

## **THE POLITICS OF FEAR AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE MIDEAST PEACE PROCESS**

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### **Abstract**

**Using the perspective of the role of fear in identity based conflicts, this article investigates the reasons for the collapse of the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians as the process unfolded with the Declaration of Principles (from 1993) and ensuing agreements. The Oslo-process initially succeeded in taking identity aspects and enemy images seriously but failed to sustain this part of the process. Fear of what the other side might be capable of doing and the uncertainty that was the main result of the Camp David negotiations in the summer of 2000 provided a fertile ground for escalating violence. Thus, any conflict resolution process must take identity, fear, and enemy images seriously. However, also existing power asymmetries must be dealt with in negotiation processes.**

Since late September 2000, Palestinians and Israelis have found themselves engulfed in a deadly spiral of violence. By February 2003, 2,058 Palestinians and 633 Israelis had been killed ("Quarterly Update on Conflict and Diplomacy", 2003, 32 (3): 120), despite the fact that the 1990s were characterised by a peace process, and attempts at harmonising relations. Whatever went wrong? Although pessimists all along pointed out that the peace process was vague, agreements were opaque, and without real direction (e.g. Said, 1995; Butenschøn, 1998), the Oslo-process did imply an emerging transformation of the conflict (cf. Kriesberg, 2001). For the Palestinians, the Oslo agreement meant interim self-rule and more (although limited) territorial control than ever before. For the Israelis, the process meant security cooperation with the newly established Palestinian Authority. What are the reasons that the process was not sustained? Why did the parties resort to violence at that particular time in history (i.e. in September 2000)?

It has been argued that the agreements made were too vague and that the staged process in itself provided for the collapse of relations (cf. Rothstein, 1999; Shikaki, 1999). With the benefit of hindsight, these assumptions appear to have been correct, but for a precise reason not generally acknowledged within the conventional literature on the

Palestinian–Israeli conflict. The argument of this article is that the *relapse to violence has to do with the ways in which fear and uncertainty are intimately linked to the formation and constant re-formation of identity*.

More specifically, questions to be addressed are:

- How were identity constructions/discourses dealt with in the negotiations in Oslo in terms of both substance and form of negotiations?
- How was identity and mistrust/fear dealt with in the aftermath of the signing of the Declaration of Principles (i.e. in the implementation process)?
- What role did the negotiations in Camp David play in determining the outbreak of violence?

### **Identity and Conflict**

In the last few years, conflict resolution theory has witnessed a proliferated interest in *identity* and subjectivity in protracted and violent conflicts (Jeong and Väyrynen, 1999). This interest stems from the fact that the pattern of conflict during the 1980s and 1990s implied an increase in conflicts where the main actors were internal to states and identity a foremost aspect (cf. Gurr and Harff, 1994; Gurr, 2000; Kaldor, 1999). Identity/subjectivity and fears of losing its coherence trigger conflicts, while conflicts tend to reinforce identities. It therefore appears appropriate to relate the literature on identity conflicts and their resolution to theories on how identity is formulated and the role of fear/(in)security in that process (cf. also Campbell, 1998; Neumann, 1999; Stern, 2001).

Conflict resolution theory-building implies a significant step forward when it comes to dealing resolutely with identity as opposed to the view of conflicts as solely interest or resource based (Pearson, 2001). Existential concerns – such as survival, recognition and dignity (Rothman, 1997:8) – of each party must be properly addressed in negotiation practices. Conflicts related to identity include crucial aspects of meaning and sentiments of belonging. To consider for example land conflicts as mainly resource-based – i.e. land as a ‘thing’ to be divided – completely misses the point of the profound salience of land and place in identity and meaning-creation. It might be argued that the current impasse in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict partly originates in the very notions that suggest a two-state solution as the end-goal. This perspective assumes that realistically, there are two peoples struggling over the same piece of land. Thus, the argument is that the land must be shared between the two parties; a Palestinian state would then be built in the West Bank and Gaza, territories occupied by Israel in 1967. To many refugees from the war in 1948 (and many of their ascendants) attachment to land is devoted to former homes and villages in present Israel. It is to that land that they are still longing (Lindholm Schulz, 2003). Equally, to Israeli Jewish identity, the land of Israel is not only a piece of territory, but a mythologized safe haven, a ‘home’, and a place imbued with meanings

related to pioneer spirit, agriculture, history, and nation-building (cf. Schama, 1995; Benvenisti, 2000). The politics of land is the central theme of both Zionism and Palestinian nationalism. This is why no attempt at conflict resolution can hope to succeed without taking this aspect seriously.

What often constitutes obstacles in this type of conflict is not simply problems in communication and understanding – as sometimes assumed in for example problem-solving (cf. Burton, 1969; 1987) approaches. Rather, there are existential barriers embedded in wants for recognition, and frequently distorted views of the ‘other’ (Rothman, 1992; Jones, 1999: 17). Such emotions, images, and discourses may be of such strength that more assumedly ‘rational’ calculations of what might benefit one’s own side in the long run might be overlooked. Parties to a conflict may set aside potential gains simply in order to further harm the other side – if there is a strong enough belief and fear that one’s own identity is under severe threat.

