goal of Israel as a Jewish state.

In addition, as violence erupted in 2000, the Israelis began to express pessimism about the chances of resolving the conflict. For example, with regards to the chances of peace, a survey by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) shows a decrease in the degree of optimism, and an increase in the degree of pessimism – from 56% in 2001 who thought that it is not possible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians to 69% in 2007 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Percentage of the Israeli Jews thinking that it is not possible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians

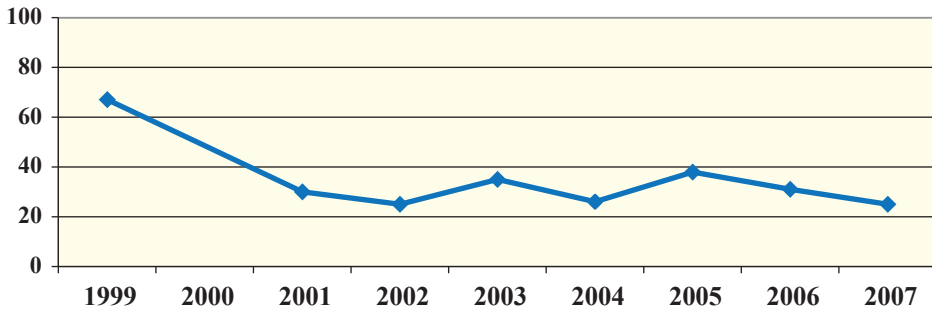


Pessimistic views about the possibility of achieving peace have also been voiced in recent years in public interviews with Israeli decision makers and policy-makers. For example, Uzi Arad, Netanyahu’s national security adviser, said in a July 2009 interview, “It will be difficult to reach a true Israeli-Palestinian agreement that does away with the bulk of the conflict. I don’t see that in the coming years it will be possible to forge that different reality, which so many Israelis want.”

Indeed, most Israeli Jews are pessimistic not only about the chances of reaching an agreement with the Palestinians but also regarding the chances that

such an agreement (if signed) would put an end to the conflict. As can be seen in Figure 6, public surveys indicate that after the onset of the *Intifada* in 2000, the percentage of Israeli Jews believing that peace treaties would bring an end to the conflict dropped sharply from 67% in 1997 to 25% in 2007.

Figure 6: Percentage of Israeli Jews who believe that a peace treaty with the Palestinians will not put an end to the Israeli-Arab conflict



(Source: Ben-Meir, 2008 p. 73.)

Again, with such pessimism about the chances for peace, it is not surprising that Israeli polls indicate public resistance to the various proposals (including Israeli ones) to end the conflict (Bar-Tal, Halperin & Oren, 2010).

The above description corresponds to the findings obtained in a study of 100 in-depth interviews carried out in 2003 (November 2002 – June 2003) about views of the Israeli-Arab conflict. The study was carried out among individuals across the political and socio-economic spectrum of Israeli Jewish society who were at least 17 years old in 1967 (Raviv, Bar-Tal & Arviv-Abromovich, in preparation). In general, the study shows that the ethos of conflict is well entrenched among the older members of Israeli Jewish society, independent of their self-categorization as doves or hawks. Many of them believe that Jews have the exclusive rights to all of the territories and that the West Bank was liberated in the 1967 war. Some of the doves do, however, recognize the rights of the Palestinians to the same land. Nevertheless, while the great majority of the interviewees realize that the idea of “Greater Israel” is unrealistic and accept the idea of dividing the land

between the two nations, they also object to complete dismantling of the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories; a majority of them agree that only isolated settlements should be dismantled. A majority of them also view Jerusalem as the united capital of the State of Israel and object to its division. At the same time, almost all of the interviewees, including many who define themselves as doves, express extreme suspicion regarding the intentions of the Arabs in general, and of the Palestinians in particular, and view them in a negative light. They do not believe that the desired peace will be achieved, and they believe that this is because of the characteristics and aspirations of the Palestinians. They reject almost unanimously the right of return of the Palestinian refugees, believing that this act will lead to the destruction of the Jewish state.

Circumstantial Conflict-Supporting Beliefs

In addition to the general ideological beliefs that obstruct possible progress with regard to peacemaking, there are also circumstantial conflict-supporting beliefs. They surface under specific conditions within the general framework of the conflict. In this section we will refer to two main circumstantial beliefs within Israeli society: that the Palestinian leaders lack the desire and power to implement a potential peace agreement with Israel, and that there is no external pressure on Israel to end the conflict.

