

REVIVING THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS: HISTORICAL LESSONS FOR THE MARCH 2015 ISRAELI ELECTIONS

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Lessons derived from the successes that led to the signing of the 1993 Declaration of Principles between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization highlight modern criteria by which a debilitated Israeli-Palestinian peace process can be revitalized. Written in the run-up to the March 2015 Israeli elections, this article examines a scenario for the emergence of a security-credentialed leadership of the Israeli Center-Left. Such leadership did not in fact emerge in this election cycle. However, should this occur in the future, this paper proposes a Plan A, whereby Israel submits a generous two-state deal to the Palestinians based roughly on that of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's offer in 2008. Should Palestinians find this offer unacceptable whether due to reservations on borders, Jerusalem or refugees, this paper proposes a Plan B by which Israel would conduct a staged, unilateral withdrawal from large areas of the West Bank to preserve the viability of a two-state solution.

INTRODUCTION

Peace between Israel and the Palestinians appears to be as elusive as ever. Following the most recent collapse of American-brokered negotiations in April 2014, Palestinians announced they would revert to pursuing statehood through the United Nations (UN), a move Israel vehemently opposes. A UN Security Council (UNSC) vote on some form of a proposal calling for an end to "Israeli occupation in the West Bank" by 2016 is expected later this month.¹ In July 2014, a two-month war between Hamas-controlled Gaza and Israel broke out, claiming the lives of over 2,100 Gazans (this number encompassing both combatants and civilians), 66 Israeli soldiers and seven Israeli civilians—the low number of Israeli civilians credited to Israel's sophisticated anti-missile Iron Dome system. An upswing in tensions throughout the Fall of 2014 surrounding Jerusalem's Temple Mount saw a resurgence in sporadic Palestinian terror attacks against Israeli civilians and subsequent Israeli crackdowns in the West Bank, leading many experts to speculate on the emergence of a Third Intifada. On December 2, 2014 Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the dissolution of Israel's Parliament. Some analysts view this move as his avenue for securing a fourth term as head of a more right-wing coalition, while others believe this presents an opportunity for turnaround in the Israeli government.

In light of these developments, this paper will present a scenario that could establish the basis for renewed final-status peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. The analysis is rooted in precedents established un-

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der previous negotiations and will begin by examining the circumstances of the mid-1990's Oslo process under which peace efforts between the two sides were, in the words of lead U.S. negotiator at the time Dennis Ross, at a "high point."² The report will then suggest that certain lessons from Oslo can be channeled into developing objectives for today's context.

This paper's ultimate proposal maintains that there are two to three developments that must occur for a final-status peace process to take shape again. First, the upcoming Israeli elections must produce a center-left coalition that prioritizes peace with the Palestinians and can demonstrate to the Israeli public Yitzhak Rabin-like security credentials. Second, this new government should present a generous, two-state peace proposal to the Palestinians that addresses all core issues: the status of Jerusalem, borders, security, and refugees. This proposal will be referred to in this paper as Plan A. Finally, if the Palestinians reject this proposal, which would occur in the likely event that they find Israel's suggested land swaps, Jerusalem compromise, or refugee solution unacceptable, the Israeli government should implement what this paper will refer to as Plan B—that is, a staged and internationally-coordinated unilateral withdrawal of both Israeli military and civilian presence from the parts of the West Bank that would not remain part of Israel under any arrangement. While Plan B alone is in no terms an ultimate solution, its implementation would be the first step in establishing a basis for final status negotiations.

A BASIS IN HISTORY: LESSONS OF OSLO

Twenty-one years ago, former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Yasser Arafat shook hands on the White House lawn following their signing of the Declaration of Principles (DOP)—a document many hoped would lead to imminent negotiations that would finally end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This period is often described as being the most hopeful era of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Dennis Ross said the moment on the White House lawn felt like the "dawning of a new era."³ While this effort would collapse two years later following the assassination of Rabin by an Israeli right-wing extremist, four enduring lessons can be derived from the lead-up to the signing of the DOP that inform today's situation:

