Chapter 9

The Geopolitical Environment as a Barrier to Resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

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There have been many political and intellectual attempts to explain the failure of the Oslo Peace Process, to characterize the barriers it faced, and to propose future solutions. The goal of this chapter is to try to explain the complexity of the geopolitical environment in which Israel operates and to show how this environment becomes a significant barrier the moment Israeli leadership begins deliberating whether to undertake risks towards settlement of the conflict. The focus on this barrier does not imply that it is the only or the principal barrier to settlement of the conflict in our region. At the same time, there is no doubt that this is a central and important barrier, and if Israel is not able to handle its complexity, it is doubtful that the peace process can be advanced.

Barriers to Conflict Resolution

A barrier is a fundamental factor that prevents resolution of a conflict or makes its resolution more difficult even if the parties involved have an interest in such resolution. One of the accepted classifications of these barriers is that of Mnookin and Ross (1995), who defined three principal categories:

1. Strategic and tactical barriers resulting from the parties' efforts to maximize their own benefits or their share in a distributive peace agreement;

2. Psychological barriers reflecting cognitive and motivational processes and various perceptual and judgmental biases, which prevent the parties from

making the changes to their positions and beliefs that are necessary in order to reach agreement;

3. Additional barriers, including structural, organizational, and internal institutional ones, which create constraints that prevent agreement.

In the cognitive sense, barriers are the fundamental factors that restrict acquisition of the knowledge needed to resolve the conflict. This knowledge requires changing the conceptual interpretive framework through which one understands reality. It also requires constructing the tools necessary for this changed reality, in accordance with defined political objectives. In this sense, barriers are, in fact, a type of existing knowledge that does not change and permanently frames perception. Barriers "lock" the existing base of knowledge regarding the conflict and do not allow for recognition of new information or for changes that could alter this base. The existing knowledge is informed by perceptions and conceptions regarding the regional environment of the conflict, by ideology, by perception of the other, by levels of trust between the parties, and by social and political structures that shape the "truth regime" of society's mainstream and define its "truth agents" (Foucault, 1980).

The discourse on strategic environment as a barrier to conflict resolution includes the physical elements of the area of conflict and the conceptual and perceptual elements related to perception of the threat involved, elements that have their origin in the violent history of the conflict and in the lack of trust between the parties.

In this chapter, I seek to focus on the geostrategic environment in which Israel operates and comes face-to-face with the challenges to peace and the characteristics of the dispute. Indeed, the characteristics of both the environment and the dispute shape the strategic threat factors in the Israeli security perception in a way that intensifies the identification of risks on the one hand, as well as the demand for security guarantees (territory, early warning, airspace, etc.) on the other. While the agents of threat make it difficult for any Israeli leadership to take security risks that involve making the concessions necessary to resolve the conflict, safety factors and security guarantees could help in dealing with potential risks.

Characteristics of the Geostrategic Environment and of the Confrontation as a Barrier to Resolution of the Conflict

Since its establishment, Israel has operated in a hostile and dangerous environment that produces strategic and security challenges, including existential and security threats (Michael, 2009). Peace processes in this environment are primarily intended to deal with these challenges in a way that would reduce or eliminate them completely. It is only natural that peace processes are perceived within Israel as undesirable and dangerous if they require territorial concessions, loss of control over airspace and strategic spots, and reduced intelligence capabilities.

Israel's sense of insecurity is a result of its modest geographical dimensions and its existence as a Jewish-western entity struggling for legitimacy in the heart of the surrounding Muslim-Arab region. "We are always alone," stated Uzi Arad, National Security Advisor.[93] Despite the widely-held assumption within the collective Jewish consciousness that the intensity of the existential threat has decreased since the signing of the peace treaty with Egypt, it would be difficult to make the claim that the Jewish majority in Israel feels welcome and safe in the region.

The peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan are first order strategic assets for Israel, and they have the potential to improve its security in the region significantly. These agreements, however, have turned into a cold and not necessarily stable peace because of the absence of conditions necessary for stable peace: full mutual satisfaction; close cooperation; political, economic, and social normalization; and the founding of institutional partnerships and social learning processes (Kacowicz & Bar-Siman-Tov, 2002). Given the absence of a stable peace, there are concerns – albeit low-level – that the conflict could be renewed.

