Socio–Psychological Barriers to Peace Making: The Case of the Israeli Jewish Society

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The present article describes the socio–psychological barriers that play a major role in Israeli Jewish society in the attempts to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict peacefully. After presenting the general conceptual framework of the socio–psychological barriers, our analysis of Israeli Jewish society focuses on two main aspects: conflict-supporting beliefs that provide well-based arguments that feed the continuation of the conflict, and emotions of fear and hatred that fuel it. Despite major changes in Israeli Jewish society through the years, many of these beliefs and emotions have remained dominant and continue to obstruct possible peaceful resolution of the conflict. They inhibit penetration of new information that could aid in facilitating the development of the peace process. The article presents the obstructing beliefs and emotions in detail, relying mostly on national surveys conducted between 2000 and 2009. Finally, it discusses the implications of the presented data and proposes ways to overcome these socio–psychological barriers.

The long history of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and the inability to re-solve it peacefully in spite of the numerous bilateral attempts and third-party

interventions imply that this conflict is vicious, stubborn, and resistant to efforts for peaceful resolution. The lack of resolution can be attributed to a large extent to socio–psychological forces that underlie the disagreements and prevent their resolution, presenting major obstacles to begin and maintain negotiations, to achieve an agreement, and later to engage in the process of reconciliation (see the review by Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011). The purpose of the present article is to elucidate these socio–psychological barriers that play a role in the Israeli Jewish society. We note that similar detrimental forces are operating on the Palestinian side, but their analysis is outside the scope of the present contribution. First, we are not well familiar with the socio–psychological forces that operate in the Palestinian society, and second, there is much less empirical data on this society. Nevertheless we are well aware that socio–psychological barriers with all their elements function also on the Palestinian side (see, e.g., Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998; Shamir & Shikaki, 2010 as attempts to analyze both sides).

In any event, we believe that analysis of obstacles to peace making has great relevance for policy makers because any practical movement toward conflict resolution has to take into account also the socio–psychological barriers that characterize the societies involved in the conflict. Understanding these barriers is a condition for launching a meaningful policy of peace making that will eventually bring about the desired outcomes.

The present article first briefly describes the background of the Israeli–Arab/Palestinian conflict with special emphasis on recent events of 2000–2009 to provide the necessary details for understanding the context in which the socio–psychological barriers evolved. The next part presents the general conceptual framework that elaborates on the nature of the socio–psychological barriers. Finally, the present work focuses on the two types of socio–psychological barriers that operate presently in Israeli Jewish society—conflict-supporting beliefs and emotions—and concludes with specific policy implications.

The Context of the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

For many decades, Palestinian nationalism and Zionism, the Jewish national movement, have clashed recurrently over the same land, the right of self-determination, statehood, and justice. The conflict, however, is not only territorial and political, but also concerns economic aspects of control over resources; it relates to basic needs such as security and identity, as well as to deep contradictions in religious and cultural goals. Since 1967, with the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the Six-Day War, the conflict has touched both the interstate and the communal levels (Sandler, 1988).

For a long time the conflict was a prototypical case of an intractable conflict, characterized as lasting at least 25 years, violent, and perceived as unsolvable, over goals considered existential, and of zero-sum nature. Also, the conflict greatly preoccupies society members, and the parties involved invest much in its continuation

(see Bar-Tal, 1998a, 2007a,b; Kriesberg, 1993). Although some of the intractable features are still intact, between 1977 and 2000 the conflict began to move toward the tractable end of the dimension. The peace treaty with Egypt in 1979, the Madrid convention in 1991, the Oslo agreements in 1993 and 1995, and the peace treaty with Jordan in 1994 are hallmarks of the peace process that changed the relations between Jews and Arabs in the Middle East (see detailed descriptions in Caplan, 2009; Dowty, 2005; Morris, 2001; Wasserstein, 2003).

A re-escalation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict began with the failure of the July 2000 Camp David summit between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Chairman Yasser Arafat, with the participation of US President Bill Clinton. According to the Israeli official view, responsibility for the failure was imputed solely to the Palestinians (see analyses by Bar-Siman-Tov, Lavie, Michael, & Bar-Tal, 2007; Drucker, 2002; Enderlin, 2003; Pressman, 2003; Swisher, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 2004). Moreover, the information supplied by Israeli sources suggested that Arafat, along with the Palestinian leadership, was not interested in resolving the conflict through compromise and peaceful means, but still strove to annihilate Israel, especially by insisting on the right of return of millions of Palestinian refugees to Israel.

With the eruption of what is now known as the second Intifada, the negotiations with the Palestinians ceased, and the level of violence on both sides surged. The Palestinians stepped up their terrorist attacks, mainly by suicide bombings in public places throughout Israel. At the same time, the Israeli security forces, endeavoring to curb the violence and especially the terrorism, carried acts of violence against the Palestinians. The climax of these was Operation Defensive Shield in April–May 2002, in which Israeli forces reoccupied the West Bank almost entirely (Drucker & Shelah, 2005; Harel & Isacharoff, 2004; Reporters without Borders, 2003). By April 14, 2004, the violence had claimed over 2,720 lives and 25,000 wounded on the Palestinian side, many of them civilians—and 943 lives (276 members of the security forces, 667 civilians) and 6,300 wounded on the Israeli side. Various attempts by external mediators, especially American and European, failed to stop the violence.

In view of the deadlock, the Israeli Government decided to unilaterally withdraw from the Gaza Strip and from four settlements in the West Bank, evacuating about 8,000 settlers. Disengagement was completed without major incidents by September 2005, but was followed by considerable chaos within Gaza. In the elections held in the Palestinian Territories in January 2006, the Hamas Movement, which calls for replacing the State of Israel with a Palestinian Islamic state in the area that is now Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip, won. The Hamas refused to recognize the right of Israel to exist, or to make peace with Israel. Israel insisted it would maintain relations only with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, who is not part of the Hamas-led government. In June 2007, following growing anarchy in Gaza, Hamas militants drove the rival secular Fatah party

out of the Gaza Strip. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas dissolved the unity government and formed a separate government based in the West Bank. The firing of Qassam rockets at civilian targets inside Israel from the Gaza Strip escalated after Hamas took power.

On November 27, 2007, the Annapolis Conference took place with the participation of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, President Mahmoud Abbas, and US President George W. Bush. For the first time, the conference approved a two-state solution as the mutually agreed-upon outline for addressing the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The conference ended with the issue of a joint statement by all parties, followed by lengthy formal negotiations between the two parties in two different channels. This did not yield an agreement, however, because the government of Prime Minister Olmert resigned after corruption charges were leveled against him. In the Israeli elections of February 2009, a leader of the hawkish Likud Party, Benjamin Netanyahu, was elected to form a hawkish government which initially did not recognize the two-state solution. Only after pressure from US President Barack Obama in June 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu accepted the idea of dividing the land between the two nations. Nevertheless, negotiations have not yet begun as the Palestinians have demanded a freeze on all Jewish settlement activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem as a precondition. However, the Israeli Prime Minister has agreed only to a 10-month freeze in the West Bank. Eventually the preliminary indirect talks between the two sides began in the spring of 2010.

It should be noted that, at present, there are several official peace plans including the quartet (United States, European Union, Russia, and the UN) "road map" and the Arab League initiative for Arab–Israeli peace, as well as various informal initiatives such as the Geneva Accord and the Ayalon-Nusseibeh initiative, which focus on solving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. However, despite the fact that the Oslo Agreement was signed in 1993 and Israelis and Palestinians spent literally thousands of hours negotiating either directly bilaterally or with the help of third parties, no peaceful settlement of the conflict has been achieved.

Having now presented the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in which the socio–psychological barriers in Israeli Jewish society have been shaped, and before describing these barriers in detail, we outline a general conceptual framework for understanding these barriers.

Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Socio–Psychological Barriers to Peace

Our fundamental premise is that intergroup conflicts center over disagreements that focus on contradictory goals and interests in different domains, and there is no doubt that these real issues have to be addressed in conflict resolution. In prolonged, serious, and harsh conflicts, however, the process of peace making

is extremely difficult because powerful barriers underlie the disagreements. These barriers inhibit and impede progress toward peaceful settlement. We focus only on the socio–psychological factors that fuel and maintain the conflicts and they will be presented in this section. They pertain to an integrated operation of cognitive, emotional and motivational processes, combined with a pre-existing repertoire of rigid supporting beliefs, worldviews and emotions that result in selective, biased and distorting information processing. This processing preserves basic disagreements and thus obstructs penetration of information that could contribute to facilitating the development of the peace process (see also Atran & Axelrod, 2008; Kelman, 2007; Stagner, 1967; White, 1970). Figure 1 depicts the dynamics and the factors that take part in this process, and we will describe them briefly. As can be seen on the left in Figure 1, the disagreements are strengthened first of all by two major factors: general worldviews and ideological and circumstantial beliefs.

General Worldviews

General worldviews are systems of beliefs and tendencies that are not directly related to the particular conflict, but provide views which contribute to its continuation because of the perspectives, values, beliefs, and norms that they propagate. The list of these general views is long, but among the more distinctive ones are: authoritarian, conservative, or socially dominant political ideology (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950; Altemeyer, 1981; Jost, 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), specific values such as those related to power or to conservatism (Schwartz, 1992), religious beliefs (Kimball, 2002), and implicit entity theory about humankind (Dweck, 1999). All of these worldviews influence how society members perceive the conflict disagreements and form their other beliefs about the rival, their own group and the conflict (see, e.g., Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Dweck & Ehrlinger, 2006; Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Golec & Federico, 2004; Guimond, Dambrun, Michinov, & Duarte, 2003; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003; Kossowska, Bukowski, & van Hiel, 2008; Krochik & Jost, in press; Levinson, 1957; Sibley & Duckitt, 2008). Accordingly, in our model they have a direct effect on the selective, biased, and distortive processing of information, and they also underlie the acquisition of the conflict-related ideological and circumstantial beliefs.