The belief that the Palestinian leader is not a partner for peace surfaced already during the years 2000-2004 with regard to the former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. He was portrayed as unwilling to end the conflict with Israel and hence as “irrelevant.” The Israeli public accepted this description as credible. For example, in a 2001 survey, 70 percent of the respondents held that Arafat personally lacked the desire, or the capability, to sign an agreement ending the conflict with Israel, even if Israel agreed to all of his demands (Peace Index, May 2001).

Since the ascendance of Abu Mazen to the presidency of the Palestinian Authority after the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004, the Israeli leadership and the mass media have also portrayed him as unable and unwilling to implement a potential peace agreement with Israel. A recent interview with Uzi Arad exemplifies that perspective: “Everyone with eyes sees that there is a failure of

Palestinian leadership. There is no Palestinian Sadat. There is no Palestinian Mandela. Abu Mazen is not vulgar like Arafat, and not militant and extreme like Hamas. There could be worse than him. But even in him I do not discern the interest or the will to reach the end of the conflict with Israel.”

The Israeli public again shares this view. For example, in a September 2005 JIPP survey, 83% thought that Abu Mazen is not strong enough to convince the Palestinians to accept a compromise settlement with Israel. Also, while 55% of the Jews in Israel believed that the Palestinian Authority under Abu Mazen’s leadership desires peace, a large majority of 71% believed that it is impossible to reach a peace settlement with the Palestinians without Hamas’s consent. (Peace Index, November, 2007).

The belief that there is no partner on the Palestinian side is accompanied by circumstantial beliefs that no external pressure should be exercised on Israel to end the conflict. The latter societal belief was prevalent at least until the ascendance of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States. For example, a survey conducted in November 2004 by the Tami Steinmetz Center indicates that 46% think that there is quite a low or a very low chance that if Israel ignores the ruling of the International Court of Justice in The Hague about the legality of the separation fence and refrains from applying the Geneva Convention to the territories, economic sanctions will be imposed on it similar to those that were imposed on South Africa because of the apartheid regime. Only 37% feared that there is quite a high or a very high chance that such sanctions will be imposed on Israel.

These beliefs decrease Israeli motivation to reach an agreement. Indeed, 49% say that if a peace treaty entails difficult concessions, it is preferable to maintain the existing situation, compared to 43% who prefer an agreement even if its price involves difficult concessions (Peace Index, March 2008).

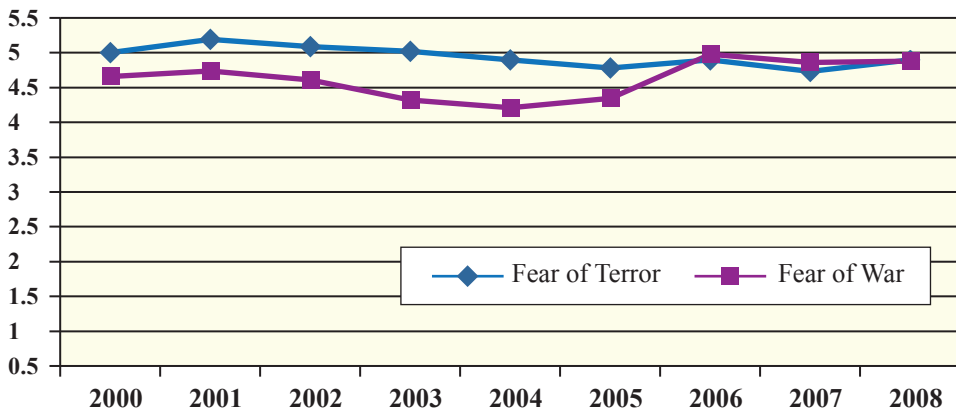
Emotional Barriers in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Levels of Fear in the Israeli Society: As far back as the early 1960s, surveys among Jewish Israelis found high levels of fear (Antonovsky & Arian, 1972), and fear has continued to dominate the Israeli Jewish public opinion (Arian, 1998; Bar-Tal, 2001). More recently, after the outbreak of the second *Intifada* in the

year 2000, the individual fear among Israeli Jews increased dramatically (Bar-Tal & Sharvit, 2008; Ben-Dor, Canetti-Nisim & Halperin, 2007). For example, while in the late 1990s (1999), only 58% of Israeli Jews reported that they were afraid or very afraid that they or their family members would be hurt by terror, in 2002 almost all Israelis (92%) felt the same way (Arian, 2002). Even in 2004, after the large wave of terror receded, 80.4% of Israeli Jews said that they felt afraid to board a bus and 59.8% said that they fear being around crowds or in public places (Ben-Simon, 2004).

