

# Israel's Dilemma: Unity or Peace?

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Ever since President Bush introduced his 'Road Map' for a permanent solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in April 2003, a great deal of public attention has focused on its demand for a reformed Palestinian Authority (PA) to confront aggressively radical Palestinian groups such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad who violently oppose a two-state solution to the conflict. One of the major obstacles to meeting this demand has been the Palestinian leadership's express reluctance to risk initiating a civil war amongst Palestinians, and especially between the PA and the increasingly strengthened Hamas movement.<sup>1</sup> But it is not just the Palestinians who confront a difficult choice between maintaining their fragile internal peace or pursuing external peace. So too do Israelis. Although the danger of civil war looms larger over Palestinian politics than it does over Israel's, there is a symmetry in the internal challenge both sides face. Both Palestinians and Israelis are likely to experience intensified domestic division and conflict should the peace process between them finally resume. Moreover, a final settlement of their conflict poses a real danger of civil disobedience and domestic violence for both sides.

Will Israelis be willing to sacrifice their aspiration for national unity for the sake of peace? To answer this crucial question, this article analyses the issue of national unity in Israel and the importance attributed to it by Israeli policy-makers and the Israeli-Jewish public. It also examines how the perceived need for Israeli national unity has affected Israel's policy towards the peace process with the Palestinians.

National unity became a subject of particular concern in Israel after the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in November 1995 by a right-wing religious extremist. The murder of an Israeli leader by an Israeli Jew was a deeply traumatic event for Israeli society. It generated a widespread desire for national reconciliation, to the extent that 'healing the rifts within the nation' came to rival, if not displace, the pursuit of Israeli–Palestinian peace as the leading item on the Israeli national agenda. The Oslo peace process suffered as a result.

More than ten years have now passed since Rabin's assassination. But the deep social and political divisions within Israel dramatized by this event

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have not been overcome. Although the collapse of the peace process and the violence between Israelis and Palestinians since September 2000 brought about a renewal of national unity in Israel, its fragility was starkly apparent in the intense controversy that surrounded Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from four West Bank settlements in August 2005. The fact that this withdrawal occurred more peacefully and quickly than most anticipated is no guarantee that future evacuations of Israeli settlements will go so smoothly.<sup>2</sup> The risk of serious domestic unrest in the event of a larger Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank remains a distinct possibility. A resumption of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians is also likely to undermine Israeli national unity. By emphasizing the value of national unity for Israeli Jews, the aim of this article is to focus attention on the difficult choice Israelis will most likely eventually have to make between their own national unity and achieving peace with the Palestinians.

It is remarkable how little attention scholars and analysts pay to the issue of national unity. The most likely reason for this stems from their scepticism concerning the appeals to national unity frequently made by political leaders. Such appeals, many believe, are merely a convenient means by which leaders attempt to curtail political opposition, thereby allowing them a freer hand to pursue their desired policies. 'National unity' is therefore dismissed as just an empty political slogan whose sole purpose is to intimidate and silence one's political opponents. Given the self-serving way in which politicians often employ the rhetoric of national unity, the widespread scepticism about national unity is undoubtedly well founded.

But such scepticism can be carried too far. One should not dismiss out of hand all political appeals to national unity as disingenuous. In some cases, political leaders may sincerely believe in the need for national unity, and this belief can influence their policy preferences. Even when cynically employed by political leaders, appeals for national unity matter since they convey the importance of national unity and, in doing so, can influence the public's political preferences. Whether or not political leaders really care about national unity, their publics often *do* care and, hence, it can be politically risky for leaders to ignore this public concern. The greater this concern, the more political leaders may find themselves constrained to act in ways that are deemed to be consistent with the need for national unity. The public's desire for national unity can, therefore, discourage political leaders from pursuing policies that are likely to be domestically highly divisive and controversial (they may, of course, still decide to pursue such policies). At the very least, it can factor into the political calculus of decision-makers, raising the political cost of certain policies. This has been the case, as this article will show, with Israel's policy towards the Oslo peace process, as Israeli leaders have had to contend with the impact of the peace process upon Israeli national unity.

## WHOSE UNITY?

Before proceeding any further, it is necessary to define what ‘national unity’ actually means. It refers to a widespread sense of social cohesion and solidarity, generally underpinned by a popular belief that members of the ‘nation’ share a common interest, purpose, and outlook, or at least a certain like-mindedness that gives rise to a collective feeling of togetherness. This is the most common, and widely held, meaning of ‘national unity’. What is left unstated, however, is the definition of the nation. But the definition or identity of the nation in question cannot be taken for granted. There are essentially two different (though not mutually exclusive) definitions of nationhood—one civic, the other ethnic. Where nationhood is defined by civic criteria, as it is in the United States for instance, the nation is coterminous with all the citizens of the state. National unity, then, includes all citizens. This meaning of national unity is clearly apparent in President Bush’s speech at the National Cathedral in Washington DC three days after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. Praising the acts of heroism and sacrifice by Americans on 11 September and in its aftermath, President Bush declared: ‘In these acts, and in many others, Americans showed a deep commitment to one another, and an abiding love for our country. Today, we feel what Franklin Roosevelt called the warm courage of national unity. This is a unity of every faith, and every background’.<sup>3</sup>

‘National unity’, however, has a different meaning in the Israeli context. In Israel, nationhood is defined by ethnic criteria. ‘Jewishness’ is a condition of membership in the Israeli nation, not citizenship.<sup>4</sup> Thus, all Jewish Israelis are members of the Israeli nation, whereas non-Jewish Israelis—notably Arab Israelis—are not considered members of the nation. Hence, ‘national unity’ in Israel generally refers to unity amongst Israeli Jews, and excludes non-Jews. This meaning of ‘national unity’ emerges, for instance, in Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s speech to the Knesset introducing his National Unity government in March 2001 in which he appealed for national unity:

We all share the same destiny. Our children share the same future. We have between us here a Jewish and democratic state, after 2000 years of exile and persecution. This is the only place in the world where Jews can defend themselves, by themselves . . . If we do not have the wisdom to unite—all the wonderful things which we built here stand in danger. Let’s make no mistake, what we share, that which we hold dear, is much greater than what separates us.<sup>5</sup>

Nor is it only the references to national unity made by Israeli leaders from the right of the political spectrum (such as Sharon) that imply a nation defined in exclusively Jewish terms. When introducing his new government

to the Knesset in July 1999, for instance, then Prime Minister and Labour party leader Ehud Barak stated:

I believe that bearing responsibility together will bring the extremes closer, blunt the contrasts in society and will require consideration, attentiveness and mutual balances—since it has already been said in the Torah [the Jewish term for the Five Books of Moses], and about our Torah: 'Its paths are paths of pleasantness, and all its ways are ways of peace.' In this way, we will be able, together, to face the tests and decisions which await us. In this way, we will be stronger and more united, despite the disputes and the diversity of opinion among us.<sup>6</sup>