Ideological and Circumstantial Beliefs

The conflict-related ideological and circumstantial beliefs are hypothesized to directly influence conflictive confrontation (see Figure 1), because their contents usually provide a one-sided view of the nature of the mutual relations, the self, and the rival (see, e.g., White, 1970). More specifically, ideological supporting
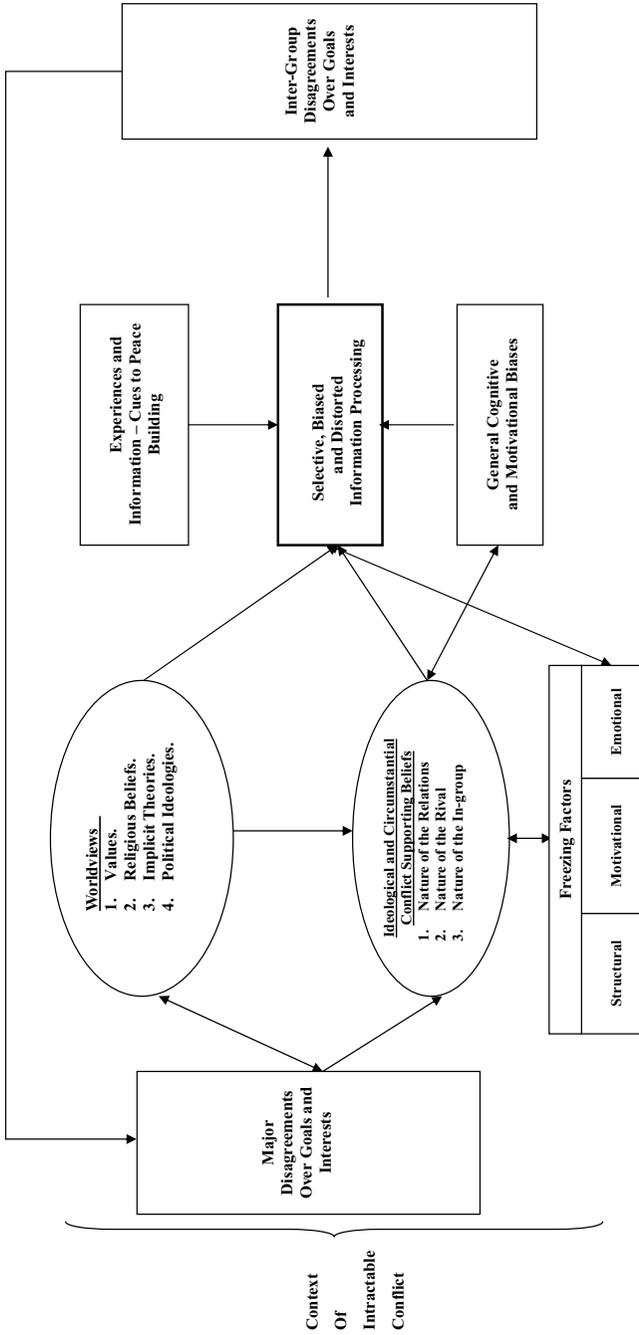
Fig. 1. Socio–Psychological barriers to peaceful conflict resolution.

beliefs pertain mostly to the following eight themes of societal beliefs (Bar-Tal, 1998a, 2000, 2007a): Societal beliefs (1) *about the justness of one's own goals*, which first of all outline the goals in conflict, indicate their crucial importance, and provide their explanations and rationales; (2) *about security*, which stress the importance of personal safety and national survival, and outline the conditions for their achievement; (3) *of delegitimizing the opponent*, which include beliefs that deny the adversary's humanity; (4) *of positive collective self-image*, which involve the ethnocentric tendency to attribute positive traits, values, and behavior to one's own society; (5) *of own victimization* which include self-presentation as a victim, especially in the context of the intractable conflict; (6) *of patriotism*, which generate attachment to the country and society by propagating loyalty, love, care, and sacrifice; (7) *of unity*, which refer to the importance of ignoring internal conflicts and disagreements during an intractable conflict to unite the forces in the face of the external threat; and, finally, (8) *of peace*, which refer to peace as the ultimate desire of the society. These ideological societal beliefs are relatively stable as they constitute an ethos of conflict which is defined as a configuration of central societal beliefs that provide a particular dominant orientation to a society experiencing prolonged intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 2000, 2007a; Oren, 2009).

But we also recognize that, in addition to these relatively long-lasting ideological sets of societal beliefs, circumstantial supporting beliefs of the conflict may be added to the repertoire as a result of particular temporary conditions that develop during the conflict. These beliefs develop in a particular context and may later disappear. For example, the particular leader of the rival group is perceived as weak and therefore is considered unable to implement the potential peace agreement. Thus, a group decides not to open negotiations with him but to continue the conflict. In any event, all the direct conflict-supporting beliefs, either ideological or circumstantial, create mistrust, hostility, and a sense of threat. They serve as explicit barriers to the peace process by providing an epistemic basis for the continuation of the conflict.

The two described categories of conflict-supporting beliefs, ideological and circumstantial, are core beliefs that preserve the continuation of the conflict because they prevent an acceptance of information that provides an alternative view about the conflict or the rival. Theoretically, they could easily be changed, but this does not happen because they are frozen (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Of determinative importance is our assumption that freezing takes place because of structural, motivational, and emotional factors. We will now describe the freezing factors of conflict-supporting beliefs.

Freezing Factors

The first factor that leads to freezing is structural. In other words, the rigid structure of conflict-supporting beliefs contributes to their stability. Rigidity

implies that the conflict-supporting beliefs are resistant to change, organized in a coherent manner with little complexity and vastly different from alternative beliefs (Rokeach, 1960; Tetlock, 1989). Rigidity has three sources: The first refers to the functionality of the described socio–psychological repertoire, which fulfills important functions on the individual and collective levels for societies involved in severe conflicts (e.g., the conflict-supporting ideological beliefs fulfill needs for positive self-collective image, security and mastery). Another structural source is the coherent interrelated structure of the described societal beliefs, which can be considered as a type of conflict ideology (Bar-Tal, Raviv, Raviv, & Dgani-Hirsch, 2009; Tetlock, 1989). That is, the various themes of ethos of conflict constitute a well-organized interrelated system of beliefs (Gopher, 2006). The third source is reflected in the way these beliefs are held— they are central, maintained with great confidence, shared by society members who are aware of this sharing, and they highly involve the society members. These three characteristics inhibit the effectiveness of persuasive messages that may change these beliefs (Bar-Tal, 1990a, 2000; Bar-Tal, Raviv, & Freund, 1994; Eagly & Chaikin, 1993; Johnson & Eagly, 1989: Rokeach, 1969).

In addition to the structural factor, the motivational force that contributes to freezing is a specific need for closure (see Kruglanski, 1989, 2004). This second factor motivates society members to view the conflict-supporting beliefs as truthful and valid because they fulfill various needs. In addition, the rigidity of the socio–psychological repertoire can be attributed to the stressful and threatening context of conflict in which society members live, as the third factor. This context limits information processing (Driskell & Salas 1996; Staal, 2004). For example, the effect can be reflected in premature closure of decision alternatives (Keinan, 1987), restricted consideration of the number and quality of alternatives (Janis, Defares, & Grossman, 1983), or sole reliance on previously stored knowledge (Bar-Tal, Y. Raviv, & Spitzer, 1999).

The fourth factor that affects the level of freezing is emotional. An age-old conviction holds that negative intergroup emotions are one of the major barriers to conflict resolution (see, e.g., Baumeister, & Butz, 2005; Corradi, Fagen, & Garreton 1992; Halperin, 2008, in press; Halperin, Sharvit, & Gross, 2010; Horowitz, 1985; Lindner, 2006; Petersen, 2002; Scheff & Retzinger, 1991; Staub, 2005; White, 1984). They freeze the repertoire and stabilize the rigidity of the conflict-supporting beliefs, but they may also act directly on information processing. In the first case they feed and underlie the ideological conflict-supporting beliefs (see, e.g., the functioning of fear by Bar-Tal, 2001) and in the other case the intergroup negative emotional sentiments play pivotal role in limiting the scope of considerations (e.g., Baumeister & Butz, 2005; Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2009).

Emotions targeted at the out-group, or even at an event itself, can be of a short- or long-term nature (Halperin et al., 2010). In both configurations they might

have a critical influence on the way people shape their attitudes and behavior in response to events that are related to the conflict. According to the discrete emotions perspective, each emotion has a unique content (or story) that includes a typical set of cognitive appraisals, a unique feeling, and specific behavioral motivations and tendencies (Frijda, Kuipers, & ter Schure, 1989; Frijda et al., 1989; Roseman, 1984, 2002). In the context of intergroup conflicts, that unique ensemble of feelings and thoughts constitutes a barrier to peace in two related but distinct ways. First, the unique content embedded within the story of each emotion directly affects people's positions about new proposals or opportunities, as for example, a fear may lead to a rejection of a proposal. Second, as already noted, that very same story uniquely shapes these positions through its influence on the way individuals' process information.

Different scholars point to different sets of intergroup emotions as foundation stones of the emotional repertoire of societies in conflict (see, e.g., de Rivera & Paez, 2007). In the present article, we focus on two salient intergroup emotions that play a determinative role in obstructing the peace process—that is, fear, and hatred. These two emotions have also constituted the most prevalent and influential factors within the context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in recent years (see also Bar-Tal, 2001; Halperin, 2008).

Fear is defined as a primary aversive emotion that arises in situations of perceived threat and danger to the organism (the person and/or collective) and/or his/her environment, and enables the person to respond to these situations adaptively (Gray, 1987; LeDoux, 1996). High levels of fear usually lead to cognitive freezing and closed-mindedness (Halperin, Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut, & Almog, 2008; Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006; Rokeach, 1960). Behaviorally, fear is usually associated with avoidance of risk taking and with the willingness to create a safer environment (Frijda et al., 1989; Roseman, 1984, 1994). In addition, research suggests that experiences of threat and fear increase conservatism, prejudice, ethnocentrism, and intolerance (Duckitt & Fisher, 2003; Feldman & Stenner, 1997; Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski, & Sulloway, 2003). Finally, fear may also lead to initiation of violence (Brubaker & Laitin, 1998; Lake & Rothchild, 1998).

Hatred is a secondary, extreme, and continuous emotion that is directed at a particular individual or group and denounces them fundamentally and all-inclusively (Opotow & McClelland, 2007; Sternberg, 2003). In most cases of hatred, in-group members appraise the out-group behavior as stemming from a deep-rooted, permanent evil character (Ben-Zeev, 1992) and even use high levels of delegitimization and dehumanization (Bar-Tal, 1990b; Haslam, 2006). Behaviorally, hatred is associated with the aspiration to harm the out-group as much as possible, and in extreme events it can lead people to desire total elimination of the hated out-group (Halperin, 2008).