There is, in fact, no social institution which is as effective in perpetuating a system of inclusion and exclusion, and a separation between ‘us’ and ‘them’, as war or violent conflict (cf. Gelven, 1994).

Collective identity is the medium through which the individual is related to collective violence, whether such violence is carried out by the military machinery of the state or on behalf of aspirants to statehood. War is a constitutive element of collective identity, reproduced in collective memory through national “narratives” of past glories in the face of threats against national sovereignty and survival. A self-image based on notions of heroism, valour and justice draws upon such collective memories and is actively reproduced in times of conflict (Jabri, 1996: 139 f.).

However, it may be an equally serious mistake to exaggerate hatred and mistrust as defining emotions vis-à-vis the other. In all conflicts, there are also seeds of empathy, engagement with the ‘other’, and understanding (cf. Lindholm Schulz, 1999). Mary Kaldor (1999) has labeled this phenomenon the existence of ‘islands of civility’.

### *Form of Conflict Resolution Approaches Vis-à-vis Identity-based-conflicts*

Conflict resolution theory focusing on identity often lifts forward the salience of dialogue groups and grass root participation as a complement to elite based negotiations (Fischer, 1996; Rothman, 1997; Rothman and Olsen, 2001; Pearson, 2001). Further, it focuses on communication barriers as opposed to an emphasis on power politics, diplomacy, and formal negotiations. Problem-solving workshops are seen as better suited to deconstruct enemy images and getting enemies to communicate. In those environments, alternative views of the ‘other’ may emerge and grow (Orjuela, 2003). However, one recent critique against the problem-solving approach claims that although problem-solving might allow parties to express grievances and concerns as well as to

define and express their identities, this approach may misleadingly place the parties on an equal footing, disregarding relations of power (Jones, 1999).

Nevertheless, a key concept in much of this conflict resolution theory literature is 'interactive conflict resolution' (Rothman, 1997) as a particular mode of addressing identity in conflict through expressing identity, needs, values, and threat perceptions.

As long as parties locked in an identity-based conflict fear that their identity needs will be neglected or negated by a conflict settlement, they will not be motivated to engage in negotiations to settle it. Thus, we hypothesize that many conflicts that have appeared 'settled' but have later re-emerged with greater virulence are, in many cases, conflicts whose true source (identity issues) has not been adequately articulated and engaged first. Identity-conflict framing does not create the illusion of an 'end' to conflict (Rothman and Olson, 2001: 295 f.).

Rothman (1997) claims that interactive dialogue must precede problem-solving which is based on ideas of compromise and tend to focus on interests. In identity conflicts, compromise may be interpreted as existentially threatening. This is why negotiations over specific interests or tasks may fail if initiated too early in a process (Rothman, 1997). Reconciliation is an important ingredient needed in order to restore or create functioning relations between collective actors.

Stable peace, then, may require a concerted effort to revise the historical canon, to begin teaching a new version of history, to apologize for genuine misdeeds, and to marginalize and contain the extremists who reject this effort (Rothstein, 1999: 16).

To create common ground for shared history is many times an overwhelming task since the different narratives and interpretations of conflict have fed arguments in the conflict. To give up a specific narrative, to admit that one's own description of history may not be completely accurate, may be tantamount to giving up part of identity.

### **Identities, Insecurities and Fears**

Identity-formation, the shaping of a 'self' that can be experienced as relatively safe and secure, is 'an anxiety-controlling mechanism reinforcing a sense of trust, predictability and control' in order to counter threat and uncertainty (Jabri, 1996: 125). There is therefore a direct link between identity and security.

As a broad range of authors have recently stressed, the concept of 'fear' is closely related to the role of identity in conflict. Insecurity and fear tend to be determining factors in violent identity conflict (Kaufman, 1996/97; Lake and Rothchild, 1996/97: 97; Pieterse, 1997; Simons, 1997; Roe, 1999; Figueiredo and Weingast, 1999: 266). Snyder

and Jervis (1999: 22) have said: 'In some cases people may prefer conflict and deadlock because they think it is the best or the only route to their security'. When groups believe that what is at stake is their very survival and existence, the potential for destruction is great. One way of formulating this assumption is in terms of an 'ethnic security dilemma'; this implies that uncertainties trigger 'ethnic' parties in a conflict to act in harmful offensive ways due to their fears (Posen, 1993). Uncertainty concerning the others' intentions seem to be enough to trigger militancy (cf. Roe, 1999; Kaufman, 1996/97). Thus, even though fears from the outside might appear exaggerated, feelings and perceptions of threat are important in themselves. Another, less realist way of posing this argument, is made by Simons (1997: 282) who says that: 'killing may simply be reflex, and you obliterate others who you believe would kill you if they could'.

Also dominant groups, majorities, and elites may feel insecure (Pieterse, 1997: 374). There are of course possibilities of exploitation by interest-driven actors, but what is of greater relevance is the link between discourses of identity and fear and the ways in which these discourses feed into conflict.