The disintegration of the Palestinian Authority into two separate geographical, political, and religious entities (the Gaza Strip and the West Bank) following

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[93] See, in this context, the remarks of National Security Advisor Uzi Arad in an interview with Ari Shavit (*Haaretz*, 9 July 2009):

> "To my regret, we have so far been unable to bring about Arab acceptance of our right to exist. Arab and Muslim refusal to recognize Israel's legitimacy is at times concealed and opaque and at times overt and violent, but it is constant. I have never met an Arab figurehead who can say calmly and clearly that he or she accepts Israel's right to exist in the true historical and recognitory sense. It will therefore be difficult to reach a genuine Israeli-Palestinian agreement that does away with the conflict for the most part. I do not foresee the possibility of creating that other reality for which so many Israelis long in the near future.

Hamas's violent takeover of the Gaza Strip in June 2007 and Israel's unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip in August-September 2005 intensified Israeli lack of trust in Palestinians and Israeli concerns about deteriorating security in the event of additional withdrawals from the West Bank. The escalation of Hamas's activities resulted in Operation "Cast Lead" (January 2009), which accurately reflects the characteristics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, Israel has for two decades now been at the international forefront of modern warfare, which is low-intensity asymmetric war between an organized, regular army of a political entity and terrorist or guerilla organizations operating on behalf of the local population.

The reality that Israel has faced over the past two decades, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, generates threats and challenges to Israeli society and leadership – real, exaggerated, or imagined – that are of the utmost significance. In the broad historical context, these threats are perceived as another layer in the persecution of the Jewish people and the threat to its existence. The memory of the Holocaust and awareness of the struggle for independence (the War of Independence and the establishment of the state under circumstances of a war imposed on Israel) resurface every time there is a security crisis such as a violent confrontation with the Palestinians or an Iranian nuclear threat.[94] International criticism of Israel is often perceived as an expression of anti-Semitism, and the overall feeling is that Israel's struggle for independence continues,[95] and that Israel is still struggling for its very existence as the state of the Jewish nation within a hostile region and an international community that ignores the hardships Israel faces.

The threats are a key component of the society's "truth regime," which sets the parameters of the public and political discourse that informs the awareness of threats. In actual fact, this is a closed loop that feeds itself spirally and increases awareness of the threat. The "truth regime" of a society is determined by its "truth agents." According to Michel Foucault, these "truth agents" are perceived

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[94] Regarding the intensity of the Iranian threat in Israeli consciousness, see the remarks of National Security Advisor Uzi Arad in an interview with Ari Shavit (*Haaretz*, 9 July 2009): "If Iran goes nuclear, anything that might be achieved with the Palestinians will be washed away in a powerful current and eliminated overnight."

[95] In this context, see the remarks of Chief of Staff Ya'alon, regarding the Al-Aqsa Intifada as the continuation of the War of Independence.

by society as epistemological authorities and as the sentries responsible for designing the "truth regime" (Mills, 2005; Foucault, 1980).

When the boundaries of the discourse are sealed, it is not possible to absorb new information and, therefore, critical thinking about the existing consciousness does not develop. In such closed informational circumstances consciousness becomes fixed in a way that freezes existing social and power structures, and these in turn freeze the perception of threat, the perception of response to the threat, and the strategic doctrines. Increased awareness of threats makes it harder for Israeli leadership to take risks. It also limits the leaders' ability to deal with the military's demands for strong and substantive security guarantees or to secure public legitimacy for political steps perceived as too risky in terms of security.

Given that awareness of a threat inevitably creates a sense of insecurity, even existential fear, security considerations naturally receive priority: "a state of mutual armament is more security than a state of mutual peace" (Uzi Arad, *Haaretz*, July 2009). In the Israeli case, security considerations are given priority even in a process aimed at pursuit of peace because where there is a developed awareness of security, peace agreements are perceived as a means to improve the security reality and reduce threats. The Oslo Accords are a clear example of this. Because the security component of peacemaking becomes more and more significant, the public tends to see the security apparatus as an authoritative source on questions involving uncertainty and risk.

The military echelon, which is the most significant component of the security apparatus, is perceived by the public and the political leadership as professional and objective on all matters involving the security aspects of a political process. Under circumstances of enhanced awareness of threat, when the sense of security is shaky, a clear priority will be granted to military-security considerations. "Political priorities receive greater consideration when there is a more pronounced sense of security, whereas military priorities will dictate decisions at the strategic [military] level when circumstances are reversed…." (Luttwak, 2002: 189).