In addition, the conceptual framework also includes universal cognitive and motivational biases that characterize all human beings as they are, in every context.

On the one hand, they influence the processing of the ideological and circumstantial beliefs and, on the other hand, they directly affect the processing of new information and experiences. Among the universal cognitive and motivational biases, cognitive heuristics, automatic cognitive processing, and various motivations such as ego enhancement can be found (see, e.g., Bargh, 2007; Jarymowicz, 2008; Kunda, 1990; Nisbett & Ross, 1980). It can be assumed that the conflictive intergroup context, accompanied by the supporting beliefs, provides an ultimate platform for the operation of these biases (Ross & Ward, 1995).

In summary, we suggest that the two content-related clusters of beliefs (i.e., the general worldview beliefs and the supporting beliefs), supported by the described freezing factors (structural, motivational, and emotional), provide a prism through which individuals perceive and interpret the reality of the conflict. That prism, integrated with general cognitive and motivational biases, frequently leads to selective, biased and distorted information processing of new, potentially positive information. The consequence of this processing is preservation and even reinforcement of the basic disagreements, as well as of the conflict-supporting beliefs (see Figure 1). For example, this processing obstructs penetration of peaceful gestures initiated by the adversary, new proposals raised by third parties or by the other side and/or new information about the other side's willingness to compromise. Under these circumstances, overcoming the basic disagreements is a very difficult challenge (see extensive presentation of the described framework in Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2011).

Moreover, we note that societies involved in intractable conflicts exert great efforts to assure that society members adhere to the dominant narrative and ignore alternative information. The society constructs mechanisms (e.g., censorship, sanctioning sources that supply alternative information, closure of archives, among others) to assure that the beliefs of the ethos of conflict, as well as collective emotions, will be maintained, and alternative knowledge about possibilities of peace making will not penetrate into the social sphere, and even when this knowledge does penetrate, it will be rejected (Bar-Tal, 2007b; Kelman, 2007).

After describing the general conceptual framework, we next focus on the present situation in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. First, we present the core areas of disagreement on which the negotiations focus, and then we review the state of the recent negotiations and public opinion about them. The presentation of the disagreements is important to describe the essence of the conflict that serves as a basis for the emergence of the socio–psychological barriers. In describing these barriers in Israeli Jewish society, we focus on the ideological and circumstantial conflict-supporting beliefs and on the emotional factors that operate as barriers. Because of the lack of data and space limitations, we sidestep the discussion of other socio–psychological barriers such as general worldviews and general cognitive and motivational biases.

Core Disagreements in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict and Public Opinion

The disagreements between Israeli Jews and the Palestinians center on at least five major issues. On the assumption that the principle of dividing the land between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea with the establishment of the Palestinian state is accepted by both sides, the first issue centers on the extent and boundaries of the territories that the Palestinian state will have. The second issue concerns the nature of the future Palestinian state. The third deals with the way both national entities will divide and rule the city of Jerusalem. The fourth relates to the solution to the Jewish settlements that have been constructed in the occupied territories since 1967. The fifth issue concerns a solution for the refugees of 1948 and perhaps even those of 1967 (Ben-Ami, 2006; Morris, 2001). Obviously, the disagreements surround additional issues as well, such as division of water and other natural resources, and the nature of economic relations, but at this point, we consider them as secondary and therefore we will not refer to them.

There have been a number of serious negotiations that produced documents about the nature of the solutions to these issues including the Taba negotiations between representatives of the Israeli government and Palestinian Authority in January 2001, the Clinton proposals in December 1995, the Abu Mazen–Beilin informal document produced in 1995, and the informal Geneva accord negotiated and presented in 2003. We present the contours of the agreement that was proposed by the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (Olmert, 2009b) after yearlong negotiations that he managed personally with the President of the Palestinian Authority Abu Mazen through 2007–2008, as this information has been published in the press. His proposals are probably the most far-reaching in comparison to proposals of any other Israeli leader in office in the past.

According to the press, when negotiations stopped in the autumn of 2008, the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert had agreed to the establishment of the Palestinian state after the Israeli withdrawal from 93.5% to 93.7% of the occupied territories, and as compensation, the Palestinians were to get 5.8% of land in other places and safe passage from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip. Olmert also agreed that the Holy Basin of Jerusalem would be under no sovereignty at all and would be administered by a consortium of Saudis, Jordanians, Israelis, Palestinians, and Americans. Jerusalem would be divided and would serve as capitals of the two states. Israel would accept only a small number of refuges as a humanitarian gesture, while the majority of them would be able to move to the established Palestinian state (Ben—*Haaretz*, June 26, 2009; Olmert—*Musaf Hag*, September 29, 2008; Olmert, June 22, 2009).

As noted, following the elections in February 2009, a new hawkish government led by Benyamin Netanayhu was elected, which eventually accepted the idea of establishing a Palestinian state pending a list of conditions including its complete demilitarization, the acknowledgment by the Palestinians that Israel was

a Jewish state, no return of Palestinian refugees to the Israeli state, and no nego-
tiations about the division of Jerusalem. The direct negotiations between the two
sides are to begin in the near future.

In view of Olmert's proposal and Netanyahu's position, it is interesting to
determine Israeli Jewish public opinion regarding the same issues of disagree-
ments according to the latest polls. Before presenting current Israeli Jewish public
opinion, we should note that over the years significant changes have appeared in
public opinion regarding some of the issues. For example, the readiness of the Is-
raeli Jewish public to accept the establishment of a Palestinian state has increased
from around 20% in 1987 to 61% in 2006. The willingness of Israeli Jews to give
up Israeli sovereignty over the Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem grew from
10% in 1994 to around 50% in 2006 (Ben-Meir & Shaked, 2008).

As for current public opinion regarding a Palestinian state, in 2009, 53%
support the idea of a Palestinian state as a solution to the conflict and a higher rate
(64%) support the "two states for two peoples" solution (Ben-Meir, 2009). How-
ever, most Israeli Jews oppose complete Israeli withdrawal from the territories.
For example, a time serial survey of the Institute for National Security Studies
(INSS)[1] indicates that around 70% oppose transferring areas, such as Gush Etzion,
the Jordan Valley, and Western Samaria, to the Palestinians. It also indicates that
from 2000 until 2009, there had been a decline in support for withdrawal from
these areas. More specifically, support for withdrawal from Gush Etzion dropped
from 33% to 14.8% in 2009; support for withdrawal from the Jordan Valley fell
from 32% to 13.8% in 2009, and withdrawal from Western Samaria decreased
from 51% to 29% in 2007 (Ben-Meir, 2009).

In addition, there is barely any support for the evacuation of all the settlements
in the West Bank, which in effect would mean a return to the 1967 borders.
According to a survey conducted in August 2004 by the Tami Steinmetz Center
for Peace Research (August 2004, Peace Index)[2], 17% were prepared to evacuate
all settlements, 15% supported evacuating most of the settlements, 37% agreed to
evacuation of only those settlements that were among or near Palestinian villages
and towns, and 25% opposed any evacuation. INSS data also indicate that the
support for evacuation of all settlements has consistently been low over the years
(see Figure 2). In 2009, only 15% supported the evacuation of all settlements (a
decrease from 20% in 2005). However, as can be seen in Figure 2, a significant
portion of the Jewish respondents support evacuation of only small and isolated
settlements. In 2009, 43% were willing to "evacuate only small and isolated

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[1] INSS, incorporates the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies. Launched in 1984, the National
Security and Public Opinion Project monitors Israeli public opinion on issues related to national
security. For more information see http://www.inss.org.il/ipo.php.

[2] Peace Index polls are monthly polls that have been conducted by the Tami Steinmetz Center for
Peace Research at Tel-Aviv University since 1994 (for more information about the Peace Index project
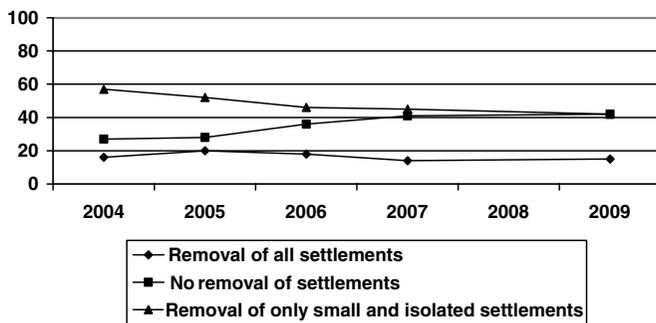see www.tau.ac.il/peace).

Fig. 2. Percentage of Israeli Jews prepared for evacuation of the Jewish settlements in the context of a permanent settlement.

settlements" in the West Bank in the context of a permanent agreement (a decrease from 57% in 2004). In 2009, 42% opposed the evacuation of settlements under any circumstance—this is an increase from 27% in 2004 (Ben-Meir, 2009).

As for the future of Jerusalem, another key issue of disagreement between the Israelis and the Palestinians, while currently around 41% support the idea of territorial concession in East Jerusalem, public opinion polls indicate that most Israeli Jews oppose other ideas about the future of this city (Ben-Meir, 2009). For example, according to Peace Index data, 60% are not in favor of joint Israeli–Palestinian administration of the Temple Mount and the Jerusalem holy places, and 83% oppose handing over the Old City to the Palestinians (Peace Index, April 2008). According to INSS data of 2009, around 82% oppose the idea that Temple Mount should be given to the Palestinians and support continued Israeli control of the Wailing Wall (Ben-Meir, 2009).

Finally, polls indicate that most Israeli Jews object to the Palestinian goal of the right of return. For example, according to a September 2007 poll, a considerable majority (87%) of the Jewish public oppose the return of a single refugee to Israel itself, even in exchange for a permanent peace agreement, 6% are prepared for the return of up to 100,000, and 3% are prepared for whatever number is decided (September 2007, Peace Index). Similarly, 2009 INSS data indicate that around 89% oppose to the return to Israel of even a limited number of refugees (Ben-Meir, 2009).

