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## **A NARRATIVE OF THE JEWISH-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: ISRAELI-JEWISH ACADEMIC VERSION – WHY? AND HOW?**

### **■ INTRODUCTION**

In this article I'll try to shed light on the three following questions: What have been the goals of the Zionist leaders in the conflict with Palestinians? What was the process of breaking out the conflict between Jews and Palestinians? What has been the course of the conflict over the years? The responses lie in the presented narrative based on academic literature. But I am aware that there are other narratives that tell a different perspective. The narrative is in the eyes of the beholder. But I am keeping the desire to be objective, subscribing also to my moral and humanistic values since each academic narrative is underlined by the system of beliefs and values of the academia person that writes it (Bar-Tal 2019).

I'll begin the paper with the question: What is the beginning of the conflict between the Jews and the Palestinian population? There are several possibilities to point out to this beginning: I chose the birth of the Zionistic<sup>2</sup> idea with the spring of the nations that exploded in 1848 (Shimoni 1995; Reinharz, Shapira 1996).

### **■ THE JEWISH-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT**

#### **The beginning of Zionism**

In the first half of the nineteenth century aroused in Europe rebellious civil forces that demanded national sovereignty and fundamental rights. Jews were also affected by these ideas. Moshe Hess, Rabbi Zvi Kalisher, Rabbi Yehuda Elkalai, Mose Lilienblum and Leo Pinsker were among the first to advocate settling in Palestine

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<sup>2</sup> Zionism derived from *Zion* is a Jewish nationalist movement that emerged in the 19th century and propagated the establishment of the state for the Jewish people in their old homeland, in view of their hardship in the diaspora and longing to their country.

as a solution for Jews to the antisemitism (Schweid 1985; Almog 1996; Tessler 2009). I can state that all the conflicts always begin in the minds of individuals (usually leaders) and so the ideas to end peacefully the conflict must also appear in the minds of the individuals (mostly leaders).

In the 1882 began the first Aliyah<sup>3</sup> to the Palestine that was at this time under the rule of the Ottoman empire (Ettinger, Bartal 1996). But it was Theodor Herzl, who infused Zionism with a new practical urgency, being profoundly shocked by the Dreyfus antisemitic affair that developed in 1894 and disappointed in emancipation of Jews in European countries. He organized in 1897 the first World Zionist Congress that propagated the Basel plan „to establish a home for the Jewish people in Palestine” (Penklar 2020). It was a plan that at that time was based on a myth of „a land without a people for people without a land”. Contrary to this myth in 1882 there were approximately 450,000 Arabs and approximately 24,000 Jews living in Palestine (Tessler 2009).

### **British rule over Palestine**

In 1917 with the conquest of Palestine by Great Britain the Palestinian population numbered about 650,000 and the Jewish about 70,000, according to the interim report of the Mandatory to the League of Nations<sup>4</sup>. Most of the Zionist Jews entered Palestine during the 40 years since 1880. The importance of the year 1917 lies in the Balfour declaration issued by the British government which stated: „His Majesty’s government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for Jewish people and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the achievement of this object...”. This statement became a foundation for the future establishment of the Jewish state (Gutwein 2016).

The British Mandatory Palestine was a geopolitical entity that existed between 1920 and 1948 in the region of Palestine under the terms of the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine. During the Mandate, the area saw successive waves of Zionist Jewish immigration and the rise of nationalist movements in both the Jewish and Palestinian communities. The Palestinians wanted to defend their status as rightful inhabitants and owners of the land, and at the same time maintain its Arab and Muslim character. In contrast, the Zionistic Jews wanted to change existing conditions by purchasing land and settling on it, in an attempt to transform the territory to create the Jewish homeland (Cohen 2014). In that context, it is interesting to note the relatively early observation by Nagib Azoury, a Maronite Christian who served as an official of the Ottoman Empire in Jerusalem. In his

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<sup>3</sup> Aliya means in Hebrew „ascent” – a spiritual ascent to the Holy Land and from 1882 took a place several Zionistic aliyot. Between 1882 and 1939 there were five aliyot and the sixth (1933–1948) one was illegal.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-204267/>.

1905 book, *Le Réveil de la Nation Arabe (The Awakening of the Arab Nation)*, Azoury wrote:

Two important phenomena – of the same nature but opposed – are emerging at this moment in Asiatic Turkey. They are the awakening of the Arab Nation and the latent effort by Jews to reconstitute on a very large scale the ancient Kingdom of Israel. These two movements are destined to confront each other continually until one of them prevails over the other. The final outcome of this struggle, between two peoples that represent two contradictory principles, may shape the destiny of the whole world.

Indeed, this prophecy turned out to be right, as we see today the history of the region with its continuous violent struggle that preoccupies the international community. The Gaza and the Lebanese wars at present is the latest evidence to this very early prediction.

The period of the British Mandate varied in the policies of the British governments. It began with the appointment of a Jew, Lord Herbert Samuel, who was himself a Zionist, as the first High Commissioner. He hoped to gain Palestinian participation in mandate affairs and to protect their civil and economic rights, but he refused to stop Jewish immigration and their land purchases. Those were the key issues in Jewish expansion of immigration and extending ownership over the land (Huneidi 2001).

In 1920 and 1929 erupted riots between the Jews and the Palestinians which showed that the conflict is violent and continuous. In 1920 the outbreak of riots in Jerusalem was caused by the continued Zionist immigration to Palestine and to outlying Jewish villages in Galilee. The riots in 1929 erupted over access to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, but spread around the country to Hebron, Yaffo and Safed. The fundamental cause of the violence was the Palestinian disappointment because of unfulfilled national aspirations, fears of Jewish immigration, and their territorial expansion by buying land that uprooted Palestinian peasants (Cohen 2015; Auerbach 2021). In 1936 began a Palestinian rebellion against the British, instigated by the massive influx of Jewish immigration which lasted till 1939 and cost heavy losses to the Palestinian population. Jews were also harmed by the revolt which led to attacks on the Jewish population and violent reactions of the Jewish militia groups (Hughes 2015). In principle, Jews cooperated with the British mandate in putting down the rebellion.

In 1936 was appointed British Royal Commission of Inquiry, headed by Lord Peel, to investigate the causes of unrest in Mandatory Palestine, following a six-month-long Palestinian general strike. In 1937 the commission published a report that, for the first time, stated that the League of Nations Mandate had become unworkable and recommended partition (Tessler 2009). According to the recommendation of the committee, Palestinians, who were supposed to get a state

of about 80% of the territory to be annexed to Trans Jordan, constituted about 990,000 people (70% of the total population) and Jews, who were supposed to get 20% of this land, numbered about 400,000 (28.24% of the total population) people<sup>5</sup> (*Report of the Palestine Royal Commission 1937*).

The Palestinians opposed the partition plan and condemned it unanimously. The Zionist leadership was bitterly divided over the plan (Morris 2001). In a resolution adopted at the 1937 Zionist Congress, the delegates rejected the specific partition plan. Yet the principle of partition was generally thought to have been „accepted” or „not rejected outright” by every major Jewish Zionist factions. The delegates empowered the leadership to pursue future negotiations. David Ben-Gurion and Chaim Weizmann, the leaders of the Zionists, saw it „as a stepping stone to some further expansion and the eventual takeover of the whole of Palestine” (Morris 2001).

Ben-Gurion presented as early as 1937 a very direct vision to widen the borders of the homeland<sup>6</sup>:

With the establishment of the Jewish state, we do not forfeit our right to return and settle in all parts of the country, and our settlement will never be limited to the limited areas of the state. (...) The possibilities of expansion will not be possible, if from the first moment the Jewish state does not direct all its efforts and steps and relations – in building, in creating power and in establishing neighborly relations – towards our expansion in the country, out of desire and agreement and cooperation with our Arab neighbors (Ben Gurion – Ben Yehuda Project – speech in 1937).