Walter and Snyder (1999: 4) identify five fear-producing situations when there is a great risk that violence will be the result: breakdown of government, the geographical isolation of a minority group within a larger community, shifting political balance of power, changing economic resources, and demobilization. These situations tend to produce uncertainty. This leads groups to think that they may be better off acting proactively in order to defend their position rather than wait for a further deterioration of their circumstances. One problem with this approach is its modernist bias, tending to fix groups as being more or less stable and their identities more or less static.

### *Israelis and Palestinians as Perennial Victims and Fighters*

In protracted conflicts, both parties often regard themselves in terms of victims, regardless of their relative strength. An experienced (whether 'objectively' relevant or not) feeling of a humiliated, threatened, or denied identity is thus fundamental. Both Israeli and Palestinian identities represent troubled identities. For Israeli Jews, the Holocaust still serves as a prime principle in framing experiences of a 'self' endangered by annihilation (cf. Baumel, 1995; Kimmerling, 2001). Further, the sense of an exposed and threatened identity in the midst of an 'Arab sea' threatening to drive out the Jews from the Middle East feeds directly into Israeli discourses about vulnerability and unsafety. Although from a Palestinian viewpoint, Israeli Jews represent a rationally calculating superagent (cf. Lindholm Schulz, 1999), always on top of the Palestinians. The fact remains that Israeli Jewish identity is vulnerable and questioned.

On the one hand, the Jewish-Israeli polity is driven by a code of self-perceived weakness, permanent wretchedness, and existential threat. A sense of permanent siege and potential annihilation in a hostile Gentile world of antisemites – be they

Christians, Muslims, Buddhists or agnostics – is perceived as the state of nature, or the cosmic order (Kimmerling, 1997: 229).

As a counterpole to this side of Israeli Jewish identity as a passive victim, the ‘new state’ Israeli has been crafted through attempts of securing identity. That is, the ‘new state Israeli Jew’ was to overcome the traumas and eliminate the weakness (Kimmerling, 1997). The Israeli state and nation were created to safe-guard Jewish identity and the Jewish population against threats of annihilation. However, the ‘victimized Jew’ has not waned away but has continued to exist as a necessary motivating aspect of the ‘warring Israeli Jew’.

Militarisation has thus been a companion of Israeli culture and identity (Kimmerling, 2001), as Israeli identity to a considerable degree has been fostered by the conflict with the Palestinians and the Arab states. Continuously, and in relation to the Israeli–Arab/Israeli–Palestinian conflicts, the orientation of the state has been geared toward ‘security’. In the dynamic interaction between identity, threat, and security, the security establishment has found it necessary to induce fear in order to preserve both the security apparatus in itself and the security aspects of Israeli identity.

Palestinian national identity is constituted as a mirror image of this structure. Palestinian identity centers around ‘suffering’ (Peteet, 1991, 1993; Sayigh, R., 1994; Lindholm Schulz, 1999, 2003), as suffering has been constituted by homelessness and insecurity. Al-nakba, the catastrophe, as the flight from what became Israel is labelled in Palestinian discourse serves as one of the root structures of this narrative. Since the ‘catastrophe’, the Palestinians have been dispersed, fragmented, dispossessed, and homeless. Since the late 1960s, Palestinian national identity is also crafted around the ‘struggle’ as a main representation to overcome processes of victimisation and to transcend experiences of dispossession, denial, and statelessness. Armed struggle has worked as a basic foundation of Palestinian nation-building (Sayigh R., 1979; Peteet, 1991, 1993; Sayigh Y., 1997; Lindholm Schulz, 1999).

Israeli Jewish and Palestinian identities thus constitute twin concepts and representations. Suffering gives neither actor an option but to struggle in order to maintain their identities and the rights that belong to people. Perhaps this is one of the most crucial aspects of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict – or in national struggles in a general sense – the way that identities are manifested through the duality of insecurities and strain. Insecurity in relation to the other has forced the parties to nurture an ideology of security and guerilla warfare respectively. Both parties identify themselves as victims and the other as victimiser (cf. Rothman, 1992; Cobbs, 1994).

In terms of discourses and images of the ‘other’, Israelis and Palestinians have surely portrayed themselves in monolithic and fixed categories. Both identities have been formed and reconstructed in a very direct entanglement with their perceptions of the ‘other’. Israeli images of the Palestinians are based on post-colonial representations of Israel as a Western incarnation of modernization, rationality, and science in a dark

environment of tradition, superstition, and backwardness. In Zionism, Arabs and Palestinians have come to represent everything that is backward, 'traditional', 'unprogressive' (Kimmerling, 1997: 229). In Palestinianist discourse Israelis are portrayed as smart and cunning, and as superior, both in terms of rational calculations and in terms of domestic politics and governance (Lindholm Schulz, 1999). Conflict naturally feeds into these representations and fixes them – at least temporarily.