This reality gives rise to a "value complexity" barrier.[96] The value of security clashes with the value of peace, and the necessity of choosing between them – or

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[96] Regarding the value complexity involved in transition from war to peace, see Bar-Siman-Tov, Y. (1996). *The Transition from War to Peace – The Complexity of Decisionmaking: The Israeli Case*. Tel Aviv: Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, Tel Aviv University (Hebrew).

ranking them within a hierarchy of values – is very difficult. Placing the value of peace over the value of security requires a substantive change in perception of the threat. Given the complex security environment in which Israel operates, including a confrontation such as the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation, it is very difficult to change the threat perception. The value of security, therefore, continues to outrank the value of peace. The military, as the foremost representative of the value of security, becomes the highest valued and most authoritative entity in the eyes of the public.

Circumstances that involve a security threat also serve to shake public trust in the other side and in its willingness to honor the peace agreement, which undermines the will to make concessions (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2000). This concern generates stringent security demands, including strong security guarantees and international assurances that the agreement will be monitored and enforced. Under such circumstances, the need to minimize losses obligates the political player to adopt a suspicious attitude towards the other side. A suspicious attitude and circumstances of uncertainty intensify the syndrome of "risk aversion" and undercut the ability to identify potential benefits of the peace agreement (Kahneman & Tversky, 1995). This tendency leads to the ranking of military-security considerations above political considerations and to overvaluing the military echelon and its assessments at the expense of the political echelon and its assessments.[97] These positions lead to a preference for maintaining the status quo, which seemingly guarantees a high degree of certainty. Paradoxically, however, Israeli insistence on preservation of the status quo and the lack of a political alternative for the other side are likely to increase the chances of war or the level of violence.

The military sector in Israel has, over the years, become the ultimate authority on all matters relating to the identification of security threats and the design of a response to them (Michael, 2007b). Israeli reality has created a situation in which the "experts authorized to engage in violence" are, for the most part, high-ranking military personnel "whether in regular service or reserves" (Kimmerling, 2001: 271). In the eyes of this authority, security is the highest guiding value and, therefore, the authority's judgment and assessment regarding the conflict

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[97] The Peace Index findings of April 2009 indicate an enormous gap between the public's valuation and trust of the military – 91% – and its low valuation of the government – 34% – and of the Knesset – 30% (Yaar and Hermann, Peace Index 2009).

and the political processes intended to resolve it pass through a security-value-based perception filter, which inevitably becomes a cognitive filter.

Thus, even when the military sector urges the political sector to initiate a political process and even when it understands that military concepts such as decisiveness or victory are not relevant to the political sphere, the military sector interprets reality through a security-based prism. In the eyes of the military sector, peace is a means or a platform for advancing security, and this is the spirit in which it makes its recommendations. If the military sector does not feel that peace will improve security, then it will see the political process as a burden, perhaps even as a security risk.

The paradox in the military approach to peace with the Palestinians is that this approach links the peace process with demands to ensure and improve security. These demands, however, are a stumbling block to advancing the process because they "castrate" the essence of the Palestinian state and the symbols of its sovereignty in the eyes of Palestinians. Access to territorial positions of control, control over airspace, control over border crossings, geographic demilitarization, and maintenance of intelligence and operational capabilities are perceived by the military sector as security needs, and a peace agreement that does not address these needs will be perceived as a security risk. The problem is that the Palestinians perceive these security demands as a blatant infringement upon the sovereignty of the state they seek to establish and as an unacceptable denial of its symbolism and honor. In their view, these demands are analogous to a consensual continuation of the occupation.

The Limitations of Strategic Thought and the Obstacles Created by Prioritizing Military Thought as Supreme

The complexity of the geopolitical environment and the characteristics of the prolonged confrontation with the Palestinians create a constant perception of security threats within Israeli leadership and serve to rank military thinking above political thinking. The unique characteristics of military thinking lead to a unique framing of the threats' characteristics, which in turn shapes patterns of response and action. This framing of the threats' characteristics becomes a primary layer of the collective psychological foundation and fixes the conceptualization of the

conflict as uncontrollable and ongoing (Michael, 2009). History demonstrates that under the circumstances in which Israel operates, Israeli leadership finds it difficult to update its strategic paradigm. This is because adjusting the paradigm requires disengagement from the military thinking that amplifies the sense of threat and leads to preference for military power as a means of solving political problems. The strategic paradigm is, in essence, security-based and military in nature, but this does not necessarily mean that the political sector has not willingly adopted it. Moreover, there were cases in which the military sector pointed out limitations of the paradigm, but the political sector continued to adhere to it nevertheless.

During Operation "Cast Lead" (January 2009), the Israeli pattern of action in the Gaza Strip was based on the logic of military thought and reflected the security discourse that prefers use of force as a solution to political problems. The political discourse refrained almost completely from consideration of other political options, such as negotiations with Hamas, whether directly or indirectly.