In summary, while over the years we can identify more willingness among the Israeli Jewish public to compromise with the Palestinians, current Israeli public opinion polls indicate that most Israeli Jews still oppose key elements of the main proposals to end the conflict described above, including those that were presented by the Israeli officials (such as Olmert's proposal). Although most Israeli Jews support the idea of a two-state solution, they oppose returning to the 1967 borders,

evacuating most or all the Jewish settlements built in the occupied territories, the suggested compromise regarding Temple Mount in Jerusalem, and the return of even a small number of Palestinian refugees to Israel. Thus, we see that the widely accepted advanced idea of the "two-state solution" is general, and requires a great deal of specificity to serve as a concrete plan for conflict resolution. Moreover, while there are still disagreements over the key issues that stand at the core of the conflict, socio–psychological barriers pose an additional major obstacle in resolving the conflict peacefully.

Socio–Psychological Barriers in Resolving the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

In this section, we present the socio–psychological barriers that play a major detrimental role in the peaceful resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, focusing on the views of the Israeli Jewish public, and the views of the political parties and of the political leaders, beginning with the presentation of the ideological conflict-supporting beliefs. In discussing the ideological conflict-supporting beliefs we mainly emphasize those beliefs which are found to be central in solidifying the disagreement and preventing peace making. These beliefs include themes that pertain to the goals of the conflict and their justification, delegitimization of the Arabs in general and in particular of the Palestinians, the sense of collective victimhood, collective self-presentation, and a theme that describes the essence of peace (see the study by Gopher, 2006). Other themes of the ethos of conflict refer mainly to the mobilization attempts of society members for the cause of conflict and they include themes of security, patriotism, self-image, and unity.[3] The recent book by Bar-Tal (2007b) analyzes extensively all the themes of societal beliefs of ethos of conflict in the Israeli Jewish society, as they appear in public discourse, leaders' speeches, ceremonies, monuments, commemoration rituals, cultural products, and educational materials, and eventually have an effect on the direction the leaders and the society take.

The ideological societal beliefs that support the conflict provide the epistemic basis for the rejection of compromises on the core issues that underlie the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. These beliefs come from at least two main sources,

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[3] The conception of ethos of conflict has served as a basis for an extensive analysis of Israeli Jewish society involved in the Israeli–Arab conflict (e.g., Arviv-Abramovich, 2004; Bar-Tal, 1998a,b, 2001, 2003, 2007; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992; Bar-Tal, Jacobson, & Klieman, 1998; Bar-Tal, Magal, & Halperin, in press; Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Ben Amos, & Bar-Tal, 2004; David, 2007; Golan, 2007; Gopher, Bar-Tal, & Raviv, 2004; Halperin, 2007; Oren, 2005; Magal, Bar-Tal, Oren & Halperin, in preparation; Oren & Bar-Tal, 2006, 2007; Oren, Bar-Tal, & David, 2004; Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998; Sharvit, 2006a,b; Sharvit & Bar-Tal, 2007a; Zafran, 2002; Zafran & Bar-Tal, 2003). Also, much of the research done within this society can be viewed as supporting this conceptual framework (e.g., Bar-Gal, 1993; Bar-On, 2000; Barzilai, 1996; Ben-Ezer, 1978; Cohen, 1985; Domb, 1982; Firer, 1985; Kelman, 1999; Lazarus, 1982; Podeh, 2002; Sagy, Adwan, & Kaplan, 2002; Shohat, 1989; Urian, 1997; Wolfsfeld, 1997; Zerubavel, 1995).

which are not mutually exclusive. One source is religious–national and it bases its justifications on religious dogma together with national-historical premises, while the other is based on existential security considerations that have roots in individual and national needs (see Magal, Oren, Bar-Tal, & Halperin, forthcoming). In addition we outline the circumstantial beliefs that appeared in the investigated period. Finally, we also point to the emotions that played a role as barriers to peace making. We will carry this analysis further by focusing on the recent period of 2000–2009, a period in which the conflict escalated and the beliefs and emotions supporting the continuation of the conflict were strengthened and broadened.

Ideological Beliefs Supporting the Conflict

To provide a short background to the development of the ideological beliefs supporting the conflict we begin our analysis with a short description of their prevalence during the years 1967–2000.

Ideological Beliefs Supporting the Conflict until 2000. In earlier work we studied the Israeli ethos and the way it had changed since 1967 (Bar-Tal, 2007b; Bar-Tal & Oren, 2000; Oren, 2005, 2009; Oren & Bar-Tal, 2006). We found that during the intractable period of the conflict (until 1977, with the coming of the Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to Jerusalem) most of the central societal beliefs that composed the ethos of conflict were dominant within Israeli society, that is, they were held by least 75% of the society members and frequently served the political leadership in justifying and explaining policies. These beliefs constituted the core narratives of the conflict in the school textbooks, often appeared in mass media and were expressed in various cultural products (see the empirical support in the studies listed in footnote 3). The dominant ethos of conflict included societal beliefs about the goal of establishing a Jewish state in Israel (Zionism) and denying the Palestinian aspirations for self-determination.

It was accepted that Israel was under existential threat and therefore had to hold its destiny in its own hands. Societal beliefs delegitimized Arabs in general and the Palestinians in particular, delegating to them the responsibility for the outbreak of the conflict, its continuation, and its violent nature. Jews in Israel were glorified and were presented as sole victims of the conflict and as loving peace. Finally, societal beliefs cherished patriotism and unity and especially highly valued sacrifice for the nation (see, e.g., Bar-Tal, 2007b; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Ben-Amos & Bar-Tal, 2004).

Subsequently, research found significant changes in the Israeli ethos of conflict over the years—especially during the process of conflict transformation after the peace treaty with Egypt and during the Oslo accord period. These changes included a general decrease in all of the societal beliefs of ethos of conflict. Public

opinion polls showed a decrease in the percentage of society members who held such societal beliefs as complete negating of Palestinian goals, uncritical views of Israeli security forces and militant policies, uncritical self-glorification and self-representation as a sole victim, unequivocal negative representation of the Arabs and the Palestinians, and support of blind patriotism (Oren, 2005). In addition, studies showed a significant reduction in the appearance of the ethos of conflict beliefs in mass media, school books and especially in cultural products (Bar-Tal, 2007b; Podeh, 2002). Another observed change indicated disappearance of certain beliefs from the ethos of conflict, such as those that maintained that the Palestinians were not a nation. This belief was abandoned by the majority of the respondents (e.g., the percentage of Israeli Jews in public opinion polls that thought that Palestinians were not a nation dropped from 70% in the period between 1973 and 1977, to around 50% in 1979 and 1983 and 32% in 2009) and disappeared from political and cultural products (Oren, 2005).

Third, studies found changes in the content of some of the societal beliefs of ethos of conflict. For example, after 1977, beliefs about peace changed from an abstract notion of peace to a view of peace as a realistic prospect to be achieved by negotiations and compromise. Meaningful changes also appeared in beliefs that represented the views of the Arabs. The past view of the Arabs as a single monolith united in their enmity to Israel was transformed into a more nuanced view that distinguished among different groups, each having a different kind of relationship with Israeli Jews, ranging from hostility to peaceful intentions (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Oren 2005).

Fourth, peace beliefs became more dominant while other beliefs, such as self-view as being the sole victim of the conflict became more peripheral. Lastly, we identified an increased awareness in the contradictions among various central aspirations expressed in societal beliefs. For example, at least a large portion of the Jewish public in Israel became aware that controlling the occupied territories that are densely populated by Palestinians may harm the Jewish character of the Israeli state (see Magal, Oren, Bar-Tal, & Halperin, forthcoming). However, adding masses of Palestinians as new citizens to the State of Israel may threaten the existence of the Jewish majority and thus the democratic nature of the state (Magal et al., forthcoming). This potent awareness resulted in changing specific beliefs related to the core issues of resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict to a more compromising direction (e.g., the two-state solution or unilateral disengagement).

Ideological Conflict-Supporting Beliefs 2000–2009. The eruption of the second Intifada and its violence reversed the moderating trend and restrengthened some of the societal beliefs of the ethos of conflict (see Bar-Tal, 2007b; Bar-Tal & Sharvit, 2008; Hermann, 2007; Sharvit & Bar-Tal, 2007). In what follows, we elaborate on the central societal beliefs in the ethos of conflict that are the

main obstacles to peace in its recent period (2000–2009). We have relied on data from public opinion surveys, political platforms of the main parties, as well as on speeches and interviews by top policy-makers.

Beliefs about the Israeli and Palestinian goals. As noted above, since the 1980s, the beliefs that have denied Arab rights to the land and refused to recognize the existence of a national Palestinian movement and of a Palestinian entity ceased to be central in Israel. For example, the findings of a recent Peace Index survey show a solid majority of 61% among the Jewish public who see the Palestinians' claim to an independent state of their own as justified (Peace Index, November 2008). Additionally, 62% of the Israeli Jewish public in June 2009 recognized the existence of a Palestinian people (32% oppose recognition and the rest do not know) (Peace Index, June 2009). As we have noted, all recent Israeli Prime Ministers, including current Prime Minister Netanyahu, accept the idea of a Palestinian state, and public opinion polls indicate that most of the Israeli Jews accept the two-state solution. It would appear that this change indicates the removal of a significant barrier for conflict resolution with the Palestinians.

However, a closer look at the current Israeli beliefs about Israeli and Palestinian goals reveals that the changes in Israeli beliefs are less fundamental than they seem at first glance. There are many indications that the acceptance of the two-state solution does not suggest any recognition of the Palestinian conflict narrative or abandonment of the Jewish claim for the territories in the West Bank captured in the 1967 war. Furthermore, there are indications that the level of resistance to the Palestinian narrative has grown in recent years in Israeli society. For example, in a 2008 poll a majority of the Jewish public defined the West Bank as "liberated territory" (55%) and not as "occupied territory" (32%). This is a change in comparison to 2004: in August 2004, 51% regarded the West Bank and the Gaza Strip as occupied territories, and 39% thought or were sure that they were not (Peace Index, March 2008). Accordingly, a Peace Index survey found that the majority of Israeli Jews defined Jewish settlements in the occupied territories as "settlements that are not in the occupied territories" (Peace Index, August 2004).

Similar views appear in the rhetoric of key Israeli politicians. For example, in 2006 former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said: "We insist on the historical right of the Jewish people over the whole of Eretz Israel. Every hill in Samaria, every valley in Judea, is a part of our historical homeland. We do not forget this fact, even for one moment" (Olmert, 2006).