In spring 1939, the British government published a White Paper which proposed a limit to Jewish immigration from Europe, restrictions on Jewish land purchases, and a program for creating an independent state to replace the Mandate within ten years. This was seen by the Jews as betrayal of the mandatory terms, especially considering the increasing persecution of Jews in Europe during the thirties since the Nazi party started to govern Germany. Despite the disagreement, as the Second World War erupted, Jews began to cooperate with the British and even recruited a fighting brigade, except the Jewish radical military organizations which continued to oppose Britain (Liebreich 2004).

The war, in which 6 million Jews perished, was a traumatic experience and hundreds of thousands of survivors tried to come to Palestine that was closed

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<sup>5</sup> [https://ecf.org.il/media\\_items/290](https://ecf.org.il/media_items/290).

<sup>6</sup> David Ben-Gurion, the primary national founder of the State of Israel, was the head of the Jewish Agency Executive from 1935, and later president (the central body in the administration of the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel), the chairman of the Zionist board (the limited executive committee of the World Zionist Organization), and the first prime minister of the State of Israel, who presented his doctrine regarding the design of the state’s borders already in 1937.

by the Great Britain. The events of the war and after it were the decisive factors that forced Britain to announce their desire to terminate the Palestine Mandate and place the question of Palestine before the United Nations, the successor to the League of Nations (Louis, Stookey 1986).

### **1948 war**

On 29 November 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations decided to end the British Mandate in Palestine and to establish two independent states – a Jewish state and a Palestinian state. According to the plan, Jerusalem and its environs would be under international supervision. The partition plan gave the Jews, who were then 33% (about 650,000) of the total population, a state that included 56% of the territory of Mandatory Palestine (they also owned only 6% of the land of the Mandatory Palestine), while the Palestinians, who were 67% (about 1,350,000) of the population, received 43% of the territory. The partition plan was rejected by the Palestinian leadership and by most of the Palestinian population. Most of the mainstream Jewish Zionist leaders formally accepted the plan and the British government announced that the Mandate for Palestine would end at midnight on 14 May 1948<sup>7</sup>.

Immediately after the UN resolution, the civil war broke out between the Palestinian and Jewish communities, which began by the Palestinian attacks on Jews as the British authority began to break down. After the establishment of the Israeli state, several Arab countries intervened on behalf of the Palestinian community that was decimated by the rebellion in 1936, starting the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Jews gained upper hand in the second part of the war, receiving Czechoslovak arms and having full mobilization. The war, which lasted until 1949, allowed Israel to expand 22% of the territory beyond the land allocated to the Jewish state by the partition plan. Jews paid very heavy price in the war in which 6,000 of them were killed, including in several massacres, about one percentage of the Jewish population. The Jewish victory in the war happened to be a disaster (in Arabic: Nakba) for the Palestinian community. During the war, approximately 750,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled, becoming refugees and about 450 Palestinian villages were destroyed. In total about 12,000 Palestinians were killed (also about 1 percent of the population) and there were also massacres in which hundreds of Palestinians were killed. The 1949 Armistice Agreements were signed separately between Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. They formally ended the hostilities of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war and also demarcated the Green Line, which separated Arab-controlled territory from Israel. Transjordan seized and subsequently annexed the West Bank and the kingdom of Egypt seized the Gaza

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<sup>7</sup> Chromeextension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://lsa.umich.edu/content/dam/cmenas-assets/cmenas-documents/unit-of-israel-palestine/Section1\_UnitedNationsPartitionPlan.pdf.

Strip. Attempts to resolve the Israeli-Arab conflict failed, because of disagreements about the borders, the Palestinian refugees' problem and the status of Jerusalem (Milstein 1997; Morris 2001; Tessler 2009; Schulze 2013).

### **The first period of the Israeli state – 1948–1967**

About 150,000 Palestinians remained in the State of Israel and they were put under strict military rule until 1966. Under the authoritarian leadership of David Ben Gurion, Israel had a number of immense challenges: to absorb many hundreds of thousands of Jewish immigrants from all over the world and form them into a unified nation; to defend the new state against threats coming from Arabs countries, thus to build a strong army; to construct new settlements for Jews throughout the country, to build governmental, parliamentary and legal system and develop successful economy (Segev 2019).

From the establishment of the state and until the mid-1970s, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that in reality was an Israeli-Arab conflict, retained all the characteristics of an intractable conflict. The conflict was violent, long-lasting and required enormous resources. In addition, with socio-psychological foundations, it was considered unsolvable and revolved around aims that both sides perceived as vital to their very existence. These aims focused on questions of the right of the Jewish nation to self-determination, its return to its homeland, the establishment of the Jewish state and in addition, national-cultural-religious control of the space. When aims like these are considered existential, there is no room for compromises – not even the smallest and most insignificant concessions. Both sides constructed supporting narratives, froze with them and entrenched themselves in their positions. Thus, these worldviews led to the disregard of the needs of the other, to the negation of the identity and narrative of the opponents, and to systematic efforts to delegitimize them. Every concession was perceived as a loss for the conceding side, as in a zero-sum game.

The Palestinians related to themselves as having the right of „precedence” over the land and thus viewed the Jews who had arrived as immigrants, or even more severely as invaders and colonialists. They absolutely rejected the right of the Jews to self-determination and to an independent state, and even refused to recognize the historical connection of the Jews with their homeland. The Jews, in contrast, related to the land as a legacy promised to them by God in the Bible, as their historical-cultural homeland, and as a place of refuge considering the dangers that the Jewish nation had faced and was still facing. They did not recognize the unique national identity of the Palestinians and considered them as part of a larger Arab nation, having the rights to many states and thus lacking legitimate roots in the country, and as „tenants” on land belonging to the Jews. The perception took hold that the aim of the Arabs was the complete eradication of the Jews, as a kind of continuing version of the Holocaust. And in such an „us or them” situation Jews

in Israel believed that they had to ensure their existence even if it meant the use of violence, as even one defeat could lead to the destruction of the state (Golan 2015; Podeh 2015).

During the first two decades following the establishment of the state, expressions of hegemonic conflict culture were clearly dominant in all national institutions, in the wide range of cultural products, in school textbooks and teaching, in official texts, leaders' speeches, national ceremonies, public space, and more. One of the main sites for these expressions was the mass media – in this period radio – and the printed newspapers and magazines. On the one hand, the radio was controlled by the prime minister office and thus was promoting themes of the ethos of conflict<sup>8</sup>. On the other hand, as a central channel for information dissemination to society members, the media also aided in creating the ethos of conflict and implanting its societal beliefs. The hegemonic ideological narrative was instilled by indoctrination covering most political, social, cultural, and educational products during those first decades. This narrative, which served as the foundation of the conflict culture, was selective, biased and distorted. It was based for the most part on supportive information which was usually intensified, while any information which was not supportive, was concealed (Bar-Tal 2023). At this period there was not any meaningful opposition to the policies regarding the management of conflict.