However and importantly, the conflict has also implied a possibility of meeting the 'other', and has with time, contributed to a gradual and partial deconstruction of enemy images. The Oslo process was preceded by many years of tireless meetings between Israelis and Palestinians on unofficial levels, consisting of initiatives by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and intellectuals, making it possible to 'get to know each other'. In addition, during the occupation, Palestinians and Israelis have met as occupier and occupied, as soldier and stone-thrower, as soldier and gunman, as prison-guard and inmate, as employer and employed. Although such encounters have occurred in asymmetrical power relations, the mere fact of facing each other has created a space where actors have met (Kimmerling, 1997: 233). Both possibilities (and many more) of highly exclusivist, closed, and stereotypical enemy images on the one hand and on the other more encompassing, empathic identity constructs emphasizing similarities exist (cf. Lindholm Schulz, 1999).

The Oslo process was designed with the intent to deconstruct enemy images. It could be argued that the particular mode of mediation that the Norwegians presented to an extent provided for a setting where old identity concepts were questioned and new ones in the form of boundary transcending friendships materialised.

### **The Peace Process**

The Declaration of Principles (DOP) signed in September 1993 was not a peace agreement, but an agreement that the parties were prepared to reach for a peaceful and processual solution to their long-time conflict; it provided a scheme for how to do so. The scheme was a staged process, in which self-government for Gaza and Jericho was a first step. Permanent status negotiations were to be based on United Nations (UN) resolutions 242 and 338, the West Bank and Gaza were to be seen as an integral unit, and the most thorny issues (Jerusalem, refugees, settlers, borders, security) were left for permanent status negotiations. Permanent status negotiations were, however, to begin no later than five years after the initiation of self-rule – i.e. in May 1999 (Declaration of Principles 1993). Discussions on the implementation of the DOP were difficult and interrupted by the Hebron massacre in February 1994, when 29 Palestinians were killed by a lone settler activist. Hamas revenge attacks in the form of suicide bombs further led to a deterioration of the security situation. Despite obstacles and opposition, the process progressed fairly smooth during the first years.

The Interim Agreement of September 1995 expanded Palestinian self-rule to the West Bank, beginning with the six major cities (Hebron excluded). A separate deal on Hebron was reached in January 1997 under an Israeli Likud-government. The Interim Agreement divided the territory of the West Bank in different zones, implying a fragmentation of territory; this opened up a critique that a Bantustanisation of Palestine had been occurring (Said, 1995; Butenschøn, 1998). Through this agreement and further redeployments – the last one taking place in March 2000 – Palestinian self-government extended in partial form in some 42 percent of the territory of the West Bank and Gaza.

The Oslo Agreement was based on an understanding between the (Palestinian Liberation Organization) PLO and Israel's Labour-Party that a Palestinian state of some sort was the only realistic outcome of the process; although it was dependent on the performance of the Palestinian Authority in safeguarding Israeli security (Kimmerling, 1997: 236). According to many observers, there was a similar, although slower and more reluctant, shift in Likud-discourse, in coming to terms with the Palestinian state-concept, even though restrictions were to be imposed upon such an entity (Heller, 1997: 10 f.; Lustick, 1997; Kelman, 1998; Morris, 1999: 641). Security cooperation was another corner-stone in the agreements, and Israel was to trust the newly established Palestinian police and security apparatus, consisting of former guerillas and activists for security assistance. Israel was to give up territory, while Palestinians were to give up some of their claims and assist Israel in security affairs.

Although the majority of the population on both sides supported the process (e.g. Shamir & Shkaki, 2002), the process also invoked strong sentiments of fear, betrayal, and staunch opposition. On the Palestinian side, Hamas and Islamic Jihad carried out a number of spectacular terror attacks in Israeli cities. In Israel, right-wing extremism was personified through Baruch Goldstein who killed 29 Palestinians in the Ibrahimi mosque in Hebron in February 1994 and Yigal Amir who assassinated Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995. On both sides, opposition groups claimed that territory had been 'sold out' and that this implied a threat against identity and existence. In turn, the violence of the opposition created fear on the other side. In particular, suicide bombs in Israeli population centers caused tremendous anxiety and were one of the reasons behind Netanyahu's election victory in May 1996.

### *Identity and Content of Negotiations*

In the Oslo-process, the Norwegian mediators took identity seriously from the very beginning. One of the starting-points of the endeavour was the belief that enemy images were 'gravely wrong' (interview with Terje Rød Larsen 8 June 1995). One strategy was to get the negotiators to talk to each other, about 'everything; their wives, their kids, movies, ordinary things' (interview with Terje Rød Larsen 8 June 1995). The assumption was that such small talk would make the actors more comfortable and that it

would serve as to deconstruct enemy images. Explicit acknowledgement of fears and enemy images therefore formed a foundation of the structure of negotiations.