Benjamin Netanyahu, the current Israeli Prime Minister, challenged the view of the territories as being occupied in his June 2009 speech at Bar-Ilan University (Netanyahu, 2009a): "The connection of the Jewish People to the Land has been in existence for more than 3,500 years. Judea and Samaria, the places where our forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob walked, our forefathers David, Solomon, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. *This is not a foreign land, this is the land of our forefathers*" (italics added).

There is no doubt that the prevailing view that the West Bank is not occupied serves as major barrier to conflict resolution. The perception of the majority of Jews in Israel, of the religious establishment, and of a significant segment of the political system is that the West Bank exclusively belongs to Jewish people. The perception that these lands have been liberated leads to rejection of the idea of compromising on this land and contributes to the difficulty of withdrawing from this territory and to the feeling that the Jewish people are the only party that contributes tangibly to the resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (see Magal et al., forthcoming for extensive elaboration of this point).

In addition, polls indicate strong opposition to any attempt to recognize or even to get acquainted with the Palestinian narrative. For example, a majority of the Jewish public (56%) in a 2009 poll opposes Israel taking even partial responsibility for the suffering caused to the Palestinians by the 1948 war. This opposition includes, for example, opposition to taking responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem, even if the Palestinians were to officially take partial responsibility for the 1948 events (Peace Index, June 2009). Moreover, as can be seen in Figure 3, the majority of Israeli Jews oppose adopting a school curriculum that recognizes the Palestinian state and gives up the aspiration to regain parts of the homeland which are in a Palestinian state, even in the context of a peace agreement with the Palestinians and the establishment of a Palestinian state that is recognized by Israel.

Another indication of the current radicalization in refuting the Palestinian narrative is the proposed "Nakba Law." This bill bans Israeli–Arabs from marking the anniversary of the 1948 events that they term the "Catastrophe" or "Nakba." According to the original version of the law, which was passed in the Ministerial Committee for Legislation in June 2009, violation of the statute could result
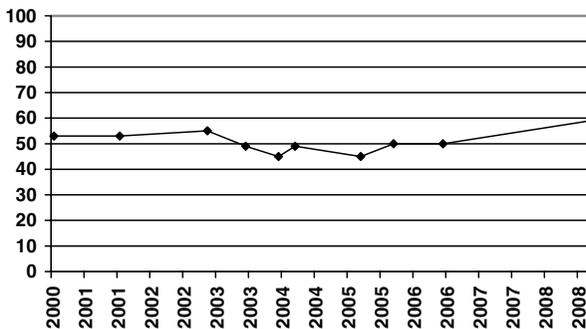

Fig. 3. Percentage of the Israeli Jews opposing adoption of a school curriculum that recognizes the Palestinian state and gives up the aspiration to get back parts of the Jewish "homeland" that are in the Palestinian state (see http://truman.huji.ac.il/polls.asp).

in a prison sentence of up to three years. However, this version has provoked condemnation on the left, including among Labor party ministers, and even in the hawkish Likud party. As a result, the Ministerial Committee for Legislation passed a revised bill, which calls for prohibiting government bodies from funding activities that commemorate "Nakba."

In light of the common perception of the territories as being Jewish land and the resistance to the Palestinian narrative, it is not surprising that most Israeli Jews oppose major Israeli withdrawal from the territories, oppose significant compromise on Jerusalem and oppose the return of even a small number of Palestinian refugees to Israel, despite vast Israeli agreement with the vague principle of the two state solution. They view the solution as one-sided, surrendering Israeli possessions without significant contribution of the Palestinians to the solution.

Image of the Arabs. Since 2000, public opinion polls and political platforms have demonstrated the return of some aspects of the old perceptions regarding the Arabs and the Palestinians. First, as we indicated above, during the years 1977–2000, Israeli perception changed from viewing the Arabs as a single homogeneous group united in their enmity to Israel into a more differentiated perception that distinguished among different Arab nations (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). After 2000, the focus shifted again to the idea of a Muslim coalition aiming to destroy Israel. There is a frequent tendency to refer to a large homogeneous group—the "axis of evil." Thus, in a 2006 Joint Israeli–Palestinian Poll (JIPP)[4] poll, 78% of respondents agreed with the statement: "The Muslims in the region will never accept the existence of the State of Israel."

This view was echoed by Prime Minister Olmert who used this theme in his speech of July 17, 2006 (during the 2006 Lebanon War) to the Israeli parliament: "The campaign we are engaged in today is against the terror organizations operating from Lebanon and Gaza. These organizations are nothing but 'subcontractors' operating under the inspiration, permission, instigation, and financing of the terror-sponsoring and peace-rejecting regimes, the axis of evil, which stretches from Tehran to Damascus."

Second, there are indications that negative stereotyping of the Palestinians has become more common since 2000. For example, while in 1997 39% of Israeli Jewish respondents described the Palestinians as violent and 42% as dishonest, by the end of 2000 the figures were 68% and 51%, respectively (Bar-Tal & Sharvit, 2008). Similarly, in November 2000, 78% of the Jewish public agreed with the statement that Palestinians have little regard for human life and therefore persist in using violence despite the high number of their own casualties (Peace Index,

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[4] The JIPP initiated in 2000 by the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah. For more information see http://truman.huji.ac.il/polls.asp/.

November 2000). A 2008 study presented similar findings: 77% of the respondents thought that the Arabs and the Palestinians had little regard for human life, and 79% agreed with the statement that dishonesty has always characterized the Palestinians and the Arabs (Halperin & Bar-Tal, forthcoming).

In addition, even though before the Oslo Accords there were some indications (especially in Labor party platforms and among Labor voters) of perceiving Israeli actions in a more critical light, and recognition that Israel was also responsible for the "political deadlock" in Arab–Israeli relations, since 2000 Arabs are again unanimously blamed for the continuation of the conflict, and for intransigently rejecting a peaceful resolution. For example, the 2003 Labor party platform states that "the [Israeli] hopes for ending the Palestinian–Israeli conflict were dashed as a result of the waves of hatred, incitement, extreme violence, and terror unleashed on Israel under the patronage of the Palestinian Authority" (Labor Party, 2003).

This theme is expressed in stronger form in the 2009 Likud Party platform: "We do not believe that the Palestinians are ready for the historic compromise that will end the conflict. There is no evidence that the Palestinians are ready to accept even the minimal demands made by any Israeli leader. They have rejected unprecedented concessions that we, the Israelis, proposed eight years ago, and their stance has neither changed nor been moderated to date" (Likud Party, 2009).

This idea remains very common in speeches and interviews following the elections. Netanyahu echoes it in his June 2009 speech at Bar-Ilan University (Netanyahu, 2009a):

"Why has the conflict been going on for over 60 years?. . . The simple truth is that the root of the conflict has been and remains—the refusal to recognize the right of the Jewish People to its own state in its historical homeland . . . The closer we get to a peace agreement with them, the more they distance themselves from peace. They raise new demands. They are not showing us that they want to end the conflict . . . With Hamas in the south and Hezbollah in the north, they continue saying that they want to 'liberate' Ashkelon in the south and Haifa and Tiberias. Even the moderates among the Palestinians are not ready to say the simplest things: The State of Israel is the national homeland of the Jewish People and will remain so" (Netanyahu, 2009).

Public opinion polls by INSS indicate that most Israelis share these sentiments: In 2007 and 2009 only about 44% of Israeli Jews believed that the majority of Palestinians want peace, compared to 64% who thought so in 1999 (see Figure 4). Accordingly, polls indicate an increase in the percentage of respondents who think that the ultimate goal of the Arabs is to eradicate the state of Israel from 50% who thought so in 1997 to 71% who thought so in 2009 (see Figure 5). Again, these shared negative beliefs about the Palestinians and the high level of mistrust can explain why Israelis react negatively to the idea of the Palestinian state and do not support most proposals to compromise.
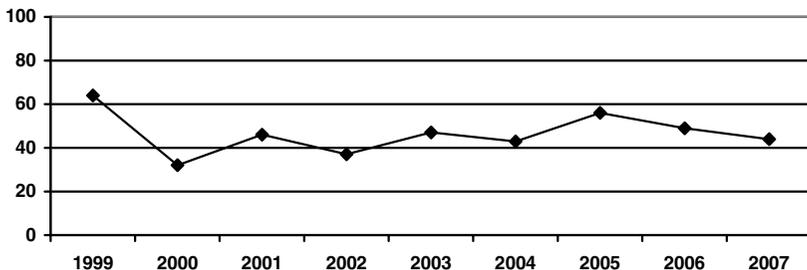
Fig. 4. Percentage of Israeli Jews believing that most Palestinians want peace.
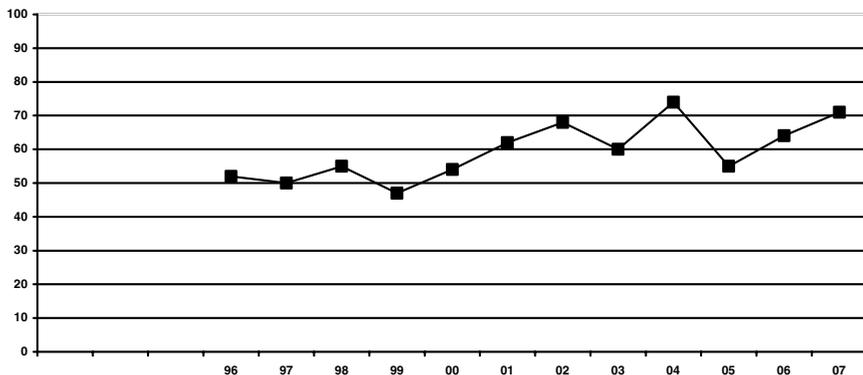

Fig. 5. Percentage of Israeli Jews thinking that the ultimate goal of the Arabs is to eradicate the State of Israel, 1993–2007.

Collective self-victimization. Since 2000 there has also been a return of old collective self-victimhood perceptions in Israeli society. This feeling began to evolve in the wake of the second Intifada. As noted, the majority of Israeli Jews blamed the Palestinians for the eruption of the violence and thought that the Palestinians were entirely or almost entirely responsible for the deterioration in the relations between them and the Israelis (Bar-Tal & Sharvit, 2008). However, this was not the only cause for the deep feeling of victimization that seized most Israeli Jews. This feeling was intensified by the repeated suicide bombing attacks, which claimed many Jewish lives, most of them civilians. The feeling of victimization became pervasive among Israeli Jews because every active resistance to occupation and/or violent attack against them has been perceived as an act of terrorism and received immense exposure as such in the media (Wolfsfeld & Dajani, 2003).