In this difficult period, the political leadership of the State of Israel conducted the conflict adopting, in my view, the following basic premises which were valid until the Six-Day War in 1967. These premises were almost accepted unanimously by the Jewish public:

1. The Arab states are interested in destroying the State of Israel and are not interested in reaching a peace agreement with it.
2. Arabs cannot be trusted because of their innate tendency towards violence and their lack of trustworthiness.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ethos of conflict* is defined as the configuration of shared core societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society at present and for the future in the contexts of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal 2013). It is composed of eight major themes about issues related to the conflict, the in-group, and its adversary: (1) *societal beliefs about the justness of one's own goals*, which outline the contested goals, indicate their *crucial importance*, and provide their explanations and rationales; (2) *societal beliefs about security* stress the importance of personal safety and *national survival*, and outline the conditions for their achievement; (3) *societal beliefs of positive collective self-image* concern the ethnocentric tendency to *attribute positive traits, values, and behavior* to one's own society; (4) *societal beliefs of victimization* concern the *self-presentation of the in-group as the victim* of the conflict; (5) *societal beliefs of delegitimizing the opponent* concern beliefs that deny the adversary's humanity; (6) *societal beliefs of patriotism* generate attachment to the country and society by *propagating* loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice; (7) *societal beliefs of unity* refer to the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements during intractable conflicts to unite the *society's forces in the face* of an external threat; finally, (8) *societal beliefs of peace* refer to peace as the ultimate desire of the society.

3. Israel should not accept proposals to return the Palestinian refugees to the State of Israel, even if this is included in the draft for a peace agreement.
4. A unique situation has developed in the realm of security. There are immediate threats to the security of the State of Israel and its inhabitants.
5. A strong army must be maintained, an army that will be able to deal with the threats of the Arab states and the internal societal challenges. It will be the „nation's army” and will play an important role in social integration, as well as other societal tasks.
6. Operations initiated by Israel, retaliatory raids and even a war should be carried out to deter the enemy and defend the state.
7. In defending the homeland, all possible means should be used without considering the opinion of the international community which abandoned the Jews during the Holocaust.
8. Israeli army is acting morally according to the principle of „purity of arms”.
9. Jews from all over the world should be brought to Israel to build a strong state.
10. To address the challenges of the conflict, a united society with one identity and on security needs to be created.
11. The nation should be educated to accept the possibility of living for a long period of time in the shadow of a conflict.
12. Opportunities for military, political and economic cooperation with nations of the world should be used to develop the state and defend it.

In addition, I would like to point out that from the Jewish point of view the Holocaust does not stand alone as one grim event but is a metaphor for Jewish history itself (Stein 1978). This is of critical importance for understanding the Israeli siege mentality<sup>9</sup> as it is expressed for instance in the following insightful observation that is relevant until today:

The Holocaust remains a basic trauma of Israeli society. It is impossible to exaggerate its effect on the process of nation-building (...). There is a latent hysteria in Israeli life that stems directly from this source (...). The trauma of the Holocaust leaves an indelible mark on the national psychology, the tenor and content of public life, the conduct of foreign affairs, on politics, education, literature and the arts (Elon 1971, p. 198 and 199).

Also, from 1948 till 1967, the majority of the public in Israel had come to terms with the territorial size of the State of Israel, as established at the end of the War of Independence. But still, the vision of a state with „two banks to the Jordan river”, or „West Bank to Israel” continued for a time being among a minority that

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<sup>9</sup> Siege mentality is defined a societal belief denoting perception of being under siege – that is, that the rest of the world has highly negative intentions towards the ingroup society (Bar-Tal, Antebi 1992).

mostly belonged to the Herut party<sup>10</sup>, Mafdal<sup>11</sup> (National Religious Party), and to a lesser extent to the Ahdut HaAvoda<sup>12</sup> (Labor Unity). Even the Prime Minister Ben Gurion did not relinquish the vision of expansion to the east. In 1957 he stated that „Jordan has no right to exist (...) the territory to the West of the Jordan (the West Bank) should be made an autonomous region of Israel” (Slater 1994: 185). The Israeli army did not freeze on its guard and in 1961 and 1963 prepared plans for forces that would have to govern the territories that the State of Israel would occupy in the future (Raz 2021).

Between 1948 and 1977 the conflict was mainly between states, because the Palestinians were crushed in Nakba 1948. Arab countries were sending Palestinian fedayeen<sup>13</sup> into Israel to carry terror attacks to which Israel reacted punitively. Also, there were Israeli minor violent skirmishes between the armies, especially with the Syrians, Jordanians and Egyptians. But in 1956 erupted a major war between Egypt and Israel. Israel participated in a secret agreement with France and Great Britain, who wanted to depose Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser and regain control of Suez Canal that the Egyptian president nationalized. Israel conquered Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula with relatively light losses of 172 soldiers and 817 wounded. The French and British landed in the Canal, but the heavy political pressure from both the United States and the Soviet Union forced the three countries to withdraw from all the Egyptian territories.

Only in 1959 was founded Fatah<sup>14</sup>, a Palestinian nationalist and social democratic political party, and in 1964 Yasser Arafat founded the Palestine Liberation Organization<sup>15</sup> as the official representative of the Palestinian people that immediately won the support of most Arab League governments. Only in 1965 Fatah began to carry attacks on civil targets. Since then, Palestinians have carried out repeated terrorist attacks. By 2024 approximately 4,500 Israeli Jews

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<sup>10</sup> Herut was a major conservative nationalist political party from 1948 until it merged in 1988 with Likud party.

<sup>11</sup> The National Religious Party was representing the religious Zionist movement.

<sup>12</sup> The leftist party that was established in 1954, which was against the partition and favored Greater Israel. In 1968 it merged to form Israeli Labor Party.

<sup>13</sup> Fedayeen is an Arabic term used to refer to various military groups willing to sacrifice themselves for a larger campaign.

<sup>14</sup> Fatah is a Palestinian nationalist and social democratic political party. It is the largest faction of the confederated multi-party Palestine Liberation Organization and the second-largest party in the Palestinian Legislative Council.

<sup>15</sup> The Palestine Liberation Organization is a Palestinian nationalist coalition that is internationally recognized as the official representative of the Palestinian people. Founded in 1964, it initially sought to establish an Arab state over the entire territory of the former Mandatory Palestine, advocating the elimination of the State of Israel. However, in 1993, the PLO recognized Israeli sovereignty with the Oslo I Accord, and now only seeks Arab statehood in the Palestinian territories (the West Bank and the Gaza Strip) that have been militarily occupied by Israel since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

have been killed in terrorist attacks since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 (Morris 1993).

### **1967 war and its consequences**

The Six Day War in 1967 provided Israel with an opportunity to expand its borders, although the immediate conditions for its outbreak were initiated by Egypt that closed Straits of Tiran to Israeli vessels, ordered UN personnel withdraw from Egyptian territories and moved his army into Sinai. Israel pre-emptively attacked Egypt, Syria and Jordan, who joined the war and so, at the end of the Six-Day War, Israel found itself in control of the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the Golan Heights. The connection to the land of the Bible (West Bank) aroused almost unanimous enthusiasm and immediately ignited a settlement movement among broad sections of the public (support for Greater Israel). The previous borders were called „Auschwitz borders”<sup>16</sup>, because, as perceived, they did not provide sufficient protection for the inhabitants of the land of the Israeli state (Oren 2002; Shlaim, Roger 2012).

Immediately after the end of the 1967 war, politicians made rhetorical use of two arguments. One is security: the need for security borders and strategic depth, and the other is a national, historical-religious. The historical reasoning was presented by then Defense Minister Moshe Dayan: „We returned to the holiest in our places, in order to never part from them”. Prominent leaders in the Labor Party supported the extension of Israel and also the Jewish settlement of the occupied territories<sup>17</sup>. On 27 September, was published in the mass-circulation newspapers a statement supporting Greater Israel by 57 of the most important and best-known – then and now – of the country’s writers, intellectuals, senior officers and political activists. It has had tremendous influence on the Jewish public opinion.