Indeed, within Israeli reality, the military framing of complex political problems does not necessarily reflect the thinking of the military itself. A number of examples illustrate how the military has developed a language and vocabulary that led to much more complex framing of the complicated reality, but the political sector has not succeeded in enriching its own discourse by incorporating the concepts and insights that the military has developed. Rather, the political sector has chosen to frame the complicated reality through the traditional military perception, along the lines of what may be termed "political militarism." A salient example of this phenomenon is the position of the military, headed by Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi and Minister of Defense Ehud Barak, who realized the limitations of military power after a few days of fighting during Operation "Cast Lead." They even advised the political sector to terminate the operation after approximately a week, but Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni pressed for continuation of military action, which then in fact continued for another month.

Israel exists within a complex reality because, among other reasons, the awareness of threat and the sense of insecurity amplify awareness of the tension around security issues and create a reality of "neither peace nor war." In such

circumstances, the complexity of strategy becomes a real challenge, requiring particularly developed and sophisticated strategic skills. Such a complex mix of circumstances requires strategic acrobatics capable of creating tricky, paradoxical synergies out of opposites and contrasts.

Given that in Israel, "there is no conception of security that can serve as an organizing conceptual framework for politicians and soldiers, [and] Israeli governments have not developed the relevant know-how to address foreseeable crises and security matters" (Tamari, 2007: 30-31), the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is typically assessed in the context of a security policy that is neither current nor adequately developed and sophisticated but is, instead, usually detached from the broader contexts of national, regional, and international security and their methods of management. Israel tends to distrust the international community and, therefore, often makes mountains out of molehills and regards every threat as an existential danger. Thus, the burden of confronting threatening situations becomes heavier and more complicated.

Developing the skills to deal with strategic complexity under the structural and cognitive conditions described here requires significant enhancement of learning processes in a way that would enable the political echelon to develop a relevant, coherent, and effective security perspective, in turn allowing the development of processes and the formation of political and public legitimacy for complex, ground-breaking measures.

The Geopolitical Environment and Its Negative Influence on the Learning Processes of Israeli Leaders

The complexity of Israel's strategic environment, which has been described as a "meeting of opposites" (Luttwak, 2002: 77), requires complex learning processes that would enable political leaders to cope with a dynamic reality in an intelligent and critical way. "Learning," for our purposes, is what Tetlock (1999) described as a change in the cognitive structure of the image of the individual in relation to the international environment… in the direction of greater complexity and willingness to be self-critical. The significance of this form of coping is the guarantee of relevance of the cognitive structures – the system of beliefs and perceptions that serves the purposes of interpretation and understanding of the

same reality and of developing methods of coping with substantive challenges – by, among other means, reframing the perceived threats. The relationship between the cognitive structure and the content and beliefs, however, is fairly complicated and has the potential to overflow the value complexity barrier (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996). Players prefer to assimilate new information into thought frameworks that already exist, a process that is likely to prevent a change in beliefs (Levy, J., 1994).

In many cases decision makers aspire to avoid past failures, while the generals are still fighting the previous war. Jack Levy (1994) has suggested that lessons from the past and their accompanying myths can affect policy more than standard perception. Rather than systematically learning from historical experience, it is possible to use history selectively and instrumentally by choosing examples that most strongly support pre-existing policy preferences. Israeli experience fuels the Israeli narrative and maintains the perception of threat and danger in a way that makes it difficult to change the strategic paradigm by accepting and processing new or alternative information.

Levy, who explored the issue of political/statesmanship learning in depth, found that learning is not a passive activity, but an active process leading to the creation of an analytical construct built on a worldview and on assumptions through which historical experience and reality are interpreted. A change in the analytical construct as a result of observation and interpretation of experience leads to a change or the development of new beliefs, skills, and procedures. These changes are likely to produce policy changes, but Levy qualifies his observations by noting that not every change in policy is necessarily the result of learning.

Decision-making processes – particularly those of governments subject to complex and conflict-riddled circumstances – reflect the manner by which various alternatives are examined through "cultural filters." Historical analogies, as well as precedents and metaphors, guide the process of selection among various alternatives, while "cultural filters" simplify reality but reduce the range of selection. These filters, in fact, determine what is considered obvious and what is subject to debate or re-examination. This process generates the array of scenarios to be developed by the government and affects the shape of patterns of operation and reaction (Levy, Y., 2009). In the case of Israel, the military filter almost always serves the political sector as well, and thus it influences the

learning processes, design of alternatives, and policy choices, which in turn lead to a marked preference for use of military power to resolve political problems. The Second Lebanon War and Operation "Cast Lead" are clear examples of this process.