The exclusively Jewish meaning ascribed to 'national unity' in the Israeli context is even apparent in the designation 'National Unity Government' to describe coalition governments involving the two largest political parties, Labour and Likud, as well as other smaller parties. Despite their broad-based nature, such governments have never included any Arab political parties (i.e., those parties solely representing Israel's Arab citizens).<sup>7</sup>

#### THE NEED FOR NATIONAL UNITY

Having defined the meaning of the term 'national unity' in Israeli political discourse, the next issue that must be addressed is why it is considered so important in Israel? Israelis, of course, are hardly unique in valuing national unity. Unity is perhaps a universal value for all social groups, large and small. Both political theorists and sociologists have identified the positive functions of social unity. Some political theorists, for example, have argued that a degree of social unity is a necessary condition for 'civic virtues' such as social trust,<sup>8</sup> and civic responsibility.<sup>9</sup> A lack of unity, according to this view, is detrimental to the proper functioning of liberal democracies. Moreover, in so far as the legitimacy of governments in liberal democracies depends upon the voluntary consent of the governed, such legitimacy is more likely to be achieved when there is at least some sense of social unity.

Sociologists since Durkheim have pointed to the need for social unity as a pre-condition for social stability and the proper functioning of society, since the absence of basic solidarity can lead to conflicts between the different groups composing the society, resulting in the breakdown of social order, and even the disintegration of the society. Where profound social cleavages exist in a society, the danger of the breakdown of social order and societal disintegration is especially acute. This is the case with Israeli society, which is a 'deeply divided society'<sup>10</sup> marked by deep-seated national, ethnic, religious and ideological cleavages, some of which are reinforcing rather than cross-cutting, thereby heightening social tensions

and the risk of societal conflict and collapse. Thus, national unity is particularly necessary in Israel in order to mitigate the intense social tensions grounded in these societal cleavages. It helps to counter the destabilizing effects of a fragmented Israeli social structure. A motivating force for national unity in Israel, therefore, is that it can hold a heterogeneous and fractured Israeli society together.

The perceived threat posed to Israel by the Palestinians and other adversaries in the Middle East (such as Syria and Iran) is another motivating force for Israeli national unity. The desire for internal unity is common to societies faced with external threats (this desire has been apparent in the US, for example, since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001). Underlying this desire is the belief that unity strengthens national resolve in responding to threats and prevents the adversary from exploiting internal divisions. It also promotes the willingness of individuals to make sacrifices for the sake of the national struggle. When conflict is protracted over a long period of time, the desirability of national unity is likely to become increasingly entrenched in the political culture. This has been the case in Israel, as the country has been involved in a violent conflict since its establishment in 1948 (and before), a conflict that has escalated into all-out war on a number of occasions. As a result of the protracted Israeli–Palestinian and Arab–Israeli conflicts, national unity has become a primary value upheld by Israel’s political culture.

There is also a more specific reason for the importance attributed to national unity in the context of Israel’s enduring conflict with its regional adversaries. The Israeli Defence Force’s (IDF) reliance upon mass conscription and a large reservoir of reserve soldiers means that its military posture and strength crucially depend upon broader Israeli society. As a ‘citizen army’, the IDF cannot be insulated from societal discord. Its ability to function depends upon the willingness of Israelis to serve in its ranks, and to make sacrifices—physical and economic—on its behalf. A strong sense of national unity increases Israelis’ motivation to serve, as well as morale and discipline within the army. National unity is, therefore, a critical component of Israeli national security. Israeli policy-makers have appreciated this since the birth of the state. Indeed, Israel’s traditional strategic doctrine of defence was deemed necessary partly in order to gain the full backing of the Israeli public. In the words of Yoram Peri: ‘[The] defensive war concept was a sociological mechanism which enabled maximum mobilization of civilian manpower for the war effort and a very high effective rate of peripheral recruitment for collective needs even between wars’.<sup>11</sup>

A final motivating force for national unity in Israel is Jewish history and tradition. The importance of Jewish unity has been upheld by Jewish sages throughout the ages (even above the importance of religious observance<sup>12</sup>). Some of the most traumatic episodes in Jewish history appeared to suggest

the danger of disunity to Jewish survival. In particular, the loss of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel and the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem was attributed to the division of the biblical Kingdoms of Israel and Judea which brought about the eventual defeat of both halves (by the Assyrians and Babylonians respectively). Similarly, the conquest of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE—one of the most cataclysmic events in the long history of the Jewish people—was blamed by Jewish sages on the internecine rivalry that consumed the Jewish community at the time.

The precariousness of Jewish life in the Diaspora placed a further premium on Jewish unity. As an embattled minority frequently faced with violent hostility from the majority populations alongside which they resided, Jews developed a powerful ethos of social solidarity. To be sure, the internal politics of Jewish communities in the Diaspora was (and still is) often fractious; but, however bitter internal political and religious disputes became, they were regulated by an overriding belief that Jews shared a common fate and that this fate depended upon their ability to support one another in the face of common enemies. The extensive social welfare system established by Jewish communities in the Diaspora was one practical manifestation of the communal emphasis upon unity. So were the harsh sanctions imposed by Jewish communal authorities upon Jews who violated the community's customs and laws (the most serious being excommunication). The belief that Jews had to project a united front to the non-Jewish world around them is one that has been passed down through the generations. Indeed, such a belief continues to be frequently expressed in current discussions concerning relations between Israel and Diaspora Jewry and within many Jewish communities in the Diaspora regarding their public support for Israel. The unease many Diaspora Jews feel about criticizing Israeli policies and actions can be understood in the context of the deeply rooted value that Jews place upon Jewish unity.

#### NATIONAL UNITY AND FOREIGN POLICY CONSENSUS

For a nation that values its unity so highly, Israeli Jews are remarkably divided. The fractious nature of Israeli society, the high-pitched and combative tenor of its public debates, and the factionalism of its party politics have long struck observers of Israel. In an essay published in 1953, Isaiah Berlin, the great British historian of ideas, observed that: 'There is no country where so many ideas, so many ways of living, so many attitudes, so many methods of going about everyday things have suddenly been thrown into a more violent clash. It is one of the most fascinating spectacles in the world'.<sup>13</sup> Israelis themselves have been only too aware of their differences; differences that pre-date Israel's establishment. Describing the Jewish society in Palestine in the decades before statehood,

Ben-Gurion wrote: 'In no other land could one find such a conglomeration of different ethnic groups, cultures, organizations and parties, beliefs and opinions, shifting ideologies and international orientations, conflicting economic and social interests, as in the yishuv'.<sup>14</sup> Despite sustained efforts by the state to erase these differences and integrate Israel's ethnically, religiously and politically heterogeneous population, such differences have persisted to varying degrees throughout Israel's existence. Israelis have always been, and remain, an exceptionally diverse nation—a source of both bewilderment and fascination to scholars and students of the country.