- 1) Breakthroughs occur unexpectedly
- 2) Both sides must feel there is a cost to not acting
- 3) Mutual trust between the two sides is critical
- 4) The importance of an Israeli leader with both a vision for peace and security credentials

The Oslo process came about as an unexpected development following the American-brokered Madrid Peace Conference. As the sole superpower in the Middle East following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. found itself capable

of having a more assertive role in the Arab-Israeli peace process. In an effort to do so, the U.S. convened a peace conference in Madrid in 1991 that was intended to establish the groundwork for future negotiations between Israel and the Arab world by normalizing relations between the parties. Ross writes, “In many ways the Madrid conference was more about symbolism than practicality. We were breaking the symbolism of denial—a taboo on direct talks between Arabs and Israelis.”⁴ However, not everyone was convinced that this approach of attempting simultaneous peace negotiations would be effective, including soon-to-be Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. American journalist Glenn Frankel writes,

Yitzhak Rabin had never been enthusiastic about the Madrid formula for talks between Israel and the Arabs. He believed that by staging four separate negotiations simultaneously, the formula effectively chained all of the Arab parties together—no one could afford to move faster than the other three for fear of being branded a sellout, so the slowest and most intransigent set the pace.⁵

Rabin saw value in playing different peace tracks off one another. Following the Madrid Conference, Rabin authorized the U.S. to secretly notify Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad that Israel was prepared to fully withdraw from the Golan Heights in exchange for peace with Syria. However, following what he perceived as Assad’s tepid response to the offer, Rabin decided to shift his peace efforts toward the Palestinians.⁶ In January 1993, he authorized secret negotiations between Israeli academic Yair Hirschfeld and PLO representative Ahmed Qurei (known more commonly by his patronym Abu Ala) in Oslo, Norway. This process would set the groundwork for the eventual signing of the DOP. If there is one consistency throughout the events that led to the eventual signing of the DOP it is that no one saw them coming. While more initial U.S. involvement may have enabled the two sides to develop a document that had fewer misunderstandings—an issue that would present major obstacles for its eventual implementation—today’s pessimists would do well to remember the unexpected and sudden nature under which it was born.

The Oslo process’s unexpected nature was not in-and-of-itself the reason that led to the signing of the DOP. Such a process would not have developed had either side felt there would be no price for choosing to forgo negotiations. Following the First Intifada (1987-1991), Israelis were left with the impression that there would be a cost in the form of tangible Palestinian resistance for a continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Hebrew University Professor Avraham Sela writes that the First Intifada “reminded the Israeli public of the ongoing problem of the future of the territories and their inhabitants.”⁷

From the Palestinian standpoint, Arafat felt that the outbreak of the Intifada was making him appear irrelevant and believed that entering negotiations would enable him to regain his role as leader of the Palestinians.⁸

For a revival of negotiations to occur today, both Palestinian and Israeli leaders must believe there is a cost to inaction.

While the consequences of inaction may have served as the parties' motives for signing the DOP, the newfound sense of trust that developed between the two sides was what carried them across the finish line. Both sides believed they had a true partner for peace, which can largely be credited to the relationship between the two leaders. While Rabin and Arafat were far from personally liking one another, there was a sense between them that the other was serious about his commitments.

Most of the time when historians talk about the newfound trust of the Oslo process they are referring to that between Rabin and Arafat. But there was also a significant trust Israelis developed for Rabin. Israelis viewed the former general and military hero of the Six Day War not only as a leader who had the vision for peace, but also as a realist who would not agree to any deal that would compromise Israel's security. The military has played a particularly important role, even beyond the realm of security, in Israeli society since the establishment of the State in 1948. Brent Sasely describes the Israeli army as being "an agent of nation-building" with its role in the creation of early agricultural settlements known as *kibbutzim* and writes that the army helped develop a distinctive Israeli society by "absorb[ing] tens of thousands of new immigrants and inculcat[ing] them with emerging Israeli values, norms and practices."⁹ To this day, Israelis will not trust security-related issues (especially in peace negotiations) to be handled by leaders who do not have sufficient security and military clout.