By and large, as can be seen from the graph below (Figure 7), levels of fear of future war and levels of fear of terror among Jews in Israel were relatively high and stable throughout the last decade (Ben-Dor & Canetti, 2009). On a scale of 1 (low fear) to 6 (high fear), levels of fear from terror did not drop below 4.78 even when the frequency of terrorist attacks dropped dramatically. These results suggest that since the year 2000, fear is a stable and central psychological characteristic of the entire Jewish society in Israel.

Figure 7: Levels of Fear of Terror and of Future War Among Jews in Israel



(Source: Ben-Dor & Canetti, 2009)

In recent years, two additional sources of fear have been added to the assortment of individual fears among Israelis. Almost half of the Jews in Israel (39.9% in 2006 and 40.6% in 2007) expressed a high or very high fear of non-conventional

attack (nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons) that would hurt them or their relatives (Ben-Dor et al., 2007). In addition, mainly after the second Lebanon war and the ongoing missile attacks on Sderot, many Israeli Jews (50.6% in 2006) have said that they are afraid that they or their relatives will be hurt by missiles (Hall, Hobfoll, Canetti-Nisim, Johnson, Palmieri & Galea, 2007).

On the collective level, surveys conducted in the last decade found that a large majority of Israeli Jews still believe that ongoing terrorist attacks might cause a strategic, and even existential, threat to the state of Israel (www.nssc.haifa.ac.il). In 2002, 85.5% of Israelis expressed this feeling, 86.6% in 2002, and 83% in 2006 (Ben-Dor et al., 2007). In addition, in 2006, 80% of the Israeli Jewish public expressed high levels of fear from a nuclear attack by Iran that would destroy the State of Israel (Peace Index, August, 2006). Furthermore, over a quarter of the Israeli public have recently (2003-2005) reported high levels of fear from the possibility that Arabs would drive all Jewish Israelis to the sea (www.nssc.haifa.ac.il). Finally, a national survey conducted in March 2008 by the Anti-Defamation League shows that 82% of Jewish youngsters (age 15-18) and 77% of Jewish adults (above 18) believe that Israel faces either a significant threat or a threat of extermination. This study also showed that 39% of youngsters and 35% of adults believe that there is either a significant likelihood or certain likelihood of another Jewish Holocaust in the future (Ynet, April 30, 2008).

Levels of Hatred in Israeli Society: Hatred is less common than fear within Israeli society, but its potential effects are no less destructive. In two surveys that were conducted in 2004-2005, Kupermintz and his colleagues (Kupermintz., Rosen., Husisi & Salomon, 2007) found that around one third (31.9% in 2004 and 38.4% in 2005) of Jewish youth in Israel report high levels of hatred towards Arabs. Interestingly, similar results were found in an adult survey based on a nationwide representative sample of Jews in Israel, in which 36.5% of the sample reported medium-high levels of hatred towards Palestinians (Halperin, 2010). Surprisingly, these medium levels of hatred remained stable and did not increase dramatically, even following periods of conflict escalation and mutual fighting. To illustrate, in a nationwide survey conducted immediately after the Lebanon war, 35.6% of Israelis reported high levels of hatred towards Palestinians (Halperin, Canetti-Nisim & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2009). Similarly, in a survey that was conducted

during the last war in Gaza, only 32.7% of Jews in Israel reported high levels of hatred towards Palestinians (See Halperin & Gross, 2010).

Despite the medium levels of hatred found among Jews in Israel, hatred is considered to be one of the most destructive emotions and one of the most powerful driving forces of the conflict (see: Halperin, 2008). The relatively low frequency of it, as found in public opinion polls, can be explained by its illegitimate nature. Specifically, hatred is considered a politically incorrect emotion, and thus, the results of public opinion polls that seek to assess levels of hatred in a certain society might be biased and inaccurate. Hence, it was not too surprising to find that 63.9% of Jews in Israel expressed high levels of hatred towards Palestinians, when an implicit (rather than explicit) measure of hatred was used (see: Halperin & Canetti-Nisim, 2008).

Implications of the Reviewed Barriers

First, we would like to point out that although only one study, which was carried in the summer of 2008, was designed with the intention of testing the proposed model, a number of studies that were performed over the years have produced results that validate certain parts of the general model. Most of these studies show that the holding of particular sets of societal beliefs that support conflict correlates with low levels of openness and adherence to uncompromising attitudes, which hinder the peace process. There are also studies that show that the sharing of certain emotions is related to rejectionist positions. Because of space limitation, we will not be able to review these studies.³

Nonetheless, we recently conducted a study that attempted to validate the process model described above using a correlative large-scale design (Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2009). The study was based on phone interviews with 501 adults, comprising a representative sample of Israeli Jewish society. The survey included scales that captured representation of the potential socio-psychological barriers presented in the model, i.e., (1) general worldviews (values, implicit