The government surrendered to the demands of the Jewish settlers and prepared the constitutional infrastructure for the settlement (Kretzmer 2013). The seminal 2021 book by Kretzmer and Ronen, *The Occupation and Justice: The Supreme Court of Israel and the Occupied Territories*, concluded 500 pages of analysis with many examples in the following way:

In its decisions relating to the Occupied Territories, the Supreme Court has legitimized all controversial policies and practices of the Israeli authorities, including those incompatible with international law. (...) With few exceptions the court has not intervened in policies and practices of the authorities in the Occupied Territories.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.algemeiner.com/2014/01/20/the-1967-lines-are-auschwitz-borders/>.

<sup>17</sup> The Israeli Labor Party is a social democratic and Labor Zionist political party in Israel. The party was established in 1968 by a merger of Mapai, Ahdut HaAvoda, and Rafi. Until 1977, all Israeli prime ministers were affiliated with the Labor movement. After 2000 the party lost support of the Jewish population.

Rather than subjecting the legality of such policies and practices to strict judicial scrutiny, the Court has generally placed the emphasis on issues of procedural fairness and whether the implementation of the policy or practices in specific cases meets the demands of reasonableness and proportionality. This has meant that, in practice, the most problematic policies and practices in the Occupied Territories have received explicit or implicit judicial approval (p. 489 and 490).

The occupied territories were viewed as being „liberated” and immediately were called with their ancient labels, Judea and Samaria, and the cradle of the Jewish history, religion, and culture. The word „occupied” disappeared from the official vocabulary and public discourse. On 28 June 1967, Israel annexed East Jerusalem to the State of Israel. It is important to note that as early as June 1967, Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, in his role as chairman of the Ministerial Security Committee, determined that Israel’s security border would be the Jordan River. In July 1967 labor minister Yigal Allon prepared an unofficial plan, which had a major impact on the Jewish settlement policy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. According to the plan, the eastern border of Israel will pass along the line of the Jordan River, therefore the Jordan Valley and the eastern slopes of the West Bank must be in Israeli territory as a defensible border. Also, according to the plan, Jews will settle in areas around Jerusalem. In addition to East Jerusalem, already in the summer of 1967 Jews settled in Gush Etzion (Bregman 2002; Zertal, Eldar 2007).

In 1972 education minister Yigal Allon decided to erase on maps the Israel’s borders along the ceasefire lines of the Six Day War that were marked with green color (Leuenberger, Schnell 2020). The importance of this move is that generations of Israelis were brought up without knowing that the Green Line separated the State of Israel from the West Bank and thought that the entire area from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea belongs to the State of Israel.

### **1973 war**

In 1973 broke another major war in the Middle East. The coalition of Egypt and Syria launched on a sacred day of Jews – Yom Kippur<sup>18</sup> – a surprising attack on Israel. It was launched after in 1970 the president of Egypt tried to negotiate Israeli half withdrawal from Sinai. This was rejected by the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. The Egyptian and Syrian forces crossed their corresponding ceasefire lines and entered Sinai and Golan Heights. The war was very vicious with heavy losses to the Israeli forces, but after a few days Israel succeeded to stop the offensive and moved to repel the enemy. On 25 October 1973 the war ended with encirclement

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<sup>18</sup> Yom Kippur is the holiest day (day of atonement) of the year in Judaism. The day’s main observances consist of full fasting and asceticism, both accompanied by extended prayer services (usually at synagogue) and sin confessions.

of the Egyptian army in Sinai, entering the Israeli army beyond the Suez Canal into Egypt and repulsing the Syrian army. Despite the results of the war, Arab countries felt psychologically vindicated by the early success. Israeli Jews were traumatized with the surprising attack and the heavy losses of the army (about 2,600 were killed, about 8,000 were wounded, and 296 were captured). This war opened the possibility of striking a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel (Schulze 2013b).

### **The rise of Likud to power and the influence of the Zionist religious sector**

The rise of the Likud<sup>19</sup> to power in 1977 turned the settlement project into a tool of creeping annexation of the territories. However, the ideological-practical torch was carried by the members of the religious-Zionist movement, who perceived themselves as the front runners of the project and pioneers of Zionism (Zertal, Eldar 2007). The project of Jewish settling was increased along the Green Line, on the back of the mountain, and along the main traffic routes, to cut off the West Bank and prevent a territorial sequence of Palestinian settlements.

As described above, the dogma of religious Zionism has played a crucial role in the significant changes that have taken place in the country and its society, and it still does (Avruch 1979). It gradually made its way from the margins to the political center and the leadership, as well as to political and military elites (Aran 1986; Katsman 2020). This presence everywhere makes this movement prominent and central in many areas of the society: in the army, in the Zionist institutions, in the educational system, in the media, the legal system, and especially in the government (Lustick 1988; Mendelsohn 2016; Hellinger, Hershkowitz, Susser 2018).

### **Peace with Egypt and the events till 1993**

Sadat's visit in 1977, after Yom Kippur war in 1973, was a rare historic turning point that had been accomplished in an extremely short period of time under the leadership of Menachem Begin, the leader of Likud. Egypt had for so many years been considered the most dangerous enemy of Israel. Almost all Jewish political leadership from the left<sup>20</sup> to the right supported the peacemaking and agreed to the removal of Jewish settlements from Sinai.

But the peacemaking had at least one significant effect. It found expression in the incipient establishment and development of a meaningful Jewish peace movement, Peace Now, which succeeded in attracting tens of thousands of Israeli

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<sup>19</sup> Likud, a National Liberal Movement, a major right-wing political party in Israel. It was founded in 1973 by Menachem Begin and Ariel Sharon in an alliance with several right-wing parties. In 1977 it ascended to rule the country and with short breaks it rules Israel until today.

<sup>20</sup> In Israel the dimension of right-left solely reflects the positions towards the conflict. Rightists hold uncompromising position towards the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and view Palestinians negatively and distrustfully, whereas leftist favor compromises and view Palestinians as partners to the peacemaking process.

Jews. The movement was established to advance the peace process with Egypt and after the signing of the peace agreement in 1979, it actively supported initiating a similar process with the Palestinians as well (Hermann 2009). In the eighties and nineties appeared a dovish camp in a way that Jewish Israeli society was more or less divided: about 35% supported the dovish view and about the same percentage declared themselves as hawks.

The War in Lebanon in 1982 against the PLO, considered the second Israeli-initiated „war by choice”, aroused unprecedented protest and opposition among part of the Jewish population (Davis 1995). This was the first sign of opposition to an initiated war, even by segments of the military echelon. The pictures of Palestinians fighting against the powerful army and the massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila<sup>21</sup> made an emotional impression on part of the Israeli public.

In December 1987 erupted the first popular mostly nonviolent rebellion of the Palestinians called the first intifada that was an expression of widespread opposition of Palestinians to life under occupation (Alimi 2007). All these events considerably expanded and deepened the alternative narrative of supporting peace making.

In the late 1980s, two important events became extremely significant vis-à-vis Israeli control of the West Bank. On 31 July 1988, Hussein, the king of Jordan, announced the administrative separation of the West Bank from Jordan and the renunciation of any claim to that territory, ending the possibility that the West Bank would be returned to Jordan, as some Israeli leaders had hoped. And on 15 November 1988, the head of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Yasser Arafat, proclaimed the establishment of a Palestinian state, and recognized the State of Israel within its 1967 borders, paving the way for a division of the area into two states (Tessler 2009).

As a result of the American pressure against the wish of the Israeli prime minister from Likud, Yitzhak Shamir, in November 1991 an international peace conference assembled in Madrid, with the participation of an Israeli delegation, and delegations from Arab states and other countries. This was followed by bilateral talks between the parties, focusing on political topics. In addition, multilateral talks also began, dealing with regional subjects, including water, economic cooperation, and the refugee problem. In Washington, bilateral talks took place between an Israeli delegation and a joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation. All these events ultimately led to indirect negotiations between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), after the Likud had lost the 1992 elections and Yitzhak Rabin, representing the Labor Party, which had dovish orientation, had become prime minister (Tessler 2009).