Also the substance of the negotiations actively addressed self and enemy images. Four days prior to the signing of the DOP, Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat exchanged letters. In Rabin's letter, Israel for the first time recognized the PLO as a representative of the Palestinian people, while the PLO recognized the right of Israel to exist within secure borders. Mutual recognition implied a formal willingness to dismantle ideological premises upon which both parties had built their perceptions of the 'other' (Michels, 1994). This resulted in a gradual change within the Labour Party (Rolef, 1997). The PLO had up to that point been depicted as the ultimate symbol of terrorism by Israel and Arafat had been delineated as global evil (Kimmerling, 1997) – and a prime source of threat. A focus on images of the other and threat perceptions may however withdraw attention from inequalities and structural imbalances. As Jones states (1999: 142), Israeli identity was more secure than Palestinian identity, because of firmly consolidated statehood and sovereignty. It needs to be stressed however that although this is certainly true, existential anxiety regarding identity and its security is constitutive of present Israel.

The PLO recognition of Israel and its right to exist within secure borders was also the outcome of a gradual process of acknowledgement beginning in 1974 and partly formalised through the PLO recognition of UN resolutions 242 and 338 in 1988.

The essence in the agreement and the mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel, was that the Israelis were saying, they exist, they have rights, they have national rights, and this openly stood in the agreement, it was as though someone said: 'We lied for the past 70 years, we can no longer lie. They are there.' (Interview with Sa'eb Erakat, Fateh, Minister of Municipal and Local Affairs, February 3, 1995).

Identities not recognised before were now acknowledged. Palestinians had until then remembered Golda Meir's statement in 1969 that the Palestinians did not really exist as a people; while Israelis on their side had feared the PLO Charter, taken as proof that the PLO really wanted to drive the 'Jews into the sea'.

### *Form of Negotiations*

Although the negotiations in Norway were highly problematic, the very structure of negotiations – based on principles of small scale and secrecy – contributed to the establishment of friendship, in particular between the chief negotiators, Abu Ala and Uri Savir (interview with Terje Rød Larsen 8 June 1995). Principles that guided the process were that negotiators should be influential parts of the political elite but not the very top-leaders; there should be an informal atmosphere and that negotiations should take place in isolation. The role of the third-party was mainly as facilitators (interview with Terje Rød Larsen 8 June 1995). The form of negotiations was taken from a textbook in conflict

resolution (cf. Kelman, 1972). In line with the role of third party interventions in conflicts characterised by existential–psychological difficulties, the task was to ease fears of the ‘other’ (Rothman, 1992). The closeness between the delegates however resulted in another problem: it became difficult for both sides to communicate the content of negotiations and potential compromise to their leaderships (Interviews Terje Rød Larsen 8 June 1995 and Mona Juul 6 June 1995). The negotiations became a closed and exclusive sphere to which neither home governments nor populations had sufficient access.

Another problem is that small-size third party actors lack the means to balance parties that are highly unequal. Also, a too heavy emphasis on identity and fear on both sides tend to conceal power inequalities (Jones, 1999). If focus is on mutual fear and existential concerns, there may be a tendency to treat parties as equal – i.e. the concerns of both parties are treated as equally legitimate – although in terms of power, finance, and control, there may be strong inequalities.

As for problem-solving aspects, meetings and dialogue groups (that had been fostered by NGOs and grass root organisations on both sides beginning in the 1970s) preceded the negotiations. Such dialogue groups, workshops, and discussion fora among academics, practitioners, journalists, peace activists, solidarity workers, and others entailed the emerging deconstruction of enemy images (Fischer, 1996; Kelman, 1978; Rothman 1997). Kriesberg (2001) also acknowledges that this was an important precedent of the negotiation process. However, it is a debated issue whether NGO negotiations actually contributed to the formal negotiations in the 1990s. The contribution may not consist of direct impact on decisions to partake and engage in negotiations, but as indirectly indicating that meetings and discussions are indeed possible (cf. Bar-On, 1999).

Dialogue groups among actors in what might loosely be termed ‘civil society’ blossomed during the years of the peace process and some have continued to meet and work also during the latest phase of violence. Most have found it untenable to continue. Many took place within the framework called ‘People to People-Program’. This program was a donor initiative with the intention of responding to clauses in the Declaration of Principles and the Interim Agreement calling for confidence-building and reconciliation (Article 22, Chapter 4 of the Interim Agreement). To Palestinians, many of these projects were however tantamount to ‘normalisation’ – something to be dreaded unless the Israeli occupation was first ended. Therefore, in many of these projects there was an element of suspicion from the very beginning. A lack of understanding of existing asymmetries sometimes hindered these initiatives to play the role that they could have done.

### *Implementation*

The first years of the peace process meant substantial progress, although opposition on both sides was formed. Eventually, confidence and a ‘working trust’ was

created between the leaderships, although it is probably safe to claim that Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat never particularly liked each other. The understanding between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat implied both were conscious about the difficulties that the other side was facing. Both sought to refrain from situations that might be politically sensitive to the other, for example in the form of domestic opposition (Kelman, 1998). This climate of pragmatic cooperation never spread beyond the specific institutions where different parts of the agreements were discussed and put into implementation, or beyond Palestinian National Authority (PNA)/Fateh and the Israeli Labour Party. Oppositional violence naturally rendered implementation of signed agreements difficult, but there was nevertheless a working spirit. However, in the implementation phase, focus was on Israeli withdrawal and construction of the Palestinian administration, while identity issues were again pushed aside. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 was a severe blow to the process as such. When Simon Peres lost the Israeli Prime Minister elections in May 1996, much of the partnership that had been created through hard labour was spoiled. The level of trust between Netanyahu and Arafat was exceedingly low. The relationship between Ehud Barak (who as Labour's new leader replaced Benjamin Netanyahu as Israel's Prime Minister in the elections of 1996) and Arafat never became particularly friendly, although the two had dinner in the home of Barak only a few weeks before the resort to violence in September 2000.