The Complex Environment in Which Israel Operates and Its Influence on the Ability to Create Risk-Taking Agreements

The complex strategic environment in which Israel operates and the paradoxical principles on which this environment is based make it difficult to market and explain it, both to coalition partners and to the general public. The complexity of the strategy and its underlying paradoxical logic require the creation of a balance based on *complementary opposition* – a force-based military strategy balanced by a soft political-diplomatic strategy, and vice versa. For example, a severe military blow to Hamas could serve as the basis for talks and the adoption of a policy of negotiation with Hamas. Conversely, it is possible to strike a blow to Hamas without damaging its ruling power ("home address") and principal assets because the possibility of such damage would be the only way to deter it militarily in the future. That is, unless it has some standing and assets, Hamas cannot be deterred.

This process is based on paradoxical logic and on complementary opposition, making it very difficult to attract support among the Jewish public in Israel. This conclusion is reinforced by the findings of the Peace Index of February 2009, which indicate that a third of the Israeli public was disappointed by the outcome of Operation "Cast Lead," and less than a third was satisfied with the outcome. The more significant finding, however, was that 66% of the Jewish public think that the military operation should have continued until Hamas completely surrendered (Peace Index, Steinmetz Center, Tel Aviv University, February 2009). The December 2008 Peace Index showed that 90% of the Jewish public in Israel already believed that the operation should have continued until Hamas surrendered.

In the view of many Israelis, the deteriorating security situation in the Gaza Strip was the result of Israel's unilateral disengagement from the Strip. This understanding increased the sense of legitimacy that the public ascribed to the

use of substantive military force against Hamas and even served as an incentive of sorts for the Israeli government in its choice of a course of action leading to Operation "Cast Lead" (Levy, Y., 2009). For this reason it was hard to persuade the public of the proportionality of the required military response to Hamas and to explain the limited military response needed for a significant political achievement. From a certain point onwards, Operation "Cast Lead" clearly passed its peak of success,[98] and continued military action eroded political gains.

The Peace Index findings highlight the significance of a unique phenomenon that Yagil Levy termed "gap of legitimacies" (Levy, Y., 2008; Levy, Y., 2009). Levy observed a significant gap between the public and political legitimacies ascribed to the use of military power to solve security problems – "political militarism" or "militaristic politics" (Kimmerling, 1993; Ben-Eliezer, 1995; Berghahn, 1981) – on the one hand, and the legitimacy of bodily sacrifice, on the other hand. While the legitimacy granted to use of military force is high, the legitimacy ascribed to bodily sacrifice is much lower (Levy, Y., 2009).

This gap makes it harder for Israeli leadership to operate in accordance with complex strategic principles. This gap also restricts the leadership's freedom of operation to use military force where it is needed or, alternatively, to take political steps in a reality of active, violent confrontation. The democratization of war makes it impossible for Israel's leaders not to consider public opinion and the power of the media, compelling them to act quickly, before the media can influence public opinion and planned actions. But it is precisely in these circumstances that the political sector needs to have acquired complex learning processes requiring strategic skills and staff work that do not exist in Israel. In the absence of these tools, the resulting vacuum draws on military thinking, and from that moment onwards, the military sector begins influencing decision-making processes and policy-making, primarily as a result of its structural and traditional advantages rather than its own free will. When the political sector is unable to internalize and operationalize complex learning processes efficiently and relatively quickly, it loses maneuverability and flexibility. In such circumstances it has difficulty setting new and relevant policy and is compelled to operate under the influence of public and media pressure against a problematic reality of a legitimacy gap on

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[98] For detailed explanation of the concept of peak of success in the strategic sense of military conduct, see Luttwak, 1987.

the part of the public (for more on this issue, see: Michael, 2008, Michael, 2007b; Michael, 2010, forthcoming).

Even in cases where the national leadership has undergone a learning process that led to change of positions and priorities, these changes must pass the political and public legitimacy test because the leaders of democratic states – specifically the State of Israel – must earn political approval (in the governmental and coalition contexts) as well as public approval for the implementation of policy, all the more so when novel, ground-breaking policy is involved (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996). Sometimes, however, the public cannot absorb paradoxical opposites and synergies of opposites and contradictions, which are key strategic elements of Israel's complex operational environment but are very hard to market and explain because, for these purposes, the public would also have to undergo a complex social learning process (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996).