In a nation so diverse, then, how is national unity to be achieved and sustained? How can the widespread desire for national unity be met? Through a broad societal consensus on foreign policy. A national consensus on foreign policy both reflects and reinforces national unity. It expresses a conviction that Israelis share a common fate, face a common enemy, and possess a basic understanding of how to defend themselves against their enemies—all essential ingredients for a sense of national unity. At the same time, a foreign policy consensus bolsters wider social cohesion since it underscores areas of agreement on critical issues—for Israelis, literally issues of life and death. Moreover, in so far as a state's foreign policy conveys to the world the collective interests, desires, and fears of the nation it represents, foreign policy symbolizes the national outlook. As such, a consensus on foreign policy is perhaps the most important manifestation of national unity; and, in a country where such unity is glaringly absent in so many areas of life, a consensus on foreign policy becomes all the more important.

Thus, although Israelis have vehemently disagreed on domestic issues (above all those concerning the relationship between religion and state), they have striven for solidarity on matters of foreign policy. Israeli foreign policy was traditionally designated a subject about which disagreements must be muted and unanimity forged. The famous expression 'politics stops at the water's edge' (coined by Arthur Vandenberg, the Republican chairman of the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, shortly after World War II) encapsulates this attitude towards foreign policy. Israeli public opinion has consistently expressed this attitude, especially when it comes to national emergencies, as Asher Arian, who has studied Israeli public opinion toward security and foreign policy over many years, notes:

The view that one must support the government in times of crisis, such as war, even if one differed with the government's policies, was agreed to by 83 percent of the sample in 1993, by 81 percent in 1988, and by 87 percent in 1986. When asked if criticism was permitted under these circumstances, more than a third said no, only 9 percent said that even vocal and strenuous opposition was permitted, with more than half of the sample allowing criticism, but of a subdued and restrained manner.<sup>15</sup>



Given these public attitudes towards dissent and the wider importance Israelis attribute to national unity, a consensus on Israeli foreign policy has long been considered of cardinal importance by Israeli policy-makers and the Israeli-Jewish public. In the first two decades of Israel's statehood, this desire for a consensus on foreign policy was achieved under the politically dominant left-wing Mapai party (in government continuously from 1949 to 1977). During this time, the basic parameters of Israeli foreign policy—such as the perception of a hostile external environment posing an existential threat to Israel, the readiness to use military force, the emphasis upon self-reliance, and the perceived need for strategic depth and defensible borders—were not contested. Popular axioms that 'there is no one to talk to', that Israel's wars were 'no choice wars' and that an 'iron wall' was necessary to ensure the country's survival were subscribed to by the vast majority of Israelis. Dissenting voices, though always present, were largely marginalized and received little public attention.<sup>16</sup> There were few political protest movements, and there was little open public debate over Israel's foreign policy (with the notable exception of the fierce debate over German reparations which took place in the early 1950s).<sup>17</sup>

This foreign policy consensus began to unravel after Israel's stunning victory in the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Israel's conquest of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip raised the question of the long-term future of those territories—whether they would remain under Israeli control or eventually be traded for peace—and Israelis became bitterly divided in their views on this question. Over the years, and especially after Israel's controversial invasion of Lebanon in 1982, domestic political polarization increased, pitching Israelis into two mutually antagonistic camps of 'doves' who favoured the formula of 'land for peace' and 'hawks' who opposed it. Yet for all the passion and animosity this issue aroused it remained essentially hypothetical as long as peace negotiations over the future of the occupied territories did not take place. Once such negotiations began in earnest, as they did in 1993 with the commencement of what became known as the Oslo peace process, the division within the Israeli-Jewish public over the future of the occupied territories reached a new level of intensity, one result of which was an act of political violence which few, if any, Israelis ever believed to be possible.

#### THE OSLO PROCESS: UNITY OR PEACE?

The Oslo peace process begun by the Labour-led government under Yitzhak Rabin that came to power in 1992, involved a dramatic redefinition of Israel's policies towards the Palestinians, the organization representing them—the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)—and the occupied territories. Given this, those Israeli policy-makers involved in negotiating the Oslo Accords were well aware of their potential to



exacerbate an already polarized domestic political climate. They knew that the Oslo peace process would be highly controversial, and would be fiercely opposed by a substantial segment of the Israeli public. This awareness is reflected in the description given by Uri Savir, Israel's chief negotiator at Oslo, of his return to Israel after his first secret meeting in Oslo in May 1993 with PLO representatives. Describing a walk through downtown Jerusalem he writes:

Suddenly I felt anxiety that a process in which I believed in deeply would be seen by others . . . as a suicidal surrender. Though I believed that a reconciliation with our enemy would fulfill the very idea and goal of a strong, modern Jewish state, there were many others who felt that if the walls came down, we would be vulnerable to external and internal enemies, that the coherence of Israeli society depended on resisting a common enemy and the penetration of what they saw as pernicious external influences. Was it possible in Israel to bridge these two worlds? Probably not. Peace with the PLO would widen the abyss between those who believed in the possibility and desirability of a new relationship between a strong Israel willing to face the future and its neighbors, and those who believed that eternal hostility demanded not only external vigilance but extreme suspicion of our neighbors. . . . The peace process would therefore be a crucial struggle not only with the Palestinians but with ourselves.<sup>18</sup>

Savir's anxieties were well founded. The Oslo peace process demolished any last semblance of national unity in Israel, and exposed the depth of the rifts within Israeli society. As Hillel Halkin eloquently wrote:

Like a man in great torment who breaks psychologically in two, Israel . . . went, or was dragged, to Oslo as two nations, each willing to risk what the other was not and unwilling to risk what the other was; neither able to communicate with or to understand the other but only to blame the other rancorously; thesis and antithesis, each half of the now-fractured personality of the Jewish people in its homeland.<sup>19</sup>

The Rabin government failed to acquire widespread public support for the Oslo peace process with the Palestinians. Although both Oslo agreements (Oslo I and Oslo II) were supported by a majority of the general public, in both cases the margin of support was very narrow.<sup>20</sup> Between 40 and 50 percent of the Israeli public consistently opposed the Oslo Accords,<sup>21</sup> and even more expressed dissatisfaction with the peace process over time. According to a comprehensive public opinion survey conducted in March 1995, for instance, 62 percent of Israelis expressed dissatisfaction with the peace process, compared to only 11 percent who felt satisfied.<sup>22</sup>