In the current environment, there is no trust between Israeli and Palestinian leaders and neither side believes the other is serious about wanting peace. The only Israeli figures in significant governmental positions that the Israeli public believes will guarantee its security are those who are neither prepared nor seriously willing to oversee the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Amidst this situation, the key to renewing peace negotiations is recreating an environment conducive to the emergence of unexpected breakthroughs, in which leaders from both sides trust one another and believe that there is a price for inaction. The path to this reality begins by the emergence of another Rabin figure on the Israeli political scene—a timely notion considering Israel just hit election season.

ELECTING A RABIN FIGURE

There are no obvious Rabin-like figures on the current Israeli political scene who are likely to run for office as the head of a center-left party in the upcoming election. Indeed, former head of the Shin Bet (Israel's internal security service) Yuval Diskin, who fits the Rabin profile with both his security background and vision for peace, has rejected rumors that he will run for office.¹⁰ However, 'Rabin figure' does not necessarily need to refer to an individual. If a center-left politician with the vision for peace but who does not possess the Rabin-like security credentials were to establish a special 'security team' comprised of members that *do* have such credentials, this combination might suffice in the eye of the Israeli

public as the necessary Rabin figure.

Such a scenario seems possible in light of the recent announcement by Labor Party Head Isaac Herzog and Hatnuah Party Head Tzipi Livni that they would run on a joint center-left ticket in the upcoming election, with the former serving as Prime Minister for the first two years and the latter for the second two years.¹¹ A poll conducted by Israel's Channel 10 a day before Herzog and Livni made their official announcement, found that the joint Labor-Hatnuah bloc would receive 22 seats, which would defeat Netanyahu's Likud Party that would win only 20.¹² If the Labor-Hatnuah bloc drew Moshe Kahalon's new party, Yesh Atid, and Meretz, which the same poll predicts will receive 13, 10 and 6 seats respectively, that would give the bloc 51 seats, leaving only 10 to be filled by either the ultra orthodox or Arab parties.¹³ The right-wing bloc would comprise Likud, Habayit HaYehudi and likely (but not guaranteed) Yisrael Beiteinu, and would receive 20, 15 and 11 seats respectively according to the Channel 10 poll, amounting to a total of 46 seats.

POTENTIAL OBSTACLES

There are a number of obstacles to this outcome. Unlike their mindset post-First Intifada, Israelis today do not view the cost imposed by Palestinians for continued occupation as seriously as they did in 1991. While the 2014 Gaza War and sporadic terror attacks indeed demonstrate that there is a cost in the form of Palestinian violence, Israelis are much less likely to be convinced of the immediate need to enter peace negotiations because of these incidences now than they were 20 years ago. Yonit Levi and Udi Segal, influential reporters on Israel's Channel 2 network, recently wrote that,

The revolutions across the Arab world, the rise of the Islamic State and the summer war with Hamas in Gaza have done little to... arouse hope that peace is around the corner. The Israeli public is skeptical, bitter and assumes that things can—and probably will—get much worse. That's why they vote for Netanyahu.¹⁴

As indicated above, if Netanyahu were to win a fourth term, it would be as the head of a coalition further to the right of what he headed before. Expressing the angst over this outcome by Israel's left wing, Chemi Shalev, a columnist for the left-leaning daily *Haaretz* cited the proverb in Ecclesiastes, "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."¹⁵

Moreover, the large personalities of leaders of a potential center-left coalition could prove problematic. *Haaretz* columnist Yossi Verter writes that, "As long as [Yesh Atid Head Yair] Lapid fails to realize that he does not have the skills to be prime minister and cannot stand for election as such... [the center-left] camp will not be able to give a good fight to their power-hungry opponents across the political divide."¹⁶ In light of the Labor-Hatnuah alliance, Lapid must be prepared to forgo running for

prime minister to allow a center-left coalition to form.