Janice Stein stresses the central role of internal politics as an obstacle or an incentive in leaders' decision-making processes. The learning process that leads to change in the positions of leaders does not necessarily take place amidst the general public as well. The gap between the positions of leaders and the positions of the public results from these differences in learning processes. In some cases the social learning process affects public opinion and its stance regarding a political process or security situation or advances the learning process of leaders, but there are reverse situations as well. A salient example is the progress achieved by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert with the Palestinians. This progress did not earn the support or trust of the public, and it led to the return of the political right to power in the February 2009 elections. This example again demonstrates that Israeli leaders must overcome the legitimacy obstacle, among others.

Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, in his comprehensive essay on the obstacles to transition from war to peace, drew attention to the various strategies of action of Israeli leaders in their pursuit of legitimacy. His findings prove that, despite the range of possible strategies, Israeli leaders have not always succeeded in establishing legitimacy for the policies that they sought to implement, and the most salient cases actually turned out to be in the Palestinian context (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996). This difficulty can be explained through the unique and complex characteristics of the operating environment in which, paradoxically, a sterile and prolonged political process is taking place against the background of a violent

confrontation (with the Gaza Strip) and a continuing focused effort to eliminate terrorist threats (from the West Bank).

The challenge of legitimacy reflects the inherent tension between external constraints and internal constraints because foreign policy and domestic policy, particularly in the Israeli context, are interdependent. Although external factors are sometimes necessary conditions for peace initiatives, domestic factors can prevent leaders from carrying them out (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2001).

Efforts to resolve an international conflict can generate an internal conflict when the potential concessions are not acceptable to some members of the political elite, interest groups, or a majority of the public. In this "two-level" game (foreign and domestic), decision makers who seek to reach a peace agreement that requires concessions must take into account the extent of domestic support for the new policy they seek to implement.

The degree of tension between external and internal constraints was starkly reflected in Prime Minister Netanyahu's first visit to the U.S. for a meeting with President Barack Obama (May 2009). In Washington Netanyahu found himself between the American rock and the coalitional hard place. The visible pressure that Obama exerted on him – with respect to the two-state principle as a basis for political agreement between Israel and the Palestinians – exacerbated Netanyahu's problems at home because, for internal political reasons, he could not publicly accept this principle and was therefore compelled to resort to evasive statements that did not include the phrase "two states for two peoples."

In a speech at Bar-Ilan University on 14 June 2009, however, Netanyahu succeeded in combining a response to U.S. demands regarding two states with the pressures from home by setting conditions that transfer responsibility to the Palestinian side.[99] This political maneuver was potentially successful, but it is likely not sufficient for a breakthrough because the Palestinian side flatly rejects these conditions, and most of the Israeli public apparently realizes that the prime minister did not change his positions or beliefs but, rather, made these statements as if under coercion – as if the devil made him do it.

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[99]   For the text of the speech and its significance, see the Israel Intelligence Heritage & Commemoration Center:
http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/Hebrew/heb_n/html/ipc_036.htm.

Israeli experience demonstrates that every peacemaking effort that included territorial concessions immediately and automatically turned into a game on two levels – internal and external – because it generated a conflict of values. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, territorial concessions have additional significance because of the great risk involved. The security risk is seen as particularly severe this time in light of the outcome of the unilateral disengagement from Gaza in September 2005. Bar-Siman-Tov (2001) concludes that since the end of the Six Day War, Israeli decision makers have understood that any peace effort that requires conceding territories will be regarded not only as a matter of foreign policy but also as domestic policy. Moreover, Bar-Siman-Tov concludes that in all the conflict resolution processes in which Israel was involved, external players had significant influence in initiating and driving the political processes, but the importance of domestic players increased during the course of negotiations. This is the reason for the importance of legitimacy in these processes that involve concessions and are perceived as risky in light of the immense uncertainty that prevails in the region.

The lack of consensus regarding territorial concessions applied not only to opposition-coalition interaction but also existed within the coalition itself. Israeli leadership understood that territorial concessions are not only a matter of foreign policy and that they require building a domestic base of legitimacy (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2001). The experience of Oslo demonstrates that formal authorization for a political agreement is not enough to put an end to domestic debate if the agreement is unacceptable to some of the political elite or other groups. The disagreement within the Israeli public even intensified after violence resurfaced between the parties with the outbreak of the second *Intifada* in September 2000 and after the division of the Palestinian Authority and the Hamas takeover of the Gaza Strip in January 2006. This disagreement even led Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to break up the "Likud" political party and establish "Kadima" following the fierce opposition within his party to disengagement from Gaza.