The Oslo-process was based on an understanding between parts of the PLO-leadership and the Israeli Labour at that time. Consequently it proved difficult to transfer the cooperative climate established during the first years of the process to another Israeli government. The Oslo-process failed to formulate a mechanism through which the peace process could be 'inherited' by new Israeli governments. This is an especially important factor as Likud and the Right in Israel represent a self-image of defenders of Israel in a world of threat and isolation.

Another problem with the phased process was precisely the uncertainty this produced. None of the parties could be certain where exactly the other party was heading in the negotiation process. This made it possible for elites on both sides to exploit the ambivalence and make claims that the other side was still opting for a maximalist strategy.

The interim period for Palestinian self-rule ended 4 May 1999. The period was prolonged due to the delay in the process and because of early elections in Israel in May that year. As bilateral Palestinian-Israeli negotiations were resumed at the highest level in September 1999, the Israeli government and the PLO/PNA agreed that an agreement on the permanent status of the West Bank and Gaza, including the 'difficult' issues such as Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees, Jewish settlements, borders, and security, was to be signed no later than 13 September 2000 (Sharm el Sheikh Memorandum 4 September 1999), exactly seven years after the historical signing of the Oslo-agreement. Under heavy American pressure, the parties decided to give it a 'final try' in Camp David.

*Camp David: Ending the Process*

When negotiations were resumed in Camp David in July 2000, both Barak and Clinton were under heavy pressure of time. Barak was under domestic pressure as his coalition had cracked in the early summer and Clinton was about to end his term as US President. Clinton saw his chance of going down to history books as the President who brokered peace between Israelis and Palestinians slipping out of his hands.

In terms of substance of the negotiations, the proposals made by Israel's Ehud Barak implied Palestinian sovereignty over the totality of the Gaza Strip and more than 90 per cent of the West Bank. According to the Palestinian version, the West Bank was to be divided into three separate enclaves, each to be surrounded and thus controlled by Israel (Palestinian Negotiation Team, 2001; Baskin, 2000). On Jerusalem, the proposal implied that Israel would annex the main settlements in and around East Jerusalem and expand Greater Jerusalem. Palestinian suburbs would constitute an 'outer ring' with full Palestinian sovereignty; while Palestinian neighbourhoods in the vicinity of the Old City such as Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan and Wadi al-Joz would make up an 'inner ring' that would have an extended form of autonomy. Israel would have overall sovereignty. Metropolitan Jerusalem would be divided into an Arab and an Israeli municipality: Israel would have sovereignty over a city with two municipalities (Hammami & Tamari, 2001: 8). Concerning the Old City, there was to be Palestinian sovereignty over Muslim and Christian quarters while Haram ash-Sharif would be under Palestinian 'permanent custodianship'. The proposal would cement the fragmentation of Palestinian-controlled territory and lead to a split sovereignty. Jerusalem would be separated from its hinterland.

In Israel, the proposal was extremely radical. For the Palestinians, the proposal was insufficient. What caused the negotiations to fail was the territorial assumptions that were made. The territorial fragmentation of the proposal meant a Palestinian fear that the territory they were to control would be cut off and fragmented and where the Palestinian population would in several locations be surrounded by Israeli-controlled territory and Jewish settlements.

The time after Camp David was thus characterised by uncertainty. The magic date the 13th of September came and went without any agreement, without a Palestinian state and without any public knowledge of how the process was to proceed. Adding to this daunting picture was the pessimistic mood expressed by Ehud Barak, plagued by severe domestic problems and facing early elections, warning that violence would replace negotiations because of the collapse of talks.

The marathon negotiations in Taba and Eilat in late January 2001 meant a substantial closing of the gap between the parties on all substantial issues (see the Moratinos 'Non-Paper' 2001). Despite obvious progress, negotiations were interrupted in a haste. Against the backdrop of escalating violence, negotiations were difficult. Moreover, the Barak government itself was on the verge of collapse. In December 2000, Barak had resigned from his post as Prime Minister and called for new elections to the

Prime Minister position. In the February elections, Likud leader Ariel Sharon won a landslide victory.

The collapse of the Camp David negotiations augmented sentiments of fear on both sides. Both populations began to fear the consequences of what their leaderships might be prepared to surrender in order to reach a compromise. In Israel, there was fear that relinquishing territory might augment insecurity and vulnerability on behalf of the Jewish population and of Israel as a state and society. Palestinian fears were similar, namely that their territorial control would not enable them to defend themselves in terms of threat and that the fragmented territory would reduce possibilities of safe-guarding Palestinian identity. That is, clinging to territory is a security-creating mechanism. At the same time, the very insecurity of the process as such was underlined with the way in which the Camp David-negotiations were handled.