In a nationwide representative sample we conducted in November 2007, 80.8% of Jewish-Israelis agreed with the statement that "Despite Israel's desire for

peace, the Arabs have repeatedly forced war" (Halperin & Bar-Tal, forthcoming). More specifically, in a survey taken in August 2008, 61% of the Jews in Israel agreed at least to some extent with the position that through the years of the conflict, Israel has been the victim while the Arabs and the Palestinians are the perpetrators (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009).

In their speeches, Israeli politicians emphasize the suffering of Israeli civilians, while presenting Palestinian civilian casualties as victims of Palestinian leadership action. An example can be found in Olmert's speech in January 17, 2009, following the Gaza War that resulted in the deaths of more than 1000 Palestinians, many of them civilians:

> Israel, which withdrew from the Gaza Strip to the last millimeter at the end of 2005—with no intention of returning—found itself under a barrage of missiles . . . Hamas has placed its military system in crowded residential neighborhoods, operated among a civilian population which has served as human shields and has acted under the aegis of mosques, schools and hospitals, while making the Palestinian population a hostage to its terrorist activities, with the understanding that Israel—as a country with supreme values—would not act . . . I also wish to say something to the people of Gaza . . . We do not hate you; we did not want and do not want to harm you . . . *We feel the pain of every Palestinian child and family member who fell victim to the cruel reality created by Hamas which transformed you into victims.*" (italics added).

In this sense, Israel perceives itself as a victim of the Palestinian leadership who "force" Israeli Jews to kill Palestinians. During the Gaza War the idea that Israelis were "coerced" by Hamas to kill innocent Palestinians became prevalent. For example, the following quotation is taken from an article that was written by a prominent Israeli writer and peace activist, A. B. Yehoshua, during the 2009 Gaza War: "We are not bent on killing Palestinian children to avenge the killing of our children. All we are trying to do is get their leaders to stop this senseless and wicked aggression, and it is only because of the tragic and deliberate intermingling between Hamas fighters and the civilian population that children, too, are unfortunately being killed" (Yehoshua, 2009).

Victimization beliefs in Israeli society extend beyond the Arab–Israeli relationship to the perception of Israel as a victim of a hostile world which includes the Western states and international organizations such as the UN. In a survey conducted in November 2007, 88.6% of the Jews in Israel agreed that "the Jewish people have been under existential threat throughout the history" (Halperin & Bar-Tal, forthcoming).

This view is well propagated by the Israeli leadership. Again, it is possible to cite the speech in April 2007 of the then Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (Olmert, 2009a):

> "Ladies and gentlemen, let us not delude ourselves. All those honest people who have internalized consciousness of the Holocaust, its memory and its lessons, are but a small portion of the good, enlightened and moral of the human race . . . However, other than them, there are many, including members of distinguished academic institutions, whose hatred

of Israel blinds them and hardens their hearts. They deny the essential right of the Jewish people to a national, sovereign existence. They are the first to find justification for all the acts of horror perpetrated against citizens of Israel and strongly condemn any defensive action by the State of Israel. We must not forget that the vast majority of the world's population remains ignorant of . . . the Holocaust, cut off and alienated from the fate of the Jewish people, exposed to false propaganda and to the hatred of the Holocaust deniers, those who deny and underrate it."

The present Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed similar views in 2009 at a ceremony on Holocaust Remembrance Day (Netanyahu, 2009b):

"We will not allow the Holocaust deniers to carry out another Holocaust against the Jewish people. This is the supreme duty of the State of Israel. This is my supreme duty as prime minister of Israel . . . the world sounds a weak voice against those who advocate obliterating Israel." (*Haaretz*, April 21, 2009)

The sense of being collectively persecuted by the international community was greatly strengthened following the Goldstone UN report in September 2009 about the Gaza war that accused Israel and Hamas for performing violations of the laws of war and then following worldwide condemnations for the violent interception of the Turkish civilian flotilla by the Israeli navy that tried to reach blockaded Gaza with humanitarian aid in June 2010. These views held by the public and the leadership reflect the well-entrenched siege mentality that characterizes Israeli Jewish society. Two thousand years of Diaspora is viewed as one long period of persecution, with the climax of the Holocaust as a national trauma, leaving their marks on the collective psyche. The belief that the whole world is against us is well connected to the ideological beliefs supporting conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007b; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992).

All this stands in sharp contrast to the situation during the early 1990s, before the Oslo Accords, when Israeli politicians tended to highlight Israel's friendly relationship with other nations. The 1992 platforms of the two major parties (Labor and Likud), for example, praised the fact that Israel was able to establish diplomatic relations with many countries that had refused to have such relations through many decades of Israel's existence (Labor, 1992; Likud, 1992). The current perception of Israel as victim of a hostile world can explain Israeli suspicion of foreign involvement in the conflict, including mediation attempts by other countries and organizations such as the "Quartet," the United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations, who are represented by a special envoy.

Positive collective self-image as militarily and morally superior.   During the years 2000–2009 there was also restrengthening of positive beliefs about Israel as militarily superior to the Arabs. For example, in 1993, 58% of Israeli Jews believed that Israel had the ability to wage war successfully against all the Arab states. This percentage dropped to 48% in 2000, and then rose to 67% in 2004 and 72% in 2005 (Oren, 2009). In 2009, 74.8% believed that Israel would be able to

cope successfully with total war with the Arab states and 80.3% were confident that the Israeli army could defend the State of Israel (Ben-Meir, 2009).

The confidence in Israeli superiority over the Palestinians and Israel's ability to cope with Palestinian uprisings is also very high. For example, 70% in the October 2007 survey believed that if the present situation continued, Israeli society could hold out longer in terms of its internal fortitude than Palestinian society could. Similarly, 63% assessed that, at present, Israeli society was in better shape than Palestinian society (Peace Index, October 2007). In addition, 42% in a June 2009 JIPP survey thought that Israeli society would be able to endure the toll that the conflict with the Palestinians imposed on it "forever," 17% thought that Israel would be able to endure it "several more decades," and 15% believed so for "another 10 years." The growing confidence in Israeli society's resilience and strength may decrease the motivation of Israelis to end the conflict in the near future since these beliefs show that Israel can do with a status quo in the protracted conflict.

The view about military strength is complemented by the self-image of morality. The present Israeli Prime Minister, the President, and the Chief of Staff have emphasized in their speeches to the public that the Israeli Army is "the most moral army in the world" (see, e.g., an interview with Gabi Ashkenazi—the Israeli Chief of Staff—*Haaretz* April 5, 2009). The public seems to hold similar beliefs. For example, a majority of the Jewish public (64%) discounts the testimonies of soldiers who took part in the 2009 Gaza war about harming Palestinian civilians and destroying civilian buildings by the Israeli forces (Peace Index, March 2009).

Peace beliefs.   Since 2000 there are many indications that peace beliefs have become less central in Israeli society. For example, in contrast to previous years, peace seldom appeared in the 2003, 2006, and 2009 Likud and Labor election platforms, while the third-largest party in the 2009 Israeli parliament—Israel Beytenu—explicitly declared in its platform that peace is not the main goal and that it is secondary to other goals such as security and the goal of Israel as a Jewish state (Israel Beytenu, 2009).

Public opinion polls also indicate that since the 2000s, peace as a goal has become less dominant. For example, in a time series survey of the INSS at Tel Aviv University, respondents were asked to rank four values (democracy, peace, greater Israel, and a Jewish majority in Israel). Since 2000, there has been a significant decrease in the priority of the goal of peace. A drop from 72% in 2000 to 57% in 2009 has been found among those who ranked peace as "the most important value" or "second most important value." In addition, as violence erupted in 2000, the Israelis began to express pessimism about the chances of resolving the conflict. For example, INSS surveys show a decrease in the degree of optimism and an increase in pessimism regarding the chances for peace from 56% in 2001 (those who thought that it was not possible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians) to 69% in 2007 and in 2009 (see Figure 6).
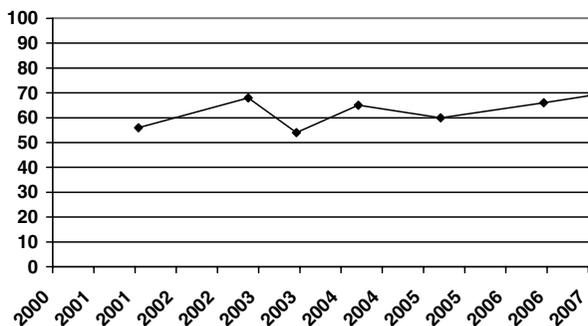
Fig. 6. Percentage of Israeli Jews thinking that it is not possible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

Expressions of pessimism about the chances for peace were also heard in interviews with Israeli policy makers. For example, Uzi Arad, Netanyahu's national security adviser, said in a July 2009 interview: "It will be difficult to reach a true Israeli–Palestinian agreement that does away with the bulk of the conflict. I do not see that in the coming years it will be possible to forge the different reality which so many Israelis want" (Arad, 2009).

Indeed, most Israeli Jews are pessimistic not just about the chances to reach an agreement with the Palestinians but also regarding the chances that such an agreement (if signed) will put an end to the conflict. As can be seen in Figure 7, surveys indicate that after the onset of the Intifada in 2000, the percentage of Israeli Jews believing that peace treaties would bring an end to the conflict dropped sharply from 67% in 1997 to 25% in 2007 and again to 19.8% in 2009.

With such pessimism about chances for peace, it is not surprising that Israeli opinion polls indicate public resistance to the various proposals (including Israeli ones) to end the conflict.
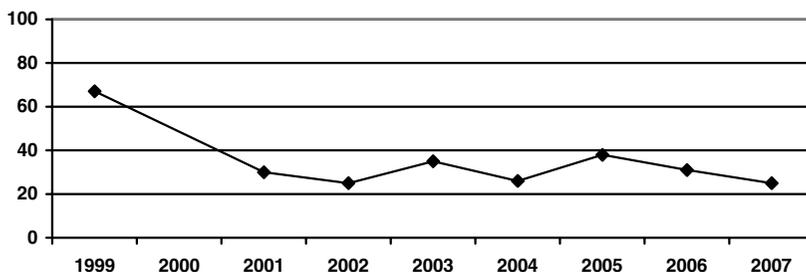

Fig. 7. Percentage of Israeli Jews believing that a peace treaty with the Palestinians will put an end to the Israeli–Arab conflict (Ben-Meir and Shaked, 2008 p. 73).