Despite this, the Rabin government was determined not to back down in the face of the growing public protest against it. As the leading members

of the government, Rabin and Peres adamantly refused to placate their opponents, whom they frequently dismissed as a bunch of extremists insanely intent on perpetuating the state of war between Israel and the Arabs. Rabin, for instance, famously derided the Jewish settlers in the West Bank and Gaza as 'crazies' and 'propeller-heads'. The attitude of the Rabin government towards domestic opposition to their peace policy was captured in an interview with Peres in *The Jerusalem Post*. Asked whether he was concerned by public opinion polls which showed limited public support for the peace process, Peres remarked: 'I'm convinced there is a stream of history than even the public polls cannot stop. Suppose we have a majority of people saying we don't like it—so we'll stop?'<sup>23</sup> On another occasion, Peres stated: 'Leadership, in my judgment, means to be elected by the constituencies of yesterday and to represent the constituencies of tomorrow. We have to answer to a constituency that doesn't exist'.<sup>24</sup>

Such comments indicate the Rabin government's cavalier attitude toward mobilizing domestic support for its peace policy.<sup>25</sup> Aware of the peace process' domestic contentiousness, Rabin and Peres seemed ready to accept this as part of the price to be paid for eventual peace with the Palestinians. Israeli–Palestinian peace, for them, was Israel's most urgent national priority, and they were willing to pursue this even at the expense of domestic peace. Thus, if the demands of national unity stood in the way of peace, it was the former not the latter that was to be forsaken.<sup>26</sup> As the Israeli commentator Akiva Eldar wrote: 'Rabin was not willing to concede what he considered to be Israel's vital interests, yet, he did, at the same time, angrily smash the sticky myth of "national unity"'.<sup>27</sup>

#### HEALING THE BREACH

On 5 November 1995, Prime Minister Rabin tragically became a victim of the lack of consensus and national unity in Israel. His assassination by a religious Zionist extremist provided Israelis with the most shocking demonstration of the danger posed by their internal divisions. It laid bare the deep division within Israel between supporters and opponents of the peace process, and underscored the danger that this division posed to Israel. The act and its aftermath—in which some Israelis mourned whilst others rejoiced—proved beyond a doubt that national unity was a thing of the past. Israelis were now engaged in a bitter internal dispute, which could endanger Israel's democratic order, and even lead to a war amongst themselves.

Thus, in the wake of Rabin's assassination, national unity became an urgent priority for many Israeli Jews, and the rhetoric of national unity, largely absent in the rhetoric of the Rabin government, became something of a mantra intoned by all Israeli leaders. After being elected prime minister following the 1996 elections, for instance, Benjamin Netanyahu declared

before his supporters in Jerusalem: 'The State of Israel is going forth on a new path, a path of hope, a path of unity, a path of security, a path of peace. The first and foremost peace that must be reached is peace at home, peace between us, peace among us'.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, in his opening address to the new Knesset on 7 June 1999, President Ezer Weizman stated that: 'The questions which must concern you are, first and foremost, how to bridge the differences and cracks in the nation. Recently the cracks have widened and have reached worrying proportions'.<sup>29</sup> Ehud Barak also affirmed the importance of national unity. His electoral platform for the 1999 elections stated that: 'The deepening polarization in our ranks endangers the unity of our society. . . . We are motivated by our wish to preserve the unity of the nation and the state and to attain peace among ourselves'.<sup>30</sup> Unity and togetherness became the catchwords of the day. Thus, the official slogan for Israel's fiftieth Independence Day celebrations was: 'Together with Pride. Together with Hope'.<sup>31</sup> Commenting on all this, one Israeli journalist wrote: 'Since the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin, there has been a brainwashing going on, which out of fear of the social, identity and cultural changes taking place here, is seen in preaching in favor of unity at all costs'.<sup>32</sup>

What impact did Rabin's assassination have upon Israeli attitudes concerning national unity and the Oslo peace process? For those on the Right it confirmed what they had long believed—that Israeli-Jewish national unity was the highest priority and that Israeli-Palestinian peace could not be achieved at its expense.<sup>33</sup> The particular importance the Israeli Right attributes to Israeli-Jewish unity is due to their conception of the State of Israel as the 'Third Jewish Commonwealth', and their corresponding fear that Israel is threatened by the same fate that allegedly befell the previous two Jewish commonwealths, namely, that internal divisions will allow it to be conquered by external enemies. The Israeli Right's narrative of Jewish history thus lends itself to a concern about Israeli-Jewish unity. As then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir stated in May 1989: 'Throughout the history of our people, we knew prosperity and success when united, and we knew misfortune and tragedy when divided. Our strength lies only in our standing united against our enemies and those who seek to kill us'.<sup>34</sup>

For the Israeli Left, by contrast, it is not so much their understanding of Jewish history that stirs fears about the internal divisions in Israel, but rather their awareness of the fragility of liberal democracy. For them, political polarization and radicalization threaten to undermine, if not topple, Israeli democracy.<sup>35</sup> Rabin's assassination dramatically heightened this fear and profoundly affected the attitude of much of the Israeli Left towards the Oslo peace process. Although the Left's support for the peace process was not diminished, it was balanced by a growing concern over the state of Israeli society, and particularly over the future of Israeli democracy.

As Adi Ophir, a leading left-wing Israeli intellectual and peace activist commented: 'After the assassination, for many on the left it seemed more important to make peace between the Jewish right and the Jewish left than between Jews and Palestinians'.<sup>36</sup> Consequently, members of Israel's left wing began paying increasing attention to bolstering Israel's democracy and democratic norms and to establishing 'dialogues' with members of opposing domestic 'camps'. And, as they became increasingly occupied with these goals, the Left lost its single-minded focus on the pursuit of Israeli–Palestinian peace. This is not to say that the Israeli Left became less committed towards achieving Israeli–Palestinian peace, but simply that its political energies and activism were no longer being solely directed towards this goal as they had been previously.

The Israeli public more generally came to believe that preserving internal peace took precedence over attaining external peace. According to a Gallup survey released in January 2000, for instance, 47 percent of Israelis felt that 'preventing a rift in the nation' was more important than signing peace agreements with the Arabs, compared to 34 percent who believed the opposite.<sup>37</sup> This widespread public sentiment helps explain why the Israeli settlement project in the West Bank and Gaza continued, and even intensified, during the years of the Oslo peace process despite majority public support for an eventual withdrawal from the occupied territories.<sup>38</sup> Although most Israelis recognized that the construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories was damaging to the Israeli–Palestinian peace process, they still accepted this as a temporary expedient to prevent civil disobedience, and even violence, from extremist Jewish settlers. Many feared that dismantling the settlements could provoke a civil war in Israel—a fear underscored by Rabin's assassination. Hence, the expansion of Jewish settlements in the territories steadily continued throughout the years of the Oslo peace process under the supervision of both left- and right-wing governments.