SHAPING THE ELECTION AROUND PEACE

The Labor-Hatnuah alliance should shape its campaign around restarting the peace process with the Palestinians. Echelons of the Israeli political commentator world are already predicting this issue will play a central role in the elections. Writing in the *Jerusalem Post*, Gershon Baskin maintains that the elections “are about deciding whether Israel will aggressively launch a peace initiative to finally put an end to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict on the basis of two states for two peoples.”¹⁷ Founder of the Israel Institute for Strategic Studies Martin Sherman writes in the same newspaper that, “The pivotal issue on the agenda in the elections will—or at least, should—be the Palestinian issue...The Palestinian issue impacts nearly every area of life in Israel and until there is a rational and sustainable blueprint of how to deal with it, it will not be possible to arrive at a rational and sustainable blueprint for how to manage the overall affairs of the nation.”¹⁸ New York University’s Center for Global Affairs Senior Fellow Alon Ben-Meir writes that, “The new election offers Israelis a historic opportunity to elect new visionary and courageous leaders who will first and foremost commit themselves to seek peace with the Palestinians and preserve Israel’s democratic principles.”¹⁹

The Labor-Hatnuah alliance should advocate for these renewed peace negotiations on the basis that doing so would improve Israel’s long-term security. Unfortunately for this alliance, Labor’s weak point at the moment happens to be security. One of the primary reasons offered as to why Netanyahu will be re-elected is because there is no individual from the opposition that can challenge him when it comes to talking security. Netanyahu served in *Sayeret Matkal*, one of Israel’s most elite Special Forces units, and his brother was killed in Operation Entebbe, a hostage-rescue Israeli forces conducted in 1976. Shalev writes, “Even if Israelis are tired of Netanyahu, there is no one who can compete with his national security credentials, no battle-trained IDF general like Yitzhak Rabin or Ehud Barak who swept the Labor Party to its only two victories in the past 40 years.”²⁰ Neither Herzog nor Livni have had high-level security positions in government nor did either hold high-ranking positions during their military service. The only security-related matter of which Herzog and Livni, as individuals, may actually have an advantage over Netanyahu is in their promise that they would improve Israel’s relationship with the U.S., the country’s most important ally and security partner. It is no secret that there have been serious tensions between the Obama Administration and Netanyahu government over the past few months. While the fundamental U.S.-Israel special relationship is in no way threatened, Herzog and Livni could still use the damaged personal relationship between Obama and Netanyahu to their advantage.

While it is true that no *individual* running as the head of a center-left party can challenge Netanyahu on security credentials, an interesting development is taking place among former high-ranking members of Israel’s security establishment. A growing

number of influential members of Israel's security establishment have been coming out in the past few years against Netanyahu's lack of investment in the peace process, arguing that not pursuing peace is damaging Israel's long-term security. Six former heads of the Shin Bet appeared in the 2012 documentary *The Gatekeepers* encouraging renewed peace negotiations and ultimate Israeli disengagement from most of the West Bank.²¹ A recent letter signed by over 100 members of Israel's security establishment, including retired generals, Mossad directors, and national police commissioners, and published as an advertisement throughout Israeli dailies, called on Netanyahu to embrace a regional solution to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by supporting the Arab League's proposal that outlines a two-state solution.²²

Writing in *Haaretz*, Israeli journalist Sefi Rachlevsky notes that, "Throughout much of history and in most countries, the military establishment stands to the right of the government. During times fraught with messianism, it finds itself standing to the left of the regime. This is happening now in Israel."²³ This phenomenon, if channeled wisely, could aid Herzog and Livni. Rachlevsky believes this growing disenchantment with the current Israeli government by Israel's security establishment "could enable a turnabout. The energy of worrying about the increasing extremism in the uppermost [security] echelons could turn into a lever for change in Israel."²⁴ Herzog and Livni could act as the channel for this "lever of change." If the duo can rally the disenchanted security establishment around the Labor-Hatnuah alliance, Netanyahu's security credentials may no longer be as impressive to the Israeli voter whose priority is national security. After all, who would the average Israeli trust: one former Special Forces fighter (who has indeed demonstrated significant security-related leadership achievements), or an entire security establishment united behind a single political party?