The findings presented about the ideological societal beliefs of ethos of conflict correspond to the results of a wide-ranging study in which 100 Israeli Jews were interviewed in depth (November 2003 to June 2003) about their views on the Israeli–Arab conflict. The interviewees had been at least 17 years old in the 1967 war and proportionally represented all segments of the Jewish population in Israel (according to political orientation, socioeconomic status, religiosity, gender, and geographical residence). In general, the study showed that the ethos of conflict is well entrenched among the interviewees, independent of their self-categorization on the dimension of hawks–doves. Many of them believe that Jews have an exclusive right to the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River and in 1967 this land was completely liberated. Only a small percentage of them recognized some kind of rights to this land by the Palestinians as well. Although the majority of the interviewees understood that the idea of "Greater Israel" was unrealistic and accepted the principle of dividing the land between the two nations, they objected to a complete dismantling of the Jewish settlements in the Palestinian occupied territories. The majority of them agreed to dismantle only isolated Jewish settlements. In addition, the great majority of them viewed Jerusalem as the reunited capital of the State of Israel and objected to its division. Almost all of them rejected acceptance of any refugees and did not see any Jewish responsibility for the creation of the problem. The vast majority of respondents, including those who viewed themselves as doves expressed extreme mistrust of Arabs and in particular of the Palestinians, and attributed very negative characteristics to them. This stands in contrast to their self-view in a positive light and as being the main victim of the conflict. They did not believe that peace was near and saw Palestinian intransigence as responsible for this situation (Raviv, Bar-Tal, Arviv-Abramovich, in preparation).

After presenting the ideological conflict-supporting beliefs that have been dominant since 2000, we turn now to describe the dominant circumstantial conflict-supporting beliefs.

Circumstantial Conflict-Supporting Beliefs

In addition to the general ideological beliefs that obstruct possible progress with regard to peace making, circumstantial conflict-supporting beliefs that are conjunctively oriented also emerged. These appeared under specific conditions within the framework of the conflict context. In this section, we will refer to two main circumstantial beliefs in Israeli society: the Palestinian leaders' lack of desire and power to implement a potential peace agreement with Israel, and the belief that there is no external pressure on Israel to end the conflict.

The belief that the Palestinian leader was not a partner for peace appeared as early as 2000–2004 with regard to the former Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat

(see Bar-Tal & Sharvit, 2008). He was portrayed as unwilling to end the conflict and hence as "no partner." The Israeli public accepted this description as credible. For example, in a 2001 survey, 70% of the respondents held that Arafat personally lacked the desire or the capability to sign an agreement ending the conflict with Israel, even if Israel agreed to all his demands (Peace Index, May 2001).

Since the ascendance of Abu Mazen to the Palestinian Authority Presidency in 2004, after the death of Yasser Arafat, the Israeli leadership and the mass media have portrayed him as unable to implement a potential peace agreement with Israel. While Arafat was described in most cases as unwilling to achieve peace, many Israelis acknowledge the fact that Abu-Mazen is a more moderate leader, but still do not believe that he is strong enough to implement his goals.

An example of that perception is taken from a recent interview with Uzi Arad, Prime Minister Netanyahu's national security adviser: "Everyone with eyes, sees that there is a failure of Palestinian leadership. There is no Palestinian Sadat. There is no Palestinian Mandela. Abu Mazen is not vulgar like Arafat nor militant and extreme like Hamas. There could be worse leaders than him. But even in him I do not discern the interest or the will to reach the end of the conflict with Israel" (Arad, 2009).

The Israeli Jewish public shares this view: For example, in a September 2005 JIPP survey 83% thought that Abu Mazen was not strong enough to convince the Palestinians to accept a settlement that required compromises. While 55% of the Jews in Israel believed that the Palestinian Authority under Abu Mazen's leadership desired peace, a large majority of 71% believed it was impossible to reach a peace settlement with the Palestinians without Hamas' consent (Peace Index, November, 2007).

Another example of a circumstantial belief that appeared in early 2000 concerned the external pressure on Israel to end the conflict. This societal belief was prevalent at least until the ascendance of Barack Obama to the US presidency. For example, a survey conducted in November 2004 by the Tami Steinmetz Center indicated that 46% of the respondents thought that there was a quite low or very low chance that if Israel ignored the ruling of the International Court in The Hague about the legality of the separation fence and refrained from applying the Geneva Convention to the territories, economic sanctions would be imposed on it similar to those that were imposed on South Africa because of the apartheid regime. Only 37% feared that there was a quite high or very high chance that such sanctions would be imposed on Israel (Peace Index, November 2004). These beliefs decrease Israeli motivation to reach an agreement. Indeed, 49% say that if a peace treaty entailed difficult concessions, it was preferable to remain in the existing situation, compared to 43% preferring an agreement even at the price of difficult concessions (Peace Index, March 2008).

Emotional Barriers in the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict

Following the model presented in Figure 1 we now turn to discuss emotional factor in the socio–psychological barriers. As in other conflicts, emotions play a significant role in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. They interact intimately with the conflict-supporting beliefs, on the one hand, as their result and, on the other, as instigating them. In the case of Israeli Jewish society it is possible to identify fear and hatred as emotions that constitute socio–psychological barriers.

Fear in the Israeli Jewish society. Even in the early 1960s, surveys among Jewish Israelis found high levels of fear (Antonovsky & Arian, 1972) and this has continued to dominate Israeli Jewish society members (Arian, 1998; Bar-Tal, 2001). More recently, after the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, the individual fear among Israeli Jews increased dramatically (Bar-Tal, Magal, & Halperin, 2009; Bar-Tal & Sharvit, 2008; Ben-Dor, Canetti-Nisim & Halperin, 2007). For example, while in the late 1990s (1999) only 58% of Israeli Jews reported that they were afraid or very afraid that they or their family members would be hurt by terror, in 2002 almost all Israeli Jews (92%) felt that way (Arian, 2002). Even in 2004, after the large wave of terror dwindled, 80.4% of the Israeli Jews said that they felt fear of getting on a bus and 59.8% said that they feared being around crowds or in public places (Ben-Simon, 2004). In 2009, about 70% of Israeli Jews still reported that they were afraid or very afraid that they or their family members would be hurt by terror.

By and large, as can be seen in Figure 8, levels of fear of future war and levels of fear of terror among Jews in Israel were relatively high and stable through the last decade (Ben-Dor & Canetti, 2009). On a scale of 1 (*low fear*) to 6 (*high fear*), levels of fear of terror did not drop below the level of 4.78 even when the frequency of terror attacks dropped dramatically. These results suggest that since 2000 fear is a stable and central psychological characteristic of the entire Jewish society in Israel.
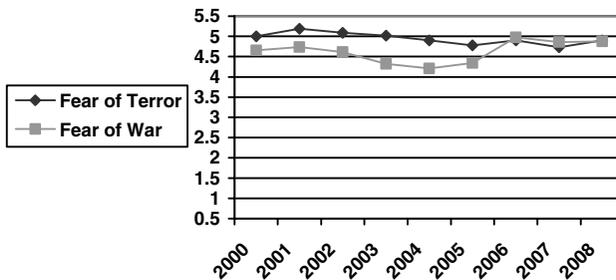

Fig. 8. Levels of fear of terror and of future war among Jews in Israel (Ben-Dor & Canetti, 2009).

In recent years, two additional sources of fear were added to the repertoire of individual Israeli fears. Almost half of the Jews in Israel (39.9% in 2006 and 40.6% in 2007) expressed high or very high fear of nonconventional attack (nuclear, biological, or chemical weapons) that would hurt them or their relatives (Ben-Dor, Canetti-Nisim, & Halperin, 2007). In addition, mainly after the Second Lebanese War and the ongoing missile attacks on the south of Israel, many Israeli Jews (50.6% in 2006) said that they were afraid that they or their relatives would be hurt by missiles (Hall et al., 2007).

On the collective level, surveys conducted in the last decade found that the large majority of Israelis Jews still believed that ongoing terror attacks might cause a strategic and even existential threat to the State of Israel: 85.5% of Israeli Jews expressed this feeling in 2000, 86.6% in 2002 and 83% in 2006 (Ben-Dor et al., 2007). In addition, in 2006, 80% of the Israeli Jewish public expressed high levels of fear of an Iranian nuclear attack, that would destroy the State of Israel (Peace Index, August, 2006). Additionally, more than one quarter of the Israeli Jewish public have recently (2003–2005) reported high levels of fear about the possibility that Arabs would throw all Jewish Israelis into the sea (Ben-Dor et al., 2007). Finally, a national survey performed in March 2008 by the Anti-Defamation League showed that 82% of Jewish youngsters (age 15–18) and 77% of Jewish adults (above 18) believed that Israel was either under meaningful threat or some threat of extermination. This study also showed that 39% of the youngsters and 35% of the adults believe that there is either meaningful likelihood or certain likelihood for another Jewish Holocaust in the future (Ynet, April 30, 2008).

Hatred in the Israeli Jewish society.   Hatred is less common than fear within Israeli society, but its potential effects are no less destructive. In two surveys that were conducted in 2004–2005, Kupermintz and his colleagues (Kupermintz, Rosen, Salomon, & Husisi, 2007) found that around one third (31.9%—2004; 38.4%—2005) of Jewish youth in Israel reported a high level of hatred toward Arabs. Interestingly, similar results were found in an adult survey based on a nationwide representative sample of Jews in Israel, in which 36.5% of the sample reported medium–high levels of hatred toward Palestinians Halperin, 2008. Surprisingly, these levels of hatred remained stable and did not increase dramatically, even following periods of conflict escalation and violence. As an illustration, in a nationwide survey conducted immediately after the Lebanese War, 35.6% of Israelis reported high levels of hatred toward Palestinians, which is a relative increase from previously reported results (Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, & Hirsch-Hoefler, 2009). Similarly, in a survey that was conducted during the last war in Gaza, one third of the Jews (32.7%) in Israel reported high levels of hatred toward Palestinians (See Halperin & Gross, forthcoming).