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<sup>21</sup> The Sabra and Shatila massacre refers to the 16–18 September 1982 killings of between 460 and 3,500 Palestinian civilians in the city of Beirut during the Lebanese war. It was perpetrated by Christian militias in Lebanon, but supported by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) that had surrounded Beirut’s Sabra neighborhood and the adjacent Shatila refugee camp.

### **Oslo accords and the peace process**

On 13 September 1993, Declaration of Principles (the Oslo 1 Accord) was signed between Israel and the PLO, with each side recognizing the other, but not the need to establish the Palestinian state. The accord's goals included Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from Jericho, and the creation of the Palestinian National Authority. The PLO recognized Israel's right to exist in peace and security, obligated itself not to engage in terror or in other violent activity, and promised to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict. The mutual recognition between the State of Israel and the PLO entered into force with the signing of the Declaration of Principles which determined a framework for the administration of Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza Strip and on the West Bank (Makovsky 1996). This was also a surprise, like the visit of the Egyptian president had been 16 years earlier. But this time the reactions were different. The rightist-hawkish opposition led by the Likud party, the second largest party in the Knesset, expressed strong resistance towards the agreement, because it negated the realization of its main objective to establish a „Greater Israel” in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Karpin, Friedman 1999).

In 1994 Israel began to carry out the first stage of the Declaration of Principles and withdrew its forces from the Gaza Strip and from Jericho, and the Palestinian Authority was established under the auspices of Yasser Arafat, the head of the PLO. The Oslo II Accords were signed in Taba, Sinai, on 27 September 1995, giving the Palestinians independent authority over Palestinian cities on the West Bank and in Gaza, as well as 450 Palestinian villages. It was agreed that elections would be conducted in the areas controlled by Palestinian Authority. The West Bank was divided into three categories: A, B, and C<sup>22</sup>. In the end, the accords were passed by the Knesset. In spite of these significant achievements, it is important to note that the Oslo Agreements did not relate to or solve central issues that constituted the heart of the conflict: the establishment of a Palestinian state, its borders, the division of Jerusalem, the security safeguards, the question

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<sup>22</sup> The Oslo Accords signed in 1995 divided the Palestinian territory into three temporary administrative sectors, Areas A, B, and C, which would exist until a final agreement would be signed. The three areas do not have territorial contiguity but are separated from each other and the division was made on the basis of various population areas and recognition of Israeli security demands: Area A (18% of the West Bank) includes all of the Palestinian cities and their surroundings, with no Israeli settlements. It is under full civilian and security control by the Palestinian Authority. But Israeli security forces enter the area with the permission of the Palestinian Authorities to arrest Palestinians suspected of violent resistance to occupation. Area B (22% of the West Bank) includes areas of many Palestinian cities, towns and villages, with no Israeli settlements. It is under civilian Palestinian control and under Israeli-Palestinian security control. Area C (60% of the West Bank) includes all Israeli settlements (cities, towns and villages) as well as over 350,000 Palestinian residents with some over 400,000 Jewish settlers. It is under full civilian and security control of Israel, except for Palestinian citizens.

of the return of refugees and the status of the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, among others. It was determined that discussions about these central issues would begin no later than 1996 and would end before May 1999. These discussions never took place. But the Oslo Agreements led to several changes among part of the Jewish public in Israel. The agreements contributed to the legitimization and the humanization of the Palestinians, and enabled people to see them as partners to peace talks, at least among the majority of Israeli Jews. Moreover, they aided in recognizing the unique Palestinian national identity and raised the question of the possibility of establishing Palestinian state. But, on the one hand, the agreements did not assure Israeli security as the terror attacks continued. They were carried by Hamas<sup>23</sup> and increased considerably after a religious Jewish settler carried a massacre in the Cave of the Patriarch in Hebron, killing 29 worshippers and wounding 125 of them. On the other hand, they worsened the economic situation of the Palestinians, because the working permits became limited, did not decrease the signs of occupation, they did not promise establishment of the Palestinian state and more important, continued the Jewish settlement project (Weinberger 2006).

Despite the strong opposition, Prime Minister Rabin promised a new beginning. On 4 May 1994, during the signing of the Cairo Agreement regarding the Gaza Strip and Jericho, he stated, and we can see his style and intentions:

We are convinced that our two peoples can live on the same patch of territory, „every man under his vine and under his fig tree”, as the Prophets foretold, and bring to this country – a land of rocks and of tombstones – the taste of milk and honey that it deserves. (...) On this day, I turn to you, the Palestinian people, and say: Our Palestinian neighbors, a century of bloodshed has forged in us a core of mutual enmity. (...) Today we are both extending a hand in peace. Today we are inaugurating a new age (from Bar-Tal 2023).

In line with the speeches the following assumptions can be detected that guided Rabin in his accord with PLO (Bar-Siman-Tov et al. 2007):

1. The Palestinian nation cannot be subdued by military means and thus, the conflict cannot be ended in this way.
2. Israeli rule over the Palestinians will do harm to the Jewish nation, and thus, it is in the Israeli interest to part ways with them by finding a solution using negotiation.

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<sup>23</sup> Hamas, „Islamic Resistance Movement”, is a Palestinian Sunni Islamist political and military movement governing the Gaza Strip. Hamas which promotes Palestinian nationalism in an Islamic context is widely popular in Palestinian society due to its ant-Israeli stance. It did not recognize the State of Israel and objected to Oslo agreements. Hamas has carried out attacks against Israeli soldiers and civilians, including suicide bombings and indiscriminate rocket attacks.

3. Negotiations can only be conducted with the Palestine Liberation Organization headed by Yasser Arafat, as under present circumstances, the organization has abandoned the principles of „armed struggle” and the „phased doctrine”, and is ready to recognize Israel and to reach an agreement to end the conflict with the following conditions: the establishment of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a solution to the refugee problem on the basis of the United Nations resolution 194.
4. The PLO is ready to accept Israel’s position that the political process must be gradual and conducted in stages, with the problematic issues – such as the status of Jerusalem, the refugee problem, the borders, and the Jewish settlements – to be discussed only at the time of the final-status settlement.
5. The PLO’s commitment to abstain from and prevent terrorism will enable Israel to transfer conduct of the war against Palestinian terrorism to the PLO.
6. Mutual trust can be created by an ongoing peace process.
7. The establishment of a Palestinian Authority will lead to responsible behavior by the Palestinians, as the creation of formal institutions creates a proto state which, from that moment, has something to lose, and thus it will negotiate with Israel responsibly to achieve a „fair compromise”.

To stop the erosion of support for the peace process, the Israeli heads of state decided to hold a demonstration of support for the process, which took place at the main square of Tel Aviv on 4 November 1995. At the end of the demonstration, as he was leaving the square, Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated by Yigal Amir, a religious-nationalist Jewish student who opposed the peace process policies (Karpin, Friedman 1999). In February 1996, Palestinian terror attacks struck Israeli cities with great intensity, after the substituting Prime Minister Shimon Peres decided to assassinate a renown Hamas terrorist.

In May 1996, the rightwing Likud Party won the elections, and their candidate for prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, put together a rightwing government. During the election campaign, Netanyahu had obligated himself to honor the agreements signed by Israel. But although he delayed the implementation of the interim agreement, in 1997, he signed the agreement to determine Israeli army deployment in Hebron<sup>24</sup>. In 1998, he signed the Wye

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<sup>24</sup> The Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron, also known as the Hebron Protocol or Hebron Agreement, was signed on 17 January 1997 by Israel, represented by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), represented by PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, under the supervision of the U.S. Secretary of State, Warren Christopher. It concerned the partial redeployment of Israeli military forces from Hebron in accordance with the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip („Oslo II”). According to the Protocol, *Area H-1* (about 80%) would come under Palestinian control, while *Area H-2* would remain under Israeli control.