The intersection between the external and the internal levels poses a dilemma to Israeli leadership, compelling it to manipulate the situation in order to cope with the constraints, balance them, or neutralize some of their problematic effects. Israeli experience demonstrates, however, that despite all the manipulation, the leaders usually did not succeed in improving their standing in relation to political

elites and in terms of public opinion, and they eventually found themselves lacking domestic legitimacy, which led to their political paralysis and the continuation of the conflict.

Leaders who grasped the paradoxical logic of the strategy were compelled to act in opposition to its principles and logic and to stick with goals that had been set in the spirit of the linear political logic reflective of the dominant mood of Israeli society. The problem is that these goals do not necessarily accord with the strategic context and the national interest; they might even be completely disconnected from the context and devoid of any strategic logic. For example, defining the goal of Operation "Cast Lead" as improving the security situation in the south is an example of linear political logic with no connection whatsoever to strategic logic. This is an example of a situation where complex diagnostic learning processes did in fact cause the leadership to change its position and understand the context differently, but did not bring about the complex social learning process that would lead the public to change its positions and grant legitimacy to a political breakthrough.

The lack of congruence between Israeli military powers and political powers creates a need for a unique leadership capable of developing a strategy for overcoming the obstacle described above, which is sometimes a stumbling block in the complex circumstances in which Israel must operate.

The Test of Israeli Leadership in Light of the Incongruence Between Military Power and Political Power in a Complex Operating Environment

The complex operating environment of the Israeli-Palestinian arena in which Israel is situated is characterized by sudden transitions from calmness to violent confrontation and sometimes also by a political process that takes place in parallel to violent confrontation. Operating in such an environment requires a uniquely strategic leadership capable of influencing the public and leading it through complex and controversial processes. In democratic countries, however, leaders must act on the basis of political agreement and broad public consensus grounded in linear logic. The difficulty lies in resolving the contradiction between the

accepted linear logic (common sense) and the paradoxical logic of the strategy. History has shown that only rarely have leaders been gifted with a strategic ability that applies to the realities of both war and peace, and even rarer is the skill to deal with a complex, dynamic reality involving a sense of existential threat and "neither peace nor war."

Winston Churchill was an inspiring leader and excellent strategist during World War II, but upon its conclusion he became a marginal leader. His phenomenal strategic abilities during wartime turned out to be irrelevant during peacetime. Menachem Begin was gifted with impressive leadership skills and a strategic vision that enabled him to lead Israel towards peace, but he turned out to be a failure as a wartime strategist. Ariel Sharon demonstrated impressive abilities as a war strategist – both as a military man during the Yom Kippur War and as a prime minister during the second *Intifada* – but did not succeed in developing the strategic skills necessary for transition from war to peace after suppressing the second *Intifada*. The conclusion is that many political leaders can excel at managing the internal affairs of their states but turn out to be complete failures at handling foreign affairs and security matters during times of crisis, and vice versa.

Political leadership is also intellectual leadership that is capable of combining military strategy with political understanding and formulating a grand strategy in the broadest, most inclusive, and most comprehensive sense of the term (Michael, 2007). This challenge becomes more difficult within the complex environment in which Israel operates, where reality embodies a fundamental clash between military strategy and political logic. Military strategy dictates striking, defeating, capturing territory, and achieving the best possible military outcome. Political logic requires trying to achieve the best possible negotiating outcome. This is why almost all military personnel believe that almost all politicians are either too daring or too cowardly. The military leader will always try for the best possible outcome, even if this is less than total victory; the statesman will try to achieve his objectives through negotiations; the potential clash between them is understandable and insoluble (Luttwak, 2002: 194).

Another contradiction between the strategies is reflected in the difference between the diplomacy of peace – the purpose of which is to minimize a threat – and deterrence by means of armed persuasion– the purpose of which is to prevent

actualization of a threat. The very need to use armed persuasion undercuts the ability to persuade through the diplomacy of peace. The diplomacy of peace, however, could create a problematic reality for Israel, where it would have difficulty deterring its opponent through armed persuasion.

Israel exists in a reality of incongruence between notable military power and notable diplomatic power. Luttwak found that in cases of incongruence between these powers, the strategic range of operation decreases. In the Israeli case, though, it appears that the lack of decisive diplomatic superiority creates incongruence in relation to military power. Not only is there a need for strategy here, but strong strategic leadership is also necessary.