Whilst allowing the expansion of existing Jewish settlements in the territories in order to appease an increasingly restive settler population, the Labour-led government of Ehud Barak (1999–2001) did dedicate itself to pursuing the peace process with the Palestinians. But Prime Minister Barak's energetic pursuit of Israeli–Palestinian peace, though no doubt sincere, was also an ingenious response to the dual challenge of pursuing the peace process and unifying Israeli society. According to Barak, by quickly attempting to reach a comprehensive final settlement with the Palestinians, he would either succeed in making peace or else, if he failed due to Palestinian intransigence, he would succeed in re-establishing the national consensus, as the hostile intentions of the Palestinian leadership would be exposed. For Barak, it appeared to be a 'win–win' scenario—if not peace, national unity; if not national unity, peace.

Thus, in response to the failure of the Camp David Summit in July 2000 Barak claimed that despite the unprecedented 'generous' concessions he made to the Palestinians during the negotiations, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat was simply unwilling to make peace. This claim was widely accepted by Israelis—in a poll conducted soon after the summit in July 2000, 67 percent of Israelis held the Palestinians responsible for its failure.<sup>39</sup> Barak later explained his strategy stating: 'Even if you think you have only a 20 percent chance of achieving peace it is your duty to act. . . . You have to try and take the moral high ground. To ensure that if we confront violence we will have both internal unity and moral superiority. Without these two elements, Israel is liable to slide into disaster'.<sup>40</sup>

The outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada in September 2000 further confirmed in the minds of many Israelis their belief that the Palestinian leadership preferred the path of violence to peace, and that they did not therefore have a partner for peace. Without an apparent Palestinian negotiating partner and faced with ongoing Palestinian terrorist attacks, the appeals for national unity made by Israel's leaders became both more insistent and more irresistible. There was hardly an occasion on which such appeals were not made. Speaking one month after the outbreak of the new Intifada at a military cemetery on the anniversary of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, for instance, then Prime Minister Barak solemnly issued a call for national unity:

During the Yom Kippur War we were one nation, united. Since then it seems at times that we are becoming distant from this, that we are splintering among ourselves into groups and communities that define themselves by their enmity to the other. That process is more dangerous to us than any enemy or external war, even more than what is happening now. . . . If we are wise enough to rise above our divisions and return to be one, united nation facing all challenges, then we will win.<sup>41</sup>

Prime Minister Sharon also made the need for national unity a central theme of his premiership. Sharon presented the formation of his first National Unity government (2001–03) as a response to the public's desire for national unity, announcing in his first speech after being elected prime minister in February 2001: 'the time has come to reach agreement among us. The public wants unity'. He then went on to promise 'a new path of peace and unity at home'.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, Sharon began his speech to the Knesset presenting his National Unity government in March 2001, saying: 'The difficult security situation, and the challenges in the international arena, the deep rupture between the people, baseless hatred—all these call for national unity. Not just a verbal unity. Not just the joining of different political forces and beliefs. We have an urgent need for real unity, unity of the hearts. National reconciliation'.<sup>43</sup> In the context of ongoing Israeli–Palestinian violence, Sharon has explicitly linked national unity with the

physical security of Israelis, stating on one occasion: 'Every fissure in our unity is a breach that invites a terrorist, a murderer, a bomber. . . . Therefore the decree of the hour is to stand united and consolidated, and together—only together—to protect our lives. . . . We will stand together because we wish to survive'.<sup>44</sup> Nor did the break-up of the National Unity government and its replacement by a Likud-led coalition government, following the January 2003 Knesset elections, lead Sharon to curtail his appeals for national unity. Speaking to his supporters on the night of his election victory, Sharon stated that, 'Israel must not be left [to] split apart internally, eaten up by blind hatred—not at a time of war, not at a time of crisis, not now. Israel needs unity'.<sup>45</sup>

The message was not lost on Israelis. In a climate of fear and insecurity produced by Palestinian terrorist attacks, national unity was resurrected.<sup>46</sup> Israeli Jews rallied together as they had done in the past. In this sense, the second Intifada turned the clock back, not only in relations between Israelis and Palestinians, but also in relations between Israeli Jews. As the sense of siege returned, so too did the sense of togetherness promoted by it. Once again, Israelis felt themselves to be a nation at war, and they united against their common enemy. As one Israeli commentator wrote: 'The important thing is that after a generation and a half of bitter rift, of internal dispute whose scope and persistence created an abnormal situation, there is now a truce. Israeli (Jewish) society in Israel has returned to a state of cohesiveness'.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, Meretz Knesset member Amnon Rubinstein stated: 'Israeli society is divided on many issues, but is solid in its loyalty and dedication to Israel, even, and especially, in times of trouble',<sup>48</sup> and Israel's President, Moshe Katsav, noted that: 'Recent events [have] helped reduce the divisions which exist in Israeli society'.<sup>49</sup>

After a long hiatus, a new national consensus prevailed again in Israel. According to Ephraim Yuchtman-Ya'ar: 'This consensus is reflected in widespread mistrust of the Palestinians' commitment to make peace with Israel, and in the common conviction that so long as Palestinian terror continues, Israel must resort to arms in order to protect the lives of its citizens'.<sup>50</sup> This consensus was apparent in the overwhelming support of Israeli Jews for Prime Minister Sharon's policies towards the Palestinians, as consistently reflected in the findings of the Peace Index survey conducted by the Tami Steinmetz Centre for Peace Research.<sup>51</sup> In 2001, for instance, 89 percent of Israeli Jews supported the Sharon government's policy of 'targeted assassinations' of Palestinian militants involved in terrorism against Israel; the following year the number was 90 percent; and in 2003 it had risen to 92 percent.<sup>52</sup> The broad support of Israeli Jews for the military tactics of the Sharon government in combating Palestinian terrorism was also evident in their almost unanimous belief that Israel's military reoccupation of the West Bank carried out in Operation Defensive Shield in March 2002 was justified.<sup>53</sup> The vast majority of the Israeli public also

supported Sharon's policy of not conducting negotiations with the Palestinians as long as Palestinian terrorist attacks continued. In the Peace Index survey of March 2001, 72 percent of Israeli Jews backed Sharon's refusal to renew the peace talks 'under fire'.<sup>54</sup> Three years after the outbreak of the second Intifada, in September 2003, 75 percent of Israeli Jews still supported the policy of not conducting negotiations with the Palestinians as long as Palestinian terrorist attacks continued.<sup>55</sup>

The renewed sense of national unity in Israel brought about by the second Intifada, however, was severely shaken by the fierce domestic debate that erupted over Prime Minister Sharon's decision to withdraw unilaterally from the Gaza Strip and from four small West Bank settlements—the first removal of Israeli settlements from the territories since 1967. Although a clear majority of Israelis supported Sharon's disengagement plan,<sup>56</sup> its opponents—overwhelmingly comprised of those belonging to the religious-nationalist camp in Israel<sup>57</sup>—were well organized and highly vocal. Tens of thousands of members of the anti-disengagement movement, dubbed the 'orange camp', staged protests, ranging from mass rallies and marches to forming a human chain that stretched from the Gaza settlements all the way to Jerusalem. In the 19 months that passed between Sharon's first announcement of his disengagement plan in December 2003 and its implementation in August 2005, the passionate campaign mounted by the plan's opponents resembled the intense opposition that the Rabin government encountered during the early years of the Oslo peace process. Once again, large numbers of right-wing and religious Jews denounced the government's 'treason'. Prominent rabbis associated with the settler movement condemned the policy as a sin against God and called upon religious soldiers to disobey their orders in the event of an evacuation, and some settler leaders even called for the use of force to resist the evacuation of settlements.<sup>58</sup>