River Memorandum<sup>25</sup>, which detailed steps to implement the Oslo Agreements, while maintaining reciprocity. However, as evidenced in later years, it appears that he did everything in his power to revoke, or at least to delay, the Oslo peace process because of his hawkish political orientation (Rosler, Hagagw-Baikovich, Bar-Tal 2021).

In principle, even during Netanyahu's term as a prime minister, the basic assumptions that had guided the Rabin government had not changed, at least not publicly or officially (Bar-Siman-Tov et al. 2007). This held true even though Netanyahu considered the Palestinians, under Yasser Arafat, only fulfilling their obligations in part; and he coined the slogan, „If they give, they'll receive; if they don't give, they won't receive”.

The project of Jewish settlement proceeded even during the terms of Rabin and Netanyahu. The most dramatic increase in the number of settlers began after the Likud, led by Menachem Begin, gained control of the government. Immediately after the elections in 1977, there were 38 settlements with 1,900 settlers. In 1999 there were already 183,900 settlers, in addition to Jewish residents of East Jerusalem. These settlements, which continued to expand, greatly affected the course of the conflict and relations with the Palestinians, although the government repeatedly made the misleading and propagandist statement that „the settlements are not an obstacle to peace” (Zertal, Eldar 2007).

In the elections for a prime minister in 1999, Ehud Barak, the nominee of the Labor Party, was victorious and he promised to implement peace policies and to continue the legacy of Yitzhak Rabin, who had established the meaningful peace process with the Palestinian nation. The term of Barak began with hope and ended with destruction of the peace camp and escalation of the conflict.

In 2000–2003, a profound change in public opinion took place among the Jewish community, and its effects can still be felt today. This was primarily the result of two constitutive events that took place in the space of two months: the failure of political talks at Camp David in July 2000, and the second rebellion (Intifada) that broke out two months later, in September of that year – along with the third constitutive event, the evacuation of the Gaza Strip in 2005 and its consequences. The dramatic events that escalated the conflict, based on the fake information provided to the Israeli Jewish public by most of Israeli leaders, the mass media, and official institutions, led to a loss of hope by many Jews. The fake information

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<sup>25</sup> The Wye River Memorandum was an agreement negotiated between Israel and the Palestinian Authority at a summit in Wye River, Maryland, U.S., held 15–23 October 1998. The Memorandum aimed to resume the implementation of the 1995 Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Oslo II Accord). Israel, however, had only implemented stage 1 of the further redeployment, meaning that it had withdrawn from 2% of Area C instead of the required 13%. Both parties accused each other of not fulfilling its share of responsibilities under the Wye River Memorandum, and the further implementation of the agreement remained unfinished.

provided by Ehud Barak stated that the Palestinians are not partners to peace process and that Arafat initiated the second Intifada to liberate the Palestinians by violence. The misinformation was accompanied by terrible violence of terror that validated for the public the intentions of Palestinians. In the second intifada were killed about 1,050 Israelis (about 710 civilians including 119 children) and about 4,700 Palestinians (about 2,200 civilians including 980 children). This is how the pessimism developed about any possibility of a solution and about the „real” intentions of the Palestinians. In other words, the spirit of the rightwing became dominant in Israeli Jewish society, and dovish attitudes diminished considerably, but did not disappear. Only about fifteen percent of the Israeli Jews have continued to adhere to dovish orientation even in 2024, but the conflict culture returned to take its dominant hegemonic place (Bar-Tal 2023).

The third constitutive event was termed the „disengagement plan”; and the construction of a separation wall built along a line east of the 1967 border, which enclosed most of the Jewish settlement blocs on the West Bank within Israel. These two projects were initiated by an elected prime minister Ariel Sharon from Likud party and then from Kadima party<sup>26</sup> without coordinating them with the Palestinian Authority. In contradiction to the popular perception which still exists, a realistic view indicates that Israel did not „disengage” from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and did not end the occupation, but simply changed its character. Over time, Israel created a new system of control and supervision over both the people, all the entering and exiting merchandise, and the territory, by putting siege on the Gaza Strip from the sea, air and land. The passage to Egypt in the south of the strip was closed by Egypt.

In 2006 were carried legislative elections in the Palestinian Authority and Hamas won them and the leader of Hamas was sworn as a Prime Minister and formed a government. USA and Israel were unhappy with the results and imposed sanctions. On 14 June 2007, Hamas took control of the Gaza Strip and as a result Mahmud Abbas dismissed the already formed government. Israel officially proclaimed the Gaza Strip as a „hostile territory”. This meant instituting a total blockade of the entire Gaza area (Peters 2010).

Over the years there have been several attempts to revive the peace process, despite the cycle of violence, but all of them failed. The negotiations between the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, and the Head of Palestinian Authority, Mahmud Abbas, continued for a few months and led to several very significant agreements. Nevertheless, they never reached completion for a variety of reasons, among which was the resignation of Olmert, who was under suspicion for crimes of corruption; thus, the negotiations ended. This was probably the most significant

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<sup>26</sup> Kadima was a centrist-rightist political party in Israel. It was established in 2005 by moderates from Likud largely following the implementation of Ariel Sharon’s unilateral disengagement plan in August 2005, and was soon joined by like-minded Labor politicians.

negotiations that touched on all the issues of dispute between Palestinians and Israeli Jews (Golan 2015).

In the Israeli elections of 2009, after the resignation of Olmert, the rightwing bloc was victorious, and Benjamin Netanyahu began several terms as prime minister. For 12 years, the head of the political pyramid had been a prime minister whose worldview expressed the ethos of conflict, and the government formed in 2015 included parties that held a clearly rightwing orientation. For the first time that reference to the establishment of a Palestinian state disappeared from the documents establishing the new coalition. In line with it, he refused to negotiate with Mahmud Abbas, who objected to use of violence in the struggle for Palestinian independence but agreed to security cooperation with Israel.

During the 2000s, a widely based Israeli support for the basic themes of the ethos of conflict (especially, justness of the conflict goals, delegitimization of Palestinians, self-glorification, sense of self-victimhood) became established that blocked any progress in the peace process. In addition, a new identity was developed in the Israeli Jewish society that underlined nationalism, rights to settle West Bank, and religiosity called neo-Zionism. These forces smoothed the failure of the attempt by the United State Secretary of State John Kerry to negotiate conflict resolution in 2013–2014. In addition, they encouraged the violent encounters between Israeli and Lebanon in 2006 and between Israel and Hamas in 2008, 2012 and 2014 that all three of them were initiated by Israel.

The extreme Israeli forces also increased creeping annexation, encouraged confrontation between Jewish settlers and Palestinians and established apartheid (Dugard, Reynolds 2013). In April 2021, the widely respected Human Rights Watch based in the U.S. released a 213-page report titled *A Threshold Crossed* which found that Israeli authorities are committing the crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution. It claims that the Israeli government perpetuates structural oppression to „maintain the domination of Jewish Israelis over Palestinians in both Israel and the Palestinian territories, where today both groups of people are about equal in size”.