Rachlevsky writes, "The only road to creating a turnabout goes through Labor: a pact between parties, movements and leading figures under the rubric of 'One Israel,' which defeated Netanyahu in 1999. That is the only way that the concern of [security] establishment figures...can gain expression."²⁵ It seems that many members of the security establishment recognize this and are ready to back a Labor-led alliance. At a peace rally in December, another former head of the Shin Bet Carmi Gillon said, "The State of Israel is run today by a bunch of pyromaniacs, led at the hands of egomaniacs to its ultimate destruction."²⁶ Drawing a historical metaphor, Gillon continued, "We must be the voice of Yohanan Ben Zakai who kept the Jewish flame burning despite the Masada suicides represented today by Bibi Netanyahu and his trusted allies from the extreme right."²⁷ In an opinion piece published in the widely-circulated daily *Yediot Ahronot* before the new elections were announced, Diskin wrote that he does not believe "the current government will be able to rise above itself and make the necessary moves [to achieve peace with the Palestinians]...It is important for the voters to understand that we do not have to follow the right-wing parties' route to a bi-national state."²⁸

If large portions of the Israeli security establishment are ready to back a

center-left coalition, the question then becomes what is the most effective means of channeling this support into votes, especially considering Herzog is widely viewed as being uncharismatic and far from inspirational. Herzog and Livni should assemble a “security team” to fill the gap in their security credentials. This team will be responsible for assuring the Israeli public that any agreement the government signs as part of a peace negotiation meets Israel’s complete security needs. At the recent Saban Forum, Herzog mentioned the formation of such a team, without identifying who the specific “security gurus” that “have devoted their life to the state of Israel”²⁹ were. A refocus on peace efforts coupled with the creation of this security team could revitalize the Israeli center-left electorate by, as Shalev writes, creating “the impression that Netanyahu and his Likud are stagnant while the force and momentum are with his rivals... as befits a time of ‘national emergency’ that [these security figures] claim is upon us.”³⁰

THE NEW COST OF INACTION

As demonstrated by Oslo, to spearhead negotiations, both parties ultimately need to be convinced that there is too large a price to pay for inaction. If post-First Intifada, the reason the Israeli public supported peace negotiations was because they were convinced that there was a serious cost of occupation in the form of Palestinian resistance, there are reasons to believe that the Israeli public could now be convinced of the necessity to enter into peace negotiations because of the cost of occupation in the form of international isolation. While in recent months the increase in symbolic gestures, such as European nations’ official recognition of a State of Palestine, have had minimal impact on Israeli positioning toward negotiations, Daniel Levy, a Middle East expert at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said that, “the next time the European frustration or egregious Israeli action hits a certain bar, then you’ll start to hit tangible issues and not just symbolic ones.”³¹ On this note, Sherman writes, “The status quo is not sustainable and is continuously deteriorating for Israel—as the recent votes in ever-increasing numbers of European parliaments in favor of unilateral recognition of Palestinian statehood starkly underscore.”³² Such actions could include economic sanctions against Israeli companies that do business in occupied territory, which could have a foreseeably significant impact on Israel’s economy as the European Union is Israel’s largest trading partner at over \$35 billion a year.³³

Another arena in which Israel faces potential international isolation is the UN. Despite significant U.S. opposition, the Palestinians are planning on bringing a proposal before the UNSC by the end of December that calls for the end of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank by 2016. Germany, France and the United Kingdom are currently drafting a more complex proposal that sets a two-year deadline for reaching a permanent status deal peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians.³⁴ At the time of writing, it is still unclear which proposal will be voted on, if either. In the event that a proposal is voted on, and in the unlikely case that the U.S. were to abstain instead of exercising its veto power,* this could benefit the Labor-Hatnuah bloc by acting as proof that Israel faces significant costs by not entering negotiations. Such a move on

the international stage by the U.S. would demonstrate to the Israeli public that Israel needs more moderate leaders to avoid further isolation.

Finally, the Labor-Hatnuah alliance can also warn of the possible internal consequences should Israel fail to enter negotiations. As Sherman writes, “One of the most worrying manifestations of these sentiments is the increasing numbers of Israelis seeking to acquire foreign passports, signaling a lack of confidence in the elected leaders’ ability to secure their future – both as individuals and as part of the national collective.”³⁵ In essence, for Herzog and Livni to win, they must demonstrate that all these costs as a result of further international isolation create an unsustainable status quo. Just as Rabin served as a leader to channel the Israeli post-First Intifada mindset into supporting the entrance of peace negotiations, so too now must the Labor-Hatnuah alliance channel an Israeli recognition of international isolation into renewing peace efforts.