Prime Minister Sharon was publicly vilified as an enemy and a traitor by his erstwhile allies in the settler movement, in a manner that was ominously reminiscent of the right-wing extremist incitement that preceded Rabin's assassination in 1995. In contrast to that time when the threat to the life of the Prime Minister was not taken seriously until it was too late, however, this time cabinet ministers as well as the head of Israel's domestic security service publicly warned of the dangers of right-wing extremist incitement.<sup>59</sup> In an interview on Israeli television, for instance, Internal Security Minister Tzahi Hanegbi, stated: 'We as a government have to do everything we can to avoid a repeat of [the Rabin assassination in] 1995'.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to the threat of Sharon's assassination by a right-wing extremist determined to prevent the dismantling of settlements in Gaza, there were also fears of violent resistance by settlers and even mutiny in the IDF by religious Zionist soldiers.<sup>61</sup> In a meeting with Israel's Minister of Defence, Shaul Mofaz, settlers were reported to have told him: 'We have no



doubt that at this pace we are heading for a civil war. If things carry on this way, within one year there will not be a united nation here'.<sup>62</sup> Although some dismissed the threat of civil war as simply an attempt to use blackmail in order to prevent the evacuation of settlements, others sounded the alarm bells. 'From the things I have heard recently from rabbis and the extreme right, I am worried about a civil war', Justice Minister Yosef (Tommy) Lapid told an Israeli newspaper; and a Knesset member from the Labour party called for an emergency meeting of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee to discuss the threat.<sup>63</sup> Prime Minister Sharon himself said that the mounting domestic tension over his disengagement plan gave him the feeling of a country on the eve of a civil war.<sup>64</sup> The Israeli public was also concerned—according to one poll in January 2005, 49 percent of Israeli Jews thought that there was a high danger of a civil war.<sup>65</sup> Commenting on all this, Uri Avnery, the veteran Israeli peace activist, wrote:

Everybody is talking about the Next War. . . . Not another war with the Arabs. Not the nuclear threat from Iran. Not the ongoing bloody confrontation with the Palestinians. The talk is about the coming civil war. . . . They talk about it at cabinet meetings and in the Knesset, on TV talk-shows, in editorials and the news pages. The Chief of Staff has publicly warned that the army may fall apart. One of the ministers says that the very existence of the State of Israel is in danger. Another minister prophesies a bloodbath like the Spanish civil war.<sup>66</sup>

The widespread fears of extremist violence and even civil war in the months preceding the Gaza withdrawal, however, did not lead the Sharon government to back down or the majority of Israelis to reverse their support for withdrawal. Although the attempt by the anti-disengagement movement to sway Israeli public opinion by appealing to its desire for national unity with the slogans 'disengagement is tearing the nation apart' and 'Sharon is tearing the nation apart' (which appeared at anti-disengagement rallies and on posters across the country) succeeded in weakening public support for disengagement, it did not convince most Israelis to oppose the disengagement.<sup>67</sup> Supporters of disengagement and the Sharon government were not deterred by the dire predictions of civil strife that would accompany the attempt to evacuate the 8000 settlers from Gaza.

Thankfully, these predictions turned out to be wrong. The evacuation of Israeli settlements took place more smoothly and quickly than many had believed possible (the removal of settlers was expected to take weeks, instead it took only one week).<sup>68</sup> But the harrowing televised scenes of fervently religious settlers and their supporters being dragged kicking and screaming out of their homes and synagogues was a searing reminder to Israelis of the divisions in their midst. Moreover, the willingness of some of

those resisting the evacuation to engage in civil disobedience and, in a few cases, to commit acts of violence, was shocking evidence of a complete disregard for the will of the majority and a disdain for the state's laws and agents (i.e., the army and police). It amounted to a direct challenge to Israeli democracy and the rule of law. In overcoming this challenge in Gaza, therefore, democracy and the rule of law in Israel passed an important test. But a greater test still lies ahead. The prospect of a much larger withdrawal of Jewish settlers from all but the largest blocks of Israeli settlements in the West Bank—whether or not this takes place as a result of an Israeli–Palestinian peace agreement—now looms on the horizon. Having successfully confronted militant settlers in Gaza without the nightmare scenario of a civil war materializing, will Israeli society now be more willing to overcome the opposition to withdrawal from West Bank settlers and their supporters? After the turmoil of the Gaza withdrawal, will the Israeli public risk their national unity again?

#### CONCLUSIONS

According to numerous opinion polls, most Israeli Jews now favour abandoning all but the largest blocks of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, with or without a peace agreement with the Palestinians. This would entail the removal of around 60,000 of the approximately 250,000 Jewish settlers now living in the West Bank, a challenge that dwarfs that of the removal of Gaza's 8000 settlers. Considering the massive amount of money and manpower required for the Gaza evacuation—an estimated 42,000 soldiers and police took part in the evacuation and its total cost could reach as high as two billion US dollars—the costs of a much larger evacuation of West Bank settlers would be astronomical.<sup>69</sup> But the biggest challenge for Israel will be social, not financial. A withdrawal from the West Bank, the biblical heartland of Judea and Samaria, will almost certainly be met with intense and even violent resistance by ideologically fanatical settlers (unlike most of the Gaza settlers who were less ideological) and their supporters (who would reinforce the settlements slated for evacuation as some succeeded in doing prior to the Gaza evacuation). Having been defeated in their effort to prevent the withdrawal from Gaza, it is quite likely that some radical right-wing Jews may resort to more extreme measures to stop any larger future withdrawal from the West Bank, territory that is much more precious to them.

Moreover, the leadership of the settlement movement would be less likely to issue calls for restraint, as they did in the case of the Gaza withdrawal, since they would have less reason to do so. Religious nationalist soldiers, who make up a growing proportion of the IDF's officer corps, would also probably be more inclined to refuse to obey their orders. More broadly, the risk of a civil war in the event of a large-scale

withdrawal of Jewish settlers from the West Bank is clearly much greater than in the case of Israel's withdrawal from Gaza. Will the Israeli-Jewish public take this risk? Even without the risk of a civil war, Israeli Jews will certainly experience intense domestic turmoil. They will be bitterly divided against each other, even more so than they were at the height of the Oslo peace process during the years of the Rabin government. The social trauma of a West Bank withdrawal could last decades. Will Israelis be willing to sacrifice their cherished national unity?