Over the years, the Israeli occupation has had to develop methods of control and surveillance over the Palestinians, using the army, the police, the General Security Services, the Mossad, and the legal system, with the support of the political system, institutions, and formal and informal organizations with enormous resources from many different sources. The solidification of the occupation has involved recruitment of tens of thousands of Palestinian collaborators and informers via deviant methods, demonstrating continual control by force (or as it is sometimes called in IDF orders: „creating a sense of persecution”) and killing Palestinians considered dangerous to the lives of soldiers, policemen, or civilians. It has also entailed assassinate Palestinian leaders and the killing and arrest of children, the use of detention without trials, torture and court hearings,

prevention of entry to the West Bank and refusal of residency permits, collective punishment, home demolition, displacement, roadblocks, and closures. The occupiers confiscate land and private properties, settle even private Palestinian land, demolish houses, expel civil population from their homes and living areas, create a stable sense of insecurity and surveillance using a variety of methods, bureaucratize control, sometimes requiring more than one hundred permits for different requests, supervise population registration, and surveil many aspects of life for the occupied population. Israel has been systematically crushing the space in which the Palestinians live by coveting and taking over territories that do not belong to it through violent means of the Jewish settlers. Every act of resistance to occupation, even nonviolent, has been considered as a threat to Israel and immediately an action is being taken to suppress it (Gordon 2008; Bar-Tal, Schnell 2013; Kretzmer, Ronen 2021; *Israeli occupation of the West Bank*, Wikipedia).

Jewish settlement in the West Bank continued throughout the tenure of all Israeli governments. Thus, by the end of 2023, approximately 490,000 Jews have settled in the West Bank in approximately 127 settlements and over 121 illegal outposts, scattered throughout the entire West Bank, mainly in Area C. In addition, approximately 230,000 Jews live in neighborhoods built in East Jerusalem, which was under Jordanian control until 1967. Israel took over 60% of the West Bank territories with various arguments, such as requirement that the state lands were registered during the British rule, military seizure of territory for security, land expropriation while taking advantage of the lack of clarity in the Ottoman law, and more (Kedar 2001). It should be noted that approximately 2,750,000 Palestinians live in the West Bank, and approximately 350,000 live in East Jerusalem. It is clear today that no government intended to transfer control of the entire West Bank to Palestinian hands. Today, there is no intention to change the status of the occupied territories based on the claim that there is no negotiating partner on the Palestinian side, and many of the right-wing leaders in Israel intend to annex all or part of the West Bank (Bar-Tal 2023). While Mahmud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, expressed willingness to negotiate a two-state solution, Hamas, which subjected the Gaza Strip to its totalitarian regime, objected to negotiations, refused to recognize the State of Israel and preferred to use violent means to end the occupation.

The Israeli elections of 1 November 2022 were even more extreme: the new government combines very nationalistic, racist and messianic religious political forces. The extreme government that came to power in November 2022, consisted of ultraorthodox parties, national religious party and Likud, initiated in January 2023 a series of steps to limit the democracy in Israel. They included overhaul of the legal system of Israel, limitations on the freedom of mass media, politicization of the governmental civil service and so on. The steps instigated continuous demonstrations of Israeli pro-democratic forces that lasted about 40 weeks. This

development was unavoidable, because occupation by its nature limits democracy and the process of increasing elements of authoritarianism in the regime has been going on for two decades, especially towards the Arab minority citizens of Israel and the dovish Jewish opposition to the occupation.

But, on the 7th of October 2023, a constitutive event took place that shook the world, the Middle East, and especially Israel. On that morning a surprising attack of Hamas occurred on twenty Israeli kibbutzim and towns near the Gaza Strip by thousands of Hamas terrorists and Gaza citizens. They murdered over 1,200 people of all ages (over 800 civilians), wounded, raped, and kidnapped 253 children, women, elderly, men and soldiers, committing inhumane atrocities. Hamas launched thousands of rockets into Israel trying to hurt the civilian population.

Israel immediately began to bomb the Gaza Strip indiscriminately with its over two million residents to eradicate Hamas that can be seen as a collective punishment. On 27 October Israeli troops entered Gaza conquering most of its territory. Over 40,000<sup>27</sup> Gazans<sup>28</sup> were killed (more than 1.7% of total Gaza population) and additional 8,000 found their death under the rubbles (over 12,500 children and 8,000 women) and over 94,000 were wounded. With ground entrance Israeli military forces lost 340 soldiers and 2,227 of them were injured. About million and 700,000 residents of Gaza became refugees and most of the Gaza area was flattened because of the bombing, bombarding, and shooting. About 80% of the houses were damaged or destroyed in the north of the Gaza Strip and over 60% in all Gaza Strip. Electricity, internet and telecommunication were shut off and there is not enough water. About 90% of Palestinians in Gaza face severe hunger and dozens of thousands suffer from the spread of infectious diseases.

From 23 November there was a humanitarian respite in connection with the exchange of kidnapped prisoners for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons. Until now 110 children, women and other nationals were released by Palestinian militants (over 100 of the hostages are still left in Gaza and some declared as being dead) and Israel freed 240 prisoners from Israeli prisons, mostly minors and women. The exchanges of prisoners ended on December 4 and the war resumed and has lasted for over 370 days till 21 October, 2024.

Israel is coping now with additional two fronts. In the West Bank appeared violent resistance supporting Gazans. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), between 7 October 2023 and 14 October 2024, Israeli forces and Jewish settlers killed approximately 728 Palestinians, including dozens of children.

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<sup>27</sup> All the numbers were taken from the reports of the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Gaza (OCHA). All the numbers regarding the war were collected up to 1 September 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Over 10,000 were Hamas fighters.

In the north of Israel meanwhile, Hezbollah<sup>29</sup> launches attacks a few times a day, in a bid to increase tensions and deter Israel from a ground invasion of Gaza. About 110,000 Lebanese residents of South Lebanon left their villages and moved north. Over 60,000 Israelis, from the southern kibbutzim, lost their homes or were forced to leave them because of the fighting and have become refugees. In addition to this number are added 62,000 residents of the north who also were evacuated. Eventually Israeli military forces entered south Lebanon to expel Hezbollah fighters from the border, after assassinating the leader of the Hezbollah with the top commanders of the organization and injuring thousands of regular fighters. Also the Israeli air force has begun to bomb the southern Lebanon and Beirut, killing over 1,000 civilians.

At the same time, there are violent exchanges directly with Iran. Israeli air strikes in Syria targeted in April 2024 an Iranian consulate killing senior members of the Iran's Revolutionary Guard. Iran retaliated with an attack of rockets and drones on Israel. Subsequently Israel attacked military sites in Iran. Later in October 2024 Israel assassinated in Teheran the head of the Hamas and Iran attacked Israel with rockets and drones. Israel retaliated again.

Regarding the failure of 7 October 2023, all the commanders of the Israeli security forces took responsibility for the failure to detect the signs of the coming attack. But Netanyahu refused to take any responsibility for his failures, even as he practiced a divide-and-rule strategy between the Palestinian authority and Hamas with the intention to prevent two state solution. He authorized the transfer of over a billion dollars from Qatar to Hamas on the assumption that the money will keep Hamas out of violence. He refuses to stop the war and exchange the remaining approximately 100 living kidnapped Israelis in Hamas captivity for Palestinian prisoners.

Israel found itself in a very traumatic situation. There is anguish, stress, bereavement, and grief on the one hand and a wish for revenge, anger and hatred, on the other hand. For the first time in more than 75 years as a state, the most horrific word in the dictionary, „Holocaust”, has become a reality. The state that was established in 1948 on the basis of a slogan „there will never be another Holocaust” abandoned its citizens to their fate. The Hamas terrorists are likened to Nazis and there is generalization of this label to all Palestinians. Many Israelis demand the razing of the Gaza Strip which means to turn it into Dresden as allied forces did during War World II. The atrocities carried out by Hamas gave a second blow to the peace camp after the events of 2000. Many of the minority who supported a peace process became disappointed, disillusioned as it is called in Israel, with the action of Hamas and the reaction of the Palestinians and their

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<sup>29</sup> Hezbollah is a Shiite Muslim political party and a militant group based in Lebanon, where its extensive security apparatus, political organization, and social services network have fostered its reputation as „a state within a state”. Founded in the chaos of the fifteen-year Lebanese Civil War, the Iran-backed group is driven by its opposition to Israel and its resistance to Western influence in the Middle East.

supporters around the world. Most Palestinians refrained from condemning the massacre of 7 October or even did not recognize it.