³ See Bar-Tal, Schori, Chernyak-Hai & Gundar, 2009; Bar-Tal, Raviv, Raviv & Dgani-Hirsch, 2009; Halperin, Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut & Drori, 2008; Gayer, Landman, Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2009; Halperin, 2008, 2010; Hammack, Pilecki, Caspi, Strauss & Ruber, Nicol, 2008; Maoz & Eidelson, 2007; Maoz & McCauley, 2005, 2009; Reifen., Federico & Halperin, 2008; Schori, Klar & Roccas, 2009; Sylvan & Nadler, 2005.

theories about groups, authoritarianism, and political orientation); (2) conflict-supporting societal beliefs, including specific long-term beliefs (self-perception of collective victimhood of the in-group and de-legitimization of the rival group) and circumstantial beliefs about the current situation of the conflict; and (3) negative lasting emotions. As dependent variables (i.e., the results of the barriers), openness to information about the conflict and support for compromises for peace were assessed.

Analysis of the results confirmed the basic patterns proposed in the theoretical model presented. First, the results showed that the Israeli public expressed low levels of support for compromises ($m=2.60$) and low to medium levels of openness to new positive information that is related to the conflict ($m=3.28$).⁴ On the other hand, levels of self-victimhood ($m=4.33$) and de-legitimization of the Palestinians ($m=4.65$) were relatively high. Interestingly, levels of negative emotions towards Palestinians (3.57) and support for the belief that time is on Israel's side (3.06) were not very high.

More importantly, the general worldviews that were assessed in the study served to decrease the levels of openness to conflict-related information and of support for compromise, mainly because of conflict-supporting societal beliefs. Specifically, people who accept entity theory about groups and those with a predisposition to support authoritarian personalities tended to de-legitimize the Palestinians and, in turn, to be less open to new information and less supportive of compromise. These two personality characteristics (i.e., entity theory and authoritarianism), combined with a tendency towards conformist-traditionalist values, also led to higher levels of perceived victimhood, which in turn stimulated the same process of closed-mindedness and rejection of compromise.

Interestingly, those who adhered to the circumstantial belief that time is on Israel's side and those who experienced relatively high levels of negative emotions (e.g., fear, hatred, and anger) towards the Palestinians were also less open to new information about the conflict or about the Palestinians. In addition, the belief that time is on the Israeli side also led Israelis to be less supportive of making compromises for peace.

⁴ All items were assessed on a scale of 1 (totally disagree) to 6 (fully agree).

Conclusions

Conflicts are an inseparable part of human relations, including intergroup relations. Groups as individuals have contradictory goals and interests, which ignite the conflicts. There is no doubt that some disagreements are very deep and hard to resolve because human beings do not readily relinquish resources, control, power, or prestige. But the great difficulty in resolving conflicts peacefully lies also with the socio-psychological barriers that accompany many of the intergroup conflicts.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a prototypical longstanding conflict that resists peaceful resolution. Almost since its beginning, various attempts have been made, using a variety of formulas, and all were rejected either by one of the sides or by both sides. The 1990s witnessed a systematic and intensive attempt that looked as if both sides were nearing settlement, but these attempts did not yield the desired solution. We attribute these failures mostly to the barriers, which are so entrenched in both societies that they are very difficult to overcome within a few years, after their having been constructed, crystallized, established, fed, and extended throughout decades of conflict.

In this chapter we focused on the socio-psychological barriers that have plagued Jewish society within Israel. This focus does not imply that socio-psychological barriers do not operate on the Palestinian side. We focus on Israeli Jewish society, showing that Jews in Israel have developed a well-entrenched national ideology that provides solidly grounded arguments for leaving the current situation as it is. The foundations of the current ideology lie with Zionism and Judaism and served well the initial return of Jews to their homeland and the eventual establishment of the state. The 1967 war, with the occupation of new territories and with its unintended results, led to reconstruction of the ideology that aimed to present a new view regarding the situation that emerged. Basically, this ideology reformulated the ethos of conflict that dominated Jewish society prior to the 1967 war. In principle, it provided a system of organized societal beliefs that came to justify holding the occupied territories for various reasons – religious, historical, national, and security-based. In addition, these beliefs de-legitimized the Palestinians, negated their national identity, delegated responsibility to them for continuation of the conflict, and portrayed them as a threat. All this stood in

contrast to their glorification of the Jews and to their own deep sense of being the victims in this conflict.