TRUST

The final element that makes a Labor-led coalition more likely to reopen peace negotiations is its historically good relationship with the Palestinian Authority. Herzog and Abbas also have a personal relationship, which would only benefit this process.

PLANS A AND B

The election of a Labor-led coalition would only be the first step down the long road of revitalizing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Needless to say, an immediate, comprehensive peace settlement, addressing all major issues and signed by both parties would be the ideal option to resolving this conflict. In the near future, though, such an agreement appears far off. The question therefore becomes how to craft a political reality that establishes enough trust between the two sides to set a basis for this eventual outcome.

PLAN A

As a demonstration of its seriousness in trying to reach a permanent solution, the new Labor-led government could implement Plan A, which would be an Israeli peace offer on the model of former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s proposal at the Annapolis Conference in 2008. This offer would reflect the requirements that any permanent status deal would encompass, including the establishment of a part of East Jerusalem as the capital of the future State of Palestine, a just addressing of the Palestinian refugee issue, measures to uphold both side’s security, and suggested borders based on Israeli annexation of large bloc settlements in exchange for comparable

* The chances the U.S. withholds its veto of such a proposal is extraordinarily small. The only circumstance under which this would occur would be if the proposal did not call for withdrawal from Israel’s major bloc settlements, which will be annexed in exchange for land swaps as part of a final status deal. While the proposal being drafted by the Palestinians will not specify this nuance, it is unclear whether the proposal being drafted by the EU-3 will.

land swaps to the Palestinians from territory in Israel proper.

PLAN B

However, it is unclear whether the Palestinians would accept an offer like this, as demonstrated by the inability of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to accept Olmert's 2008 proposal. The primary reason for this refusal was that Abbas did not believe the offer met the Palestinian minimum criteria for Jerusalem, refugee issues or borders. A specific example the Palestinians found unacceptable in the 2008 proposal, which would likely repeat itself in an Israeli offer today, is the issue of Israel's Ariel settlement. Ariel is home to nearly 18,000 Israelis and is more of a city than the traditional conception of a "settlement." However, it is also 12 miles East of Israel's 1967-border meaning that if Israel were to annex it as part of a permanent sta-

tus deal, the new international border would create a large jut through the northern part of the future State of Palestine. In all likelihood, any Israeli proposal will include Ariel within its borders, with Israel citing the difficulty of removing Ariel's residents and the settlement's overall permanence. Palestinians, however, require Ariel become part of their future state as not doing so would compromise the new state's topographical continuity.

In the event the Palestinians reject Israel's Plan A because of Ariel and/or any other reason, Israel could then revert to Plan B. This would involve a staged, unilateral withdrawal of Israeli military and civilian presence from territory that would become part of the State of Palestine under *any* proposal once a final deal is reached (marked by red lines on the map to the left). These areas would essentially be based on Olmert's 2008 offer.



Source: S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace

A unilateral withdrawal would in no way be a permanent solution to the conflict; however, it would demonstrate Israel's seriousness in trying to reach one. A diverse array of Israeli political figures, who can boast plenty of hawkish positions, support forms of a unilateral withdrawal. Former head of the Israeli Defense Forces Military Intelligence Directorate Amos Yadlin and former Israeli chief peace negotiator Gilead Sher write that if the Palestinians were to refuse an Israeli offer,

Israel should pro-actively take constructive, unilateral, internationally coordinated steps towards a two-state reality, meaning the *de facto*—if not yet *de jure*—existence of two nation-states for two peoples... Unilateral Israeli action would create tangible progress toward a two-state solution and generate momentum towards re-establishing negotiations.³⁶