The answer to this critical question depends upon the perceived benefits of a withdrawal from the West Bank. If the withdrawal were to be carried out unilaterally, these benefits would be less, since it would not be done in return for any Palestinian concessions or commitments. Hence, it will be difficult for an Israeli government to garner sufficient public support for a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from parts of the West Bank given the high domestic risks of such a withdrawal. If the withdrawal were part of a formal Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, however, it would hold the promise of lasting peace, making it more attractive to the Israeli public. But even Israeli-Palestinian peace would not necessarily be enough for Israelis to forsake their national unity. After all, as noted previously, Israelis have put their national unity ahead of peace before. Ultimately, it is the costs that Israelis will pay for the absence of peace between themselves and the Palestinians that will determine their willingness to sacrifice their national unity for the sake of peace. As Adi Ophir puts it: 'I believe there will be no peace with the Palestinians without a real, torturing rupture within Israeli-Jewish society. So far the price of this rupture seems to most Israelis on the so-called left higher than the price of another little war'.<sup>70</sup> As the costs of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continue to mount, one can only wonder at what point, if ever, Israelis and their leaders will decide to forsake, if necessary, Israeli-Jewish national unity for Israeli-Palestinian peace. Given the importance they attribute to their national unity, as this article has argued, this may well take some time.

## NOTES

1. *The Guardian*, 28 August 2003.
2. There were some isolated violent incidents before and during the withdrawal. Most notably, on 4 August 2005 an Israeli army deserter killed four Palestinian Israelis on a bus in northern Israel in an attack aimed at disrupting the planned withdrawal; and on 17 August 2005 a Jewish settler shot and killed four Palestinian labourers in the West Bank settlement of Shilo.
3. 'Address by George W. Bush, President of the United States Delivered at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance, National Cathedral, Washington, D.C., 14 Sept 2001', *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 1 October 2001, Vol. 67, No. 24, p. 742.
4. Baruch Kimmerling, 'Between the Primordial and the Civil Definitions of the Collective Identity: *Eretz Israel* or the State of Israel?', in Erik Cohen, Moshe Lissak and Uri Almagor (eds.), *Comparative Social Dynamics: Essays in Honor of S.N. Eisenstadt*, Boulder, CO, 1985, pp. 262-283.

5. Inauguration Speech of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in the Knesset, Jerusalem, 7 March 2001. Accessed 10 June 2003 at <http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/mfa/go.asp?MFAH0joo0>.
6. Speech by Prime Minister Ehud Barak on the Presentation of the Government to the Knesset, Jerusalem, July 6 1999. Accessed 3 February 2006 at (<http://www.mfa.gov.il/mFA/Government/Speeches+by+Israeli+leaders/1999/PM%20Barak-%20Presentation%20of%20Government%20-%20July%206-%201999>).
7. There have been a total of six National Unity governments in Israel's history—1967–1969, 1969, 1969–1970, 1984–1988, 1988–1990, 2001–2003.
8. Daniel Weinstock, 'Building Trust in Divided Societies', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (1999), pp. 287–307.
9. Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, 'Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory', *Ethics*, No. 104 (January 1994), pp. 352–381.
10. Eric Nordlinger, *Conflict Regulation in Deeply Divided Societies*, Cambridge, 1972.
11. Yoram Peri, 'Coexistence or Hegemony? Shifts in the Israeli Security Concept', in Dan Caspi, Abraham Diskin and Emanuel Gutman (eds.), *The Roots of Begin's Success: The 1981 Israeli Elections*, New York, 1984, p. 199.
12. The Talmud, for instance, tells the story of the 24,000 disciples of the famous sage Rabbi Akiva. All but five of them died in a plague in just a few weeks. Despite their religious devotion, their deaths were believed to have been a punishment by God for their lack of respect for one another.
13. Isaiah Berlin, 'The Origins of Israel', in Henry Hardy (ed.), *The Power of Ideas*, London, 2000, p. 160.
14. David Ben-Gurion, 'The Eternity of Israel', *The Government Yearbook*, Jerusalem, 1954 (Hebrew), pp. 14–23. Reprinted in Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum and Noam J. Zohar (eds.), *The Jewish Political Tradition: Volume I Authority*, New Haven, 2000, p. 491.
15. Asher Arian, *Security Threatened: Surveying Israeli Opinion on Peace and War*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 250.
16. The most significant exception to this was Moshe Sharett who was Israel's Foreign Minister and briefly Prime Minister from 1953 to 1955. Sharett urged a more moderate Israeli foreign policy and a more active pursuit of Arab–Israeli peace than his rival, Ben-Gurion. See, Avi Shlaim, 'Conflicting Approaches to Israel's Relations with the Arabs: Ben-Gurion and Sharett, 1953–1956', *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (1983), pp. 280–311.
17. Gad Barzilai has examined the domestic support for Israel's wars from the 1956 Suez War to the 1991 Gulf War. According to Barzilai, dissent was confined to the periphery or aired in private until the 1973 War. Gad Barzilai, *Wars, Internal Conflicts, and Political Order: A Jewish Democracy in the Middle East*, Albany, 1996.
18. Uri Savir, *The Process: 1,100 Days That Changed the Middle East*, New York, 1998, pp. 22–23.
19. Hillel Halkin, 'Israel and the Assassination: A Reckoning', *Commentary*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (1996), p. 29.
20. The Oslo I agreement was supported by 53 percent of Israelis, and opposed by 45 percent, with 2 percent having no opinion, according to a poll conducted by the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* in late August 1993. The Oslo II agreement was supported by 51 percent of Israelis, and opposed by 47 percent, with 2 percent having no opinion, according to a poll conducted in late September 1995. *Yediot Aharonot*, 30 August 1993, *Yediot Aharonot*, 28 September 1995.
21. See, for instance, the monthly results of the Peace Index survey conducted by the Tami Steinmetz Centre for Peace Research at Tel Aviv University, [http://www.tau.ac.il/peace/Peace\\_Index/](http://www.tau.ac.il/peace/Peace_Index/).
22. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, 'Israel's Peace-Making with the Palestinians: Change and Legitimacy', in Efraim Karsh (ed.), *From Rabin to Netanyahu: Israel's Troubled Agenda*, London, 1997, p. 180.
23. Interview with Foreign Minister Peres in *The Jerusalem Post*, 1 July 1994, in Meron Medzini (ed.), *Israel's Foreign Relations: Selected Documents, 1992–1994*, Vol. 14, Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995, pp. 672–673.
24. Briefing to the Foreign Press by Foreign Minister Peres, 28 June 1993, in Meron Medzini (ed.), *Israel's Foreign Relations: Selected Documents, 1992–1994*, Vol. 13, Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995, p. 260.