### **‘Al-aqsa-intifada’ and the Politics of Fear**

In the vacuum left behind by Camp David, simmering frustration among the Palestinians reached a climax with Ariel Sharon’s heavily securitized visit on the Temple Mount 28 September 2000. Sharon’s walk on the Temple Mount was interpreted as a direct challenge. It communicated that Likud was not to compromise on Jerusalem, directly feeding into Palestinian identity discourses on vulnerability, suffering, and struggle. It is also significant for our understanding that the visit by Sharon occurred in the uncertain post-Camp David climate. Regardless of the intentions, the consequences of the action were devastating. It should further be underlined that during the summer 2000 Israeli media reported on re-examinations of possibilities of Jewish prayer at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and other activities serving to enhance Jewish presence around the site (Baskin, 2000).

The large-scale violence that broke out in the West Bank and Gaza on the day after was thus predictable. Violent demonstrations – called for by the Palestinian leadership – were by Palestinians depicted as legitimate resistance against the enduring Israeli occupation. In Israel, the violence was portrayed as orchestrated by Yasir Arafat and as a way to crush the peace process. In the vicious cycle that followed, the outbreak of violence was produced by fear and as the intifada continued; it further produced and escalated fear.

Two events in October 2000 came to symbolise the sentiments of exposure and threat on both sides. The first incident (in late September 2000) was that of a 12-year old Palestinian boy caught in a crossfire with his father: After trying to protect his son during the 45 minutes of horror, the boy was shot to death. The TV-pictures of the terrified boy who died in his father’s arms became a symbol for Palestinian suffering and thus an ingredient in the violence when grief and wrath of the many dead became a catalyst behind renewed confrontations.

The other event was the two Israeli soldiers who were brutally lynched by an enraged mass of people outside the police station in Ramallah. Pictures of the dead body of one of the reservists, thrown out of the window while his assailant triumphantly held up his bloody hands in front of a jubilant crowd, became a symbol for Israeli insecurity in the region as well as a sign of Palestinian hatred. Both events could be taken as a sign of what the other side might be capable of doing.

The situation was also affected by the ‘terror overlay’ which has defined world politics since September 2001. Israel’s government exploited the dominant discourse in relation to ‘terrorism’ and appointed Arafat as a local variant of Usama bin-Laden.

Despite a US-authored UN-security resolution endorsing a Palestinian state as a vision for the future of the Middle East (UNSC 1397, 2002), and despite a Saudi-initiated peace plan (Crown Prince Abdullah, 2002) endorsed by the Arab League, a deadly escalation ensued during the Spring of 2002. This escalation involved large-scale suicide attacks by Hamas as well as the al-Aqsa Martyr’s Brigades, related to Fateh’s Tanzim. Israel’s response was partial re-occupation of different areas of the West Bank, including exaggerate and disproportionate use of violence.

As violence escalated, Palestinians felt at war and besieged, bringing to the fore past experiences as well as old perceptions of the ‘other’ as repressive and belligerent. The Palestinians as so many times before felt themselves victims of an exceedingly strong power. The fact that Arafat from early 2002 was practically under house arrest in his war-torn compounds in Ramallah further fed into these sentiments as did Israeli threats of sending him to exile or even possibly killing him in September 2003. The erection of a wall separating Israel from the West Bank was a sign in the same direction. Israeli fears of ‘trespassing’ caused an obsession with attempting to keep unwanted subjects/‘terrorists’ at bay through securing the borders of a sovereign nation-state by all means. In Israel, sentiments of existential threat and of being an exposed people in a hostile world were brought to the fore. To the Israelis, Palestinian violence was a confirmation that Israel cannot be guaranteed security unless Israel herself provides it.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The Declaration of Principles and the Oslo-process were ultimately based on an understanding between parts of the PLO and Israel’s Labour-party that a Palestinian state was the only realistic solution to the century-old conflict. The process was built on a rather conventional step-by-step approach: through approaching ‘smaller’ issues, confidence could be established, paving the way for compromise on the ‘larger’, ‘difficult’ issues. However, the process explicitly addressed the conflict from an angle which allowed for the inclusion of identity issues. The argument made throughout this article is that these factors were not sufficiently sustained and that the process did not

maintain a focus on the links between fear/security and identity as well as the relations of power. Below follows an elaboration of the main problems of the process.

The *first* weak link in the process was the principle of a staged implementation. The open-ended nature of the agreement created ‘ambiguity, conditionality and reversibility’ (Shikaki, 1999: 29). Further,

Conflict resolution in stages, however, carries risks. Each side in the conflict creates its own expectations; if unfulfilled, the disillusionment may block further progress and may take the process backward (Shikaki, 1999: 29).