Former Israeli ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren writes, “One solution [to a failed peace process] could be a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian population centers in the West Bank... Israel can still end the occupation of the Palestinians, preserve its security, and perhaps lay new foundations for peace.”³⁷ In an interview, Oren expanded on this idea saying, “I don't know if remaining in the entire territories, with control over a great number of Palestinians and being exposed to increasing international sanctions—boycotts and delegitimization—I don't know if that brings you to peace... It actually endangers Israel.”³⁸ Without endorsing the notion, Netanyahu himself has acknowledged that, “The idea of taking unilateral steps is gaining ground, from the center-left to the center-right... Many Israelis are asking themselves if there are certain unilateral steps that could theoretically make sense.”³⁹ A February 2014 article published in the Israeli daily *Maariv* reported that a former media advisor to Netanyahu named Yoaz Hendel was working on a specific plan for unilateral disengagement that would minimize the withdrawal of Israeli settlers.⁴⁰ Details of this plan have yet to emerge.

The term unilateralism has a bad reputation in Israel. Following Israel's unilateral withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza in 2000 and 2005 respectively, the country was rewarded with a surge of violence from within the withdrawn territory. However, as Yadlin and Sher argue, these moves were right in principle—they were just carried out using flawed tactics.⁴¹ The proposed unilateral withdrawal from parts of the West Bank would not be a repeat of either Lebanon or Gaza for three reasons. First, the future State of Palestine would be demilitarized and Israel would be able to play a role in ensuring weapons and rockets could not be smuggled in along the Jordan Valley border. Second, the withdrawal would be carried out in stages, in conjunction with both the international community and Palestinian Authority to ensure a power vacuum would not develop. Third, the withdrawal would be implemented under the recognition that the action in-and-of-itself does not suffice as a permanent solution.

Such a withdrawal would be costly, both financially and socially—with the minority of ideological Israeli settlers who do require forced evacuation likely putting up physical resistance as occurred in Gaza. The withdrawal would be carried out over an extended period of time, and if done properly would guarantee Israel's maintenance as a Jewish, democratic state. Moreover, this withdrawal would be tantamount to Israel's official renunciation of claims over areas of the West Bank, which would establish a strong basis for future permanent status negotiations.

CONCLUSION

Some reading this article will point to the many suggestions made for Israel and question why parallel ones are not provided for the Palestinians. In no way by detailing objectives for Israel and not the Palestinians is this report claiming that the latter does not have a comparable role to play in renewing negotiations. Indeed, no permanent solution can be reached unilaterally. Merely, this analysis maintains that Israel, as the more powerful party of the two, should be the one to initiate this process.

Israeli skeptics on the Right often question Abbas's viability as a partner for peace. While Abbas has his share of both personal and leadership shortcomings, there is no denying his belief in the principle of reaching a two-state solution through non-violent means. As Diskin writes,

I know extremely well the daily brain-washing that claims that Abbas is no partner. I have known Abbas for longer and far better than many of the politicians who spread these slogans. I can honestly say that he has quite a few flaws... but he is still the only Arab leader I know who dared to publicly oppose terror at the height of the second Intifada, even when the Palestinian public supported terror, and after the kidnapping of the three boys and the beginning of the escalation that led to Operation Protective Edge. Abbas, as opposed to Arafat, understands very well that terror is harmful to the Palestinian cause, and therefore instructs his security forces to act against terror in a clear and direct manner.²⁴²

The clearest shortcoming of a unilateral withdrawal in the eyes of the Left is that it does not address the end-of-claim issues of Jerusalem and refugees. Frida Ghitis writes, "The unilateral move would deprive Israel of its most important goal in talks with Palestinians: a final and definitive resolution to the conflict. For Palestinians, a unilateral Israeli move might produce a state, but it would leave not only Jerusalem, but also the issue of what happens to Palestinian refugees, unresolved."²⁴³ While all these concerns are valid, they are outweighed by the potential Plan B has to establish the basis for renewed negotiations that address all final-status issues.

Minutes before his assassination, Yitzhak Rabin stood on stage at a peace rally leading the thousands gathered before him in the iconic Israeli song *Shir LaShalom*

(A Song for Peace). One of the final verses reads, “Don’t say the day will come, bring the day about!” Skeptics of an eventual unilateral option would do well to give this song another listen.

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