25. Sasson Sofer criticizes the Rabin government's 'flagrant neglect of the domestic front', a neglect that he argues helped to undermine the subsequent implementation of the Oslo Accords as sections of the Israeli population mobilized against it. Sasson Sofer, *Israel in the World Order: Social and International Perspectives*, Jerusalem, 1998, p. 4.
26. This was apparent in Rabin's willingness to rely upon the votes of Israeli Arab representatives in crucial votes in the Knesset. The right wing attacked the Rabin government's dependence on the votes of Arab Knesset Members, denouncing Rabin's lack of a 'Jewish majority'.
27. Akiva Eldar, 'Where is Barak—and where is Rabin?' *Ha'aretz*, 3 November 2000.
28. Quoted in Danny Ben-Moshe, 'Elections 1996: The De-Zionization of Israeli Politics', *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 3, Nos. 3–4 (1997), p. 74.
29. Opening Session of the fifteenth Knesset, 7 June 1999, address by the President of the State of Israel Mr. Ezer Weizman, Information Division, Israel Foreign Ministry, Jerusalem.
30. 'Ehud Barak's Plan for a Better Israel', [http://www1.knesset.gov.il/elections/pm/ematz\\_a\\_pm\\_0.htm](http://www1.knesset.gov.il/elections/pm/ematz_a_pm_0.htm).
31. Judy Dempsey, 'Fault lines at 50', *The Financial Times*, 29 April 1998.
32. Avirama Golan, 'When "Israeliness" stands for old elites', *Ha'aretz*, 23 February 2001.
33. The attitude of the Israeli Right to national unity is captured in an opinion poll carried out in November 2002 in the run-up to the January 2003 general election which asked respondents which was more important to them in choosing a candidate for prime minister: the ability to reach a peace agreement, the ability to fight terror, the ability to improve the economy, or the ability to preserve national unity. Thirty-six percent of Likud voters ranked the ability to preserve national unity as most important (this was ahead of the next most important ability for Likud voters—fighting terror, which 33 percent ranked as most important). By contrast, the ability to reach a peace agreement was ranked first by 38 percent of Labour voters, with only 7 percent ranking the ability to preserve national unity as most important. Poll reported by *Independent Media Review Analysis*, 7 November 2002, <http://www.imra.org.il/>.
34. Statement in the Knesset by Prime Minister Shamir on the Peace Initiative, 17 May 1989, in Meron Medzini (ed.), *Israel's Foreign Relations: Selected Documents, 1988–1992*, Vol. 11, Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pp. 148–153.
35. See for instance, Gabriel Sheffer, 'Israel as a banana republic', *Ha'aretz*, 1 February 2001.
36. 'An Interview with Adi Ophir', *Tikkun*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (January–February 2001).
37. *Ha'aretz*, 21 January 2000.
38. Between 1994 and 2000, the Israeli government confiscated approximately 35,000 acres of Palestinian land in the West Bank for the construction of bypass roads and settlements. Sara Roy, 'Decline and Disfigurement: The Palestinian Economy After Oslo', in Roane Carey (ed.), *The New Intifada: Resisting Israel's Intifada*, New York, 2001, p. 95.
39. Ephraim Yuchtman-Ya'ar, 'The Oslo Process and Israeli-Jewish Public: A Story of Disappointment?' *Israel Studies Forum*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Fall 2002), p. 16.
40. Ari Shavit, 'Eyes Wide Shut', Interview with Barak, *Ha'aretz*, 9 September 2002.
41. Herb Keiron, 'Barak preaches unity sermon to families of fallen', *Jerusalem Post*, 11 October 2000.
42. 'PM-elect makes unity his theme', *Ha'aretz*, 7 February 2001.
43. 'Inauguration Speech of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in the Knesset, Jerusalem, March 7, 2001', Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches>.
44. 'Excerpts from Speech by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to the Likud Congress, Jerusalem, October 23, 2002', Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches>.
45. 'Text of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's victory address', Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/MFA/Government/Speeches>.
46. A public opinion survey taken in March 2002 posed the question: 'In your opinion have recent events, including terrorist attacks and operation "Defensive Shield"', strengthened or weakened the sense of national unity in the Israeli-Jewish public?' Eighty-six percent of Israeli Jewish respondents answered that the events strengthened national unity. Tamar Hermann, 'Tactical Hawks, Strategic Doves: The Positions of the Jewish Public in Israel on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict', *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (August 2002).
47. David Landau, 'Carpe diem', *Ha'aretz*, 6 April 2001.
48. Amnon Rubinstein, 'In fact, we are closing ranks', *Ha'aretz*, 20 November 2000.

49. *Ha'aretz*, 5 October 2000.
50. Yuchtman-Ya'ar, 'The Oslo Process and Israeli-Jewish Public', p. 23.
51. Accessible at <http://www.tau.ac.il/peace/>.
52. Asher Arian, *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2004*, Tel Aviv, 2003, p. 29.
53. Yuchtman-Ya'ar, 'The Oslo Process and Israeli-Jewish Public', p. 17.
54. *Ha'aretz*, 4 April 2001.
55. Yuchtman-Ya'ar, 'The Oslo Process and Israeli-Jewish Public', p. 17.
56. In the Peace Index survey of April 2004, 59 percent of Israeli Jews expressed support for the plan compared to only 34 percent who opposed it. Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, 'Peace Index / The majority wants disengagement', *Ha'aretz*, 7 April 2004.
57. According to statistical analyses of the demographic profiles of supporters and opponents of the disengagement plan, ultra-Orthodox Jews were 14 times more likely to be opposed to the disengagement plan than secular Israeli Jews, while those who defined themselves as religious were 9 times more likely to oppose the disengagement plan than secular Israeli Jews. Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, 'Peace Index: July 2005', <http://www.tau.ac.il/peace>.
58. *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 September 2004.
59. *The Jerusalem Post*, 6 July 2004.
60. Ibid.
61. In a survey by the Dahaf Institute in February 2005, 75 percent of Israelis said that they were very or quite concerned that clashes between settlers and the soldiers who come to implement the evacuation might lead to an exchange of fire. Cited in Meir Elran, 'Disengagement Offshoots: Strategic Implications for Israeli Society', *Strategic Assessment*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (August 2005).
62. *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 September 2004.
63. Ibid.
64. *The Jerusalem Post*, 6 July 2004.
65. Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, 'Peace Index: Jan 2005', <http://www.tau.ac.il/peace>.
66. Uri Avnery, 'On the Road to Civil War', *Maariv International*, 22 November 2004.
67. A survey carried out in June 2005 by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research and the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem found that 53 percent of Israelis supported Sharon's disengagement plan, down from 65 percent who supported the plan in a poll taken in March of that year. The Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, <http://truman.huji.ac.il/polls.asp>, 20 June 2005.
68. *The New York Times*, 24 August 2005.
69. Hillel Halkin, 'Israel After Disengagement', *Commentary* (September 2005).
70. 'An Interview with Adi Ophir', *Tikkun*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (January–February 2001).