These ideological societal beliefs of ethos of conflict were transmitted through channels of communication and societal institutions. Over the years, Jewish society in Israel has undergone a major change. Nevertheless, many of the core societal beliefs of ethos of conflict and collective memory have remained dominant. This ideological system is reflected in the well-established view of a majority of Israeli Jews that only they are conceding territories and commodities in favor of settling the conflict. This means that the Israeli point of departure, even for many of those who favor settling the Israeli-Palestinian conflict peacefully, is that the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including their resources, belong to the Jewish nation and that Jews are the only side that contributes to peacemaking. This view explains well the difficulty, reluctance, and refusal of some to withdraw from the occupied territories, to divide Jerusalem, and to dismantle the Jewish settlements. No nation yields its territory willingly, and the growing readiness of Israeli Jews to withdraw from at least some of the territories is mainly a result of the insight that keeping them is very costly for the Jewish nation and for the State of Israel.

The ideological conflict-supporting beliefs are accompanied by circumstantial conflict-supporting beliefs, which appear under various circumstances at various periods of time. These beliefs support and provide additional concrete rationales for postponing the peace process. These two sets of beliefs constitute a coherent system with a consistent structure and a teleological basis that inhibits peacemaking. This system of beliefs is rigid as a result of structural and motivational factors and is resistant to change. Moreover, this system is often supported by general worldviews that provide a conservative outlook on the world. In addition, it should be noted that this system of beliefs is intertwined with, and related to, the emotional system that is an inseparable part of the socio-psychological repertoire.

The described socio-psychological barriers greatly affect the information-processing systems of members of society, as individuals and as a collective. They lead to a selective, biased, and distorted flow of information, which in essence prevents the acceptance and internalization of alternative information that can shed light on the conflict, the rival, one's own society, or the history of

the conflict, in a way that might contradict the ideological beliefs and advance new ideas about the necessity of peacemaking.

We would like to end our paper with a question: how do we overcome the socio-psychological barriers in order to move societies immersed in an intractable conflict towards an era of peacemaking? We realize that it is easier to elucidate and explain the socio-psychological barriers than it is to respond to this question with practical approaches. Nevertheless, we will try to outline a short conceptual response that can serve as a basis for developing more comprehensive thoughts.

We suggest that flexibility usually results from the appearance of a new idea (or ideas) that is inconsistent with the heretofore-held beliefs and attitudes and therefore creates some kind of tension, dilemma, or even internal conflict that might stimulate people to move away from their basic position and look for alternative ideas (e.g., Abelson, Aronson, McGuire, Newcomb, Rosenberg & Tannenbaum, 1968; Bartunek, 1993; Festinger, 1957; Kruglanski, 1989). In the case of our conflict, the new idea (a belief), which we call an “instigating belief,” contradicts the previously strongly held beliefs that there is a need to continue the conflict. We suggest that the instigating belief that fuels the motivation towards flexibility is based upon recognition of the incompatibility between the desired future, on the one hand, and the emergent future, the current state, and/or the perceived past, on the other hand. Thus the instigating belief provides motivation to re-evaluate the previously held beliefs and, in fact, leads to flexibility with respect to the possible adoption of alternative beliefs. The instigating belief or beliefs may appear spontaneously in the minds of people and not under any special circumstances, but usually they come to mind as a result of external conditions that force a re-evaluation of the previously held conflict-supporting repertoire (see the comprehensive analysis of the conception in Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2010).

Specifically, the realization that facilitates openness to alternative information supporting peace processes is that the costs of continuing the conflict exceed the costs of compromise in peacemaking. It is also known that recognition of the costs is weighed more heavily than recognition of the possible gains resulting from peacemaking (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). This principle can be easily applied to the case of those parts of Jewish Israeli society that accept the principle of a two-state solution mainly because of “the demographic threat,” which suggests that the much higher rate of population growth of the Palestinian communities

in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority will soon affect the population balance and proportionality between the two largest ethno-religious communities in the region and, as such, is expected to lead to the creation of a Palestinian majority within the next few decades (Gayer, Landman, Halperin & Bar-Tal, 2009; Soffer 2008). This realization led to the relaxation of attitudes among known ideological hawks such as former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and former Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and to their acceptance of alternative beliefs that support considerable compromises.

Undoubtedly, there are other arguments and processes that lead under certain conditions to a relaxation of attitudes that, in turn, could later lead to the acceptance of beliefs that support peacemaking and even reconciliation. In any event, these processes, as indicated, almost always begin with a minority and, in some cases, successfully spread throughout society until the ethos of peace becomes dominant. We must always remember that human beings are the ones who decide to launch bloody conflicts and that they must also, therefore, be the ones to decide to initiate and finalize a peace process.

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