The intended change was allowed to be too protracted and to be too vaguely defined, since the explicitly shared vision between the parties was buried with Yitzhak Rabin. Indefinite transformations with only vague intentions are therefore problematic. As time passed without further clarity being visible, fears were produced that the other side was merely foot-dragging.

*Secondly*, concerning the form of negotiations, the Oslo-process built on facilitating, on easing communication, breaking stereotypes, and the like. There was a specific acknowledgment of problem-solving as a favoured strategy. The problem-solving approach was however not sustained. After the signing of the Oslo-accords, the negotiation structure was brought back under the auspices of the United States (although Norway, Sweden and the European Union and other actors continuously played important mediating and facilitating roles), implying a renewed dominance for the power-based structure. This was most obvious for the Camp David-talks in the summer of 2000. It thus appears that power-based negotiations are not sufficient for dealing with identity conflicts *but* that problem-solving/facilitating is equally problematic because of its tendency to treat highly unequal actors as equals.

The *third* set of problems relates to the fact that the process and its content was never brought back to relevant actors in civil society nor to the public at large. There were never any broad information campaigns. Although the peace process was in fact preceded by a number of initiatives by Palestinian and Israeli NGOs, academics, labour unions, youth groups and peace groups throughout the 1980s, not enough effort was made to ‘popularise’ the process and to bring it back to the people concerned, causing a nagging sense of suspicion on both sides. This ought to tell us something about the need to link informal and formal processes closer together. In late summer 2000, both sides also felt that the limit for compromise had already been exceeded. Both the Israeli government and the PLO became subsequently enmeshed in domestic political bargaining, seeking to gain legitimacy for their alternative, but without enough efforts vested into explaining the process and its contents to their constituencies respectively (Kriesberg, 2001: 389). Here, the parties would have needed more outside assistance.

*Fourth*, although there was battle fatigue on both sides, both constituencies had still lived the conflict for decades; stereotypes and enemy images are not deconstructed

simply as a result of agreements at elite levels (Rothstein, 1999a: 5). As both sides perceive themselves in terms of perennial victims, chances for compromise are further diminished. For large sections of both populations, enemy images had until that time composed relatively secure spheres for action. Formal change of the perception of the other thus led to confusion for large segments of both populations. For oppositional groups, the peace process became a threat to images of self and other. Shamir and Shkaki (2002) have showed that at the eve of the Camp David negotiations, the public opinion among both Israelis and Palestinians considered their respective leaderships to have agreed to too far-reaching compromises.

As conflict declined and changed, boundaries became less rigid and less decided, which in itself created uncertainty. Thus, the formal shift in perceptions resulted in confusion on popular levels on both sides. Although the peace process and all that it entailed in forms of deconstructing enemy images was welcomed by a majority of both populations, the peace process was portrayed as a threat among opposition groups. Although the Oslo-process pinned down the profound meaning of identity and enemy-images of the conflict, negotiations after the Interim Agreement of 1995 failed to keep this in focus. Instead there was a retreat into a perception of the conflict as interest- or resource-based in the sense that territory was to be seen as a material resource to be divided between the parties. The meaning of that territory to both sides has not been properly integrated in the process.

*Fifth*, the agreement did not include a mechanism for how to transfer the concepts and ideas of the process to the opposition. Oppositional groups on both sides base their identity perceptions on enemy images framed as threats. On the Palestinian side the PNA tried to balance between the PNA's state-building aspirations and PLO's revolutionary political style, as well as between the mainstream and fringe movements. As Arafat lost legitimacy, he became less prone to compromise (cf. Rothstein, 1999a: 9). Further, the weakened internal position of Arafat diminished his potentials of controlling his opposition. Rothstein (1999a) makes the point that strongly supported leaders who favour compromise are better for peace than the contrary. It follows then, that if a leader loses support because of compromises made, that leader will be less and less willing to pursue the path of negotiations.

*Sixth*, and importantly, the relationship between territorial contiguity, identity, and security must be properly assessed. For the Palestinians, the ambiguity of Camp David created territorial uncertainty; that is would the Palestinian-controlled territory be fragmented, composed of separate enclaves and entities? This fear of future isolation and vulnerability was so great that in order to avoid such a situation, violence was a favoured option. Geographic isolation creates fears of future possibilities of defending the community (Walter, 1999a: 6). For the Israelis, control of territory has been of utmost significance for state and society security since the creation of the state. Therefore, relinquishing territory without being certain that the Palestinian authority would be able to guarantee Israeli security created similar fears. Simply put, both sides feared that the

outcome of the peace process would threaten their very survival, and the parties were locked in a mutual dilemma of fear. It was therefore a devastating decision that was made when the American hosts of the Camp David-talks decided not to draft a continuation of the negotiations. As Walter has claimed: ‘combatants cannot credibly commit to treaties that produce enormous uncertainty in the context of a highly dangerous implementation period’ (Walter, 1999b: 39).

Conflict resolution must try to deal simultaneously and to an equal extent with 1) the legitimate sentiments of fear on both sides *regardless* of power asymmetries and 2) structural imbalances and asymmetries. One highly important lesson is that security needs for both parties must be part and parcel of any territorial compromise.

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