The key to intelligent handling of the incongruence between these powers lies in a strategic leadership that will strike the right balance between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of strategy. Such leadership would define consistent and non-conflicting goals, set priorities, and coordinate the various sectors: military, diplomatic, social, and economic. This requires an acrobatic combination of paradoxes and contradictions because a tough military policy needs to be balanced with a soft foreign policy, and vice versa. But such acrobatics put the political sector – in Israel specifically and in democratic countries generally – in a very difficult position: decision makers might be (mistakenly) perceived as adopting incoherent and contradictory policies. Ironically, it is much easier for dictatorships to implement such policies because dictators do not have to explain their policies and do not need agreement (Luttwak, 2002: 326).

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter focused on characterizing and analyzing the complex environment in which Israel operates and posited that this reality – in accordance with the theoretical definition developed – poses a significant barrier to peace. This strategic barrier creates real difficulties vis-à-vis the learning processes needed to bring about change and poses a series of obstacles that make it difficult for Israeli leadership to identify or create opportunities, to plan and take complex strategic steps, and to achieve meaningful political breakthroughs that, even if they do not lead to resolution of the conflict, can contribute to better and less violent conflict management.

In order to cope with this barrier successfully, real change with respect to the geopolitical characteristics of the environment is needed. Real substantive change in this area requires at least three elements:

(1) Transition from bilateral paradigm with the Palestinians to multilateral/ regional paradigm;

(2) Reducing asymmetry in the relations between Israel and the Palestinian entity by means of a gradual and controlled "bottom-up" process for the establishment of a viable Palestinian state capable of functioning according to effective sovereignty. This would mean – among other things – exercising authority and even control over the population within its delineated jurisdiction, with a distinct monopoly over the use of force, and in accordance with the principles of law and order.

From this it follows that a viable state is a state that actualizes its sovereignty towards its citizens effectively and over the course of time and conducts reciprocal relations with its neighbors, the region, and the international community, while demonstrating responsibility and accountability. This process needs to take place with the active support of the international community (including the states of the region and other Muslim states) and in accordance with a broad, regional peace-building plan (the central element of which is state building);

(3) The provision of real international security guarantees for Israel so that its security interests will be assured over time.

Only a substantive change of environmental characteristics can lead to a change in the strategic paradigm that Israeli leadership has adopted since the Oslo process – a paradigm characterized mainly by fear of (perhaps also aversion to) taking risks.

Significant change of the characteristics of this complex operating environment can occur as a result of the redefinition of the space in a way that generates a sense of security within Israel that it is welcome in the region and grants it complete legitimacy as the state of the Jewish people. Implementation of the normalization principles contained in the Arab Peace Initiative could relax Israel's sense of

threat and alienation within the region. This could lead to a change in the public mood within Israel and create an atmosphere that would make it easier for Israeli leadership to take risks in managing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel could be granted such legitimacy by the states of the region if they agree to take part actively in a regional peace-building operation with the participation of the international community. Such a peace-building operation could lead, through a gradual and measured bottom-up process, to the establishment of a viable Palestinian state capable of ensuring state monopoly over the use of force and developing a regional security regime that would allow the reframing of existing threats and the formation of an alternative paradigm to the security paradigm that prevails today (Michael, 2007).[100]

Israel also has a role to play in the achievement of such a change, which would in turn remove the strategic barrier blocking its path to peace (in the sense of a political arrangement that would establish the conditions for conciliation as a basis for real peace in days to come). Towards this end, however, Israel will need the support of the international community and primarily the United States, with the backing of Arab states and with sufficient security guarantees, such as a strategic pact with the United States, membership in the European Union, membership in NATO, and the like.[101] When these conditions exist, the political sector in Israel will be required to demonstrate clear strategic leadership and to develop learning processes that will lead to a knowledge base and the strategic skills to reshape the contours of the security discourse, transform the "truth regime," reduce the consciousness of threat, and enable the necessary social and political acquiescence. Under such circumstances there would be a reasonable likelihood of exchanging the existing security paradigm for a new paradigm, which in turn would lead to a new political reality.

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[100] For more information about implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative in the context of a regional peace and security arrangement, see Michael, K. (2007). *The Arab League Peace Initiative – A Historic Opportunity? Background, Meanings, and Possible Avenues of Exploration*. Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, pp. 100-101; Michael, K. & Kellen, D. (2007). *Stabilizing the Israeli-Palestinian Bi-level Conflict Zone — Considerations for a Multinational Peace Support Operation*. Jerusalem: The Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, pp. 18-39; Michael, K. & Dajani, M. (2007). "The Role of the International Community." *Palestine-Israel Journal*, 13(4).

[101] See the remarks of National Security Advisor Uzi Arad: "If the Middle East goes nuclear, it is possible that joining NATO and/or a defense pact with the United States would be a condition of a regional security arrangement." (Shavit, 2009).

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