The Gaza war is a third traumatic event to shape consciousness of the Israeli Jews, but while two of them, the 1948 war and the Gaza war pose huge barriers to peacemaking, the 1973 war with Egypt enabled the peaceful conflict resolution with the archenemy at that time. The Gaza war destroyed hopes for building trust with Palestinians and advance any kind of understanding with them. It opened a wound that will be very difficult to heal. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are equally traumatized as are Jews. For Palestinians, the situation is considered as a continuation of the Nakba (Disaster) of the 1948 war. Some of the families in Gaza are now refugees for the second and third time. According to their view, Israel is preparing to expel them and to build Jewish settlements, as some Israeli leaders demand.

The war started a new phase of conflict between narratives. While Israelis focus on the events of 7 October and ignore the ethnic cleansing that took place afterwards and they do not talk about ongoing brutal occupation, the Palestinians focus on the continuing atrocities committed after 7 October and the immorality of the occupation. Each side not only makes efforts to present a different picture of the events, but also tries to convince the international community of the evilness of the other group and the morality of its own group.

Nobody knows how the war will end. US President Joe Biden, after unequivocally supporting of Israel and providing military help of ammunition, weapons, and 14 billion dollars of assistance, started to press Israel for humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. He also proposed a plan for ending the war. But the Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu rejected the plan and instead strives towards a complete victory. He and his coalition have a different understanding of the situation and even during the war the government continued to advance anti-democratic steps, incite the opposition in Israel and pursue preferential policies towards the coalition's sectors, especially the ultraorthodox and Zionist religious segments. The following new assumptions were developed during the regime of Netanyahu by him and his coalition, as I see it:

1. The land of Israel is the exclusive homeland of the Jewish people. It was created there, existed for hundreds of years, and Jewish culture was established within its borders. The Jews were exiled from Israel, returned after great suffering in the diaspora in the hostile world that climaxed with the Holocaust. They built a state that ensures their survival.
2. Jews have the right to settle in every part of their homeland including the Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. These settlements not only constitute a continuation of the Jewish heritage but also provide security to the country. In all these places Israel must be solely responsible for security. Two state solution is unacceptable.

3. Nevertheless, existential danger still threatens the State of Israel and the Jewish nation living in the country. The danger is perpetual, as Israel is surrounded by hostile nations and organizations, with Iran at the head, which will never accept Jewish nationhood in general and specifically, deny the presence of a Jewish state in the region.
4. The military forces of Hamas must be eliminated, and Hamas cannot rule in Gaza. All the pro-Iranian organizations like Hezbollah must be destroyed or at least considerably weakened.
5. The Jewish nation is the sole victim of the conflict.
6. The Palestinian nation does not want a peace agreement that will obligate them to compromise, and as such Palestinian leaders are not partners to a peace process.
7. Military power must be used for deterrence and defense as well as to punish violence. Israel must live by its sword to ensure its existence. However, Israel uses violence only when it has to; maintaining a high level of morality as well as acting in line with international law is a norm in the Israeli army.
8. In addition to being the sole victim of the conflict, the Jewish nation is also a permanent victim of anti-Semitic and anti-Jewish forces in the world that would like to see the eradication of the State of Israel.
9. The state and its army should not be criticized, because it provides ammunition to the Arab enemies of Israel and to anti-Semitism in various countries. In addition, it impairs morale, mobilization and the ability to stand up to the enemy.

With these premises the State of Israel is condemned to maintain the occupation and with it the conflict for years to come. These premises are shared by the majority of the Israeli Jews (about 70%) and by most of the leaders who will take the place of Netanyahu. Most of the Israeli Jews prefer today the continuation of the present occupation or the annexation of occupied territory and only about 20% prefer a two-state solution, which means establishment of the demilitarized Palestinian state.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS

When writing this essay, I tried to present a particular perspective from which I see the development and a course of this conflict. Nevertheless, a lot has been published on this confrontation, including a lot of disinformation, because in addition to violence, both sides are engaged in a narrative fight to convince their own side of the validity of their own goals and delegitimize the rival (Slater 2023). Moreover, there is a serious attempt to convince the international community with the same arguments (Oren, Nets-Zehngut, Bar-Tal 2015).

The Jewish population with 1948 war, 1967 war, 1982 war, and 2023 war – four wars, with two Palestinian rebellions, only extremized their view on a peaceful solution of the conflict (Maoz 2009). All Israeli governments contributed to expanding and solidification of the Jewish settlement project in the occupied territories. Until the Gaza war, the great majority of the Israeli Jews had learned to live „without the occupation”,

not acknowledging it, in denial and repression, in a kind of comfort zone. Meanwhile, brutal Palestinian occupation persists in the occupied territories and institutionalized apartheid has developed. The Gaza war spoiled the feeling of comfort. It extended considerably the feeling of victimhood among Jews that had plagued the nation even after the establishment of the state, with the Holocaust serving as a chosen trauma.

The fundamental challenges that face rivals, like Israeli Jews and Palestinians, in an intractable conflict, beyond the ones noted with the development of culture of conflict, are the inability of the rivals to look at the mirror and the inability to take the perspective of the rival.

Today it is difficult to predict the future, when the conflict will peacefully end, because Palestinians and Jews will not go anywhere else, and their violence is very costly for both sides. The intractable conflict with its escalation and institutionalization necessarily brought authoritarian regime to Israel that is seen today as an electoral democracy with all its limitations rather than liberal democracy<sup>30</sup>. It is very difficult to foresee the change that would come from within the Israeli society. The two state solution is resisted by the leadership and most of the Jewish society members. A one state solution with limited civil rights for Palestinians will bring a full regime of apartheid across Israel and giving Palestinians full rights will destroy the Zionist dream of having a Jewish state. Thus, we are stuck... Ethnic cleansing of 1948 is a dream of some political forces in Israel.

Only pressure from the outside world, especially the US, can bring peace making. This situation can develop similarly to where white South Africa stood before 1990. However the position of the Western countries is difficult to predict because they are engulfed by realpolitik considerations, which take into account geopolitical conditions and interests of the states, rather than moral and humanitarian aspects. But the public may press the politicians to accept policies in line with international law, human rights, and morality. Hard to know!!!

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## DANIEL BAR-TAL

### A NARRATIVE OF THE JEWISH-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT: ISRAELI-JEWISH ACADEMIC VERSION – WHY? AND HOW?

The article tries to shed light on the following three questions: what were the goals of the Jewish Zionist leaders in the conflict with Palestinians? What was the process of breaking out the conflict between Jews and Palestinians? What was the conflict over the years? The answerers come from Jewish Israelis, which I analyze based on the academic literature. The well-defined idea to settle Jews in their old homeland appeared with the emergence of Zionism. It was a revolutionary ideology since Jews left/were expelled from their country about 2000 years ago. But there was one problem that stood as a barrier. There were Palestinians living in the same place, some for centuries, who also began to develop their nationalism. This fact opened an intractable conflict between Jews and Palestinians that had lasted for over a hundred years until present time. The article points out to the most important events and processes that shaped the conflict from escalation to de-escalation and again to re-escalation.

**Keywords:** Israel; Israeli-Palestinian conflict; narrative; history