Despite the fact that only about one third of the Jews in Israel report hatred of Arabs, it is considered one of the most destructive emotions and one of the

most powerful driving forces of the conflict (see Halperin, 2008). Its relative low frequency, as found in public opinion polls, can be explained by its nonlegitimate nature. In more detail, hatred is considered a nonpolitically correct emotion and hence results of public opinion polls trying to assess levels of hatred in a certain society might be inaccurate. Hence, it was not too surprising to find that 63.9% of Jews in Israel expressed high levels of hatred toward Palestinians, when an implicit (and not explicit) measure of hatred was used (see Halperin, Canetti-Nisim, & Kimhi, forthcoming).

Policy Implications of the Presented Conception

First, we would like to point out that although only one study conducted in the summer of 2008 was designed to test the proposed model, a number of studies that have been performed in Israel through the years have provided support for the validity of certain parts of the general model. These studies had different objectives, used specific variables, and the design did not correspond to the described conceptual framework of socio–psychological barriers. Still, in line with the present conception, most of these studies show that holding particular sets of societal beliefs which are part of the conflict-supporting repertoire is related to low levels of openness and to adherence to uncompromising attitudes which hinder the peace making process. There are also studies that show that sharing certain emotions is related to rejectionist positions. To provide preliminary support for the proposed model, a short review of these studies is presented.

Based upon a nationwide representative sample of Jews in Israel ($n = 550$), Maoz and McCauley (2005) found that two of the most powerful predictors of opposition to making compromises for peace are the long-term belief that the conflict is of zero-sum nature and levels of perceived threat from Palestinians. These exact results were replicated, in a more recent study, based on another representative sample ($n = 504$) (Maoz & McCauley, 2009).

Another series of studies emphasized the role of the ideological belief of delegitimization of the Palestinians in hindering progress toward peace. Halperin and his collaborators (Halperin, Bar-Tal, Nets-Zehngut, & Drori, 2008) found that delegitimization of Palestinians was highly negatively associated with hope and with optimism about the possibility of resolving the conflict. Maoz and McCauley (2008) found that de-humanization of the Palestinians led Israeli Jews to support aggressive actions toward them instead of possible constructive political solutions (see also Hammack, Pilecki, Caspi, Strauss, & Ruber, 2008).

Using two different nationwide samples, Bar-Tal and his colleagues (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009) have recently found that the belief in in-group victimization is associated with low levels of openness to new information and with low support for compromises as proposed in Figure 1. Similarly, Nadler and Sylvan (2005) used an experimental design and found that Israeli Jews who

were exposed to information about their victimization and were characterized as being high in their commitment to the in-group showed lower levels of willingness for reconciliation with Palestinians. Maoz and Eidelson (2007) also found that a belief in in-group vulnerability predicts preference for aggressive action (i.e., to transfer) over compromises. In a very recent study by Schori, Klar, and Roccas (2009) the sense of self-perceived collective victimhood was found to be strongly positively associated with the feeling of moral entitlement to hurt the Palestinians and negatively associated with group-based guilt over Israel's actions in the occupied territories. It was also related to willingness to continue the military operations at all costs, even allowing for great losses to either the Israeli or the Palestinian side, and with the wish to continue punishing the enemy group, even if such punishment meant retaliation and suffering subsequently inflicted upon the in-group. Of special relevance to the conceptual model is the study by Baram, Dagan, and Klar (2009). The results of the study in line with the model presented in Figure 1 show that high commitment to the Jewish narrative about the Israeli–Arab conflict, as well as high identification with the Jewish nation, lead to high refusal to participate in activities that may challenge the Jewish narrative (like being exposed to the Palestinian narrative through reading an article).

Recently, Bar-Tal and his colleagues (Bar-Tal et al., 2009) provided the first empirical examination of the way in which the comprehensive configuration of ideological beliefs (also defined as the ethos of conflict) influences the way people process information about conflict-related events. Their main finding was that participants with a high level of ethos of conflict tended to perceive photos depicting encounters between Jews and Palestinians differently than did those with a low level of ethos of conflict. The former tended to perceive the Palestinians as more aggressive, to blame them more for such attributed aggressiveness, and to explain this perceived aggressiveness more in terms of internal and stable causes.

As for the effects of circumstantial beliefs on openness to new information and on support for compromises, Gayer and her colleagues (Gayer, Landman, Halperin, & Bar-Tal, 2009) used both correlative and experimental designs and found that the circumstantial belief that "time is on the Palestinian side and that as the time goes by Israel's position in the negotiations becomes weaker and weaker" is a powerful contributor to processes of unfreezing that involves more openness to new information and to support for compromises for peace. Moreover, they also found that simple interventions that involve information about possible future losses if the conflict will not be resolved in the near future (changing the nature of the State of Israel into bi-national state) can be useful in stimulating such processes.

As for the implications of the emotional barriers, a recent study by Halperin (2010) found that on the eve of the Annapolis summit (November 2008), fear felt by Jewish Israelis led to two highly destructive results. First, individuals who felt high levels of fear of Palestinians opposed any potential risks taken by the

Israeli delegation during the upcoming negotiations (see also Reifen, Halperin, & Federico, 2008). Such risks are crucial for the success of the negotiations and hence the effects of high fear seem detrimental. Second, high fear led to a substantial decrease in support for making compromises that might involve any potential security threat.

As mentioned previously, the potential implications of hatred on attitudes and behavioral tendencies in conflict situations are destructive. In a recent study, Israeli Jews with high levels of hatred toward Palestinians defined their ultimate goal as "hurting the Palestinians as much as possible" and expressed support for any violent action that would promote the elimination of Palestinians (Halperin, 2008). In another study, hatred toward the Palestinians was found to be the most powerful predictor of rejection of compromises (Halperin, 2008). Finally, the results of the same study showed that Israeli Jews who were dominated by hatred actively opposed any exposure to potentially positive information about the Palestinians or the nature of the conflict, implying that hatred highly influences the dynamic of information processing in the context of the conflict.

Finally, we have recently conducted a study that attempted to validate the described process model (see Figure 1) using a correlative large-scale design (Halperin & Bar-Tal, forthcoming). The study was based on phone interviews with 501 adults who constituted a representative sample of the Israeli Jewish society. The survey included scales that captured representations of the potential socio–psychological barriers presented in the model: (1) general worldviews (values, implicit theories about groups, authoritarianism and political orientation), (2) conflict-supporting societal beliefs, including specific long-term beliefs (self-perception of collective victimhood of the in-group and delegitimization of the rival group) and circumstantial beliefs about the current situation of the conflict, as well as (3) negative lasting emotions. As dependent variables (i.e., the result of the barriers), openness to information about the conflict and support for compromises for peace were assessed.

Analysis of the results confirmed the basic patterns proposed in the theoretical model. First, the results on a 6-point scale showed that the Israeli Jewish public presented low levels of support for compromises ($M = 2.60$) and low to medium levels of openness to new positive information that is related to the conflict ($M = 3.28$). On the other hand, levels of self-victimhood ($M = 4.33$) and delegitimization of the Palestinians ($M = 4.65$) were relatively high. Interestingly, levels of negative emotions toward Palestinians ($M = 3.57$) and support for the belief that the time was on the Israeli side ($M = 3.06$) were not very high.

More importantly, the general worldviews that were assessed in the study indicated decreased levels of openness to conflict-related information as well as support for compromises mainly through the mediation of the conflict-supporting societal beliefs. In more detail, people with entity theory about groups and those with tendencies toward authoritarian personalities tended to delegitimize the

Palestinians and in turn, to be less open to new information and less support-ive for compromises. These two personal characteristics (i.e., entity theory and authoritarianism) combined with the tendency toward conformist–traditionalistic values also led to higher levels of self-perceived victimhood that in turn stimulated the same process of closed mindedness and rejection of compromises.

Interestingly enough, those who adhered to the circumstantial belief that time was on the Israeli side and those who experienced relatively high levels of negative emotions (e.g., fear, hatred and anger) toward the Palestinians, were also less open to new information about the conflict or about Palestinians. In addition, the belief that time was on the Israeli side also led Israelis to be less supportive of making compromises for peace. In sum, the results showed a path leading from general worldviews to openness and readiness to compromise through the mediation of ideological and circumstantial supporting beliefs of the conflict and negative emotional sentiments (see Figure 1). They mean that the unwillingness to be exposed to new information that may contradict the already-held views about the conflict closes the society members in their views and emotions, and ultimately supports the continuation of the conflict.

Conclusions and Future Directions

Conflicts are an inseparable part of human relations, including intergroup relations. Groups as individuals have contradictory goals and interests, which ignite the conflicts. There is no doubt that some disagreements are very deep and difficult to resolve because human beings do not readily relinquish resources, control, power, or prestige (Bar-Tal, 2011). But the great difficulty in resolving conflicts peacefully lies also in the socio–psychological barriers that accompany many of the intergroup conflicts.

In this article, we focused on the socio–psychological barriers that have plagued Jewish society in Israel. This focus does not imply that socio–psychological barriers do not operate on the Palestinian side. It only reflects our extensive knowledge of the Israeli Jewish society and our view that although both sides share responsibility for the long continuation of the conflict, in the 2000s it is mostly Israel that has the assets and the power to resolve the conflict peacefully. It is Israel that occupies the West Bank and has spread Jewish settlements throughout the territory, with all the accompanying implications (Gorenberg, 2006; Zertal & Eldar, 2007).

Together with this view, we well recognize that various additional factors contribute to the stalemate and regression. These are located on the Palestinian side, in the Arab states, and in the international community. We also recog-nize that, through the 100 years of conflict, the Jews have not always played the major role in its continuation. There were times that Palestinians were the majority and had more power. Nevertheless, the purpose of this article has not

been to thoroughly analyze all aspects or even all socio–psychological aspects of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict but to provide an example of the role socio–psychological barriers play in preventing peaceful resolution of a vicious conflict. This analysis should be viewed as a case study of the general conceptual framework that we have proposed. But we deeply believe that the analysis does not provide a solely theoretical contribution, but also has profound relevance to the understanding of major real life issues and practical implications for policy setting and practices.

We focus on Israeli Jewish society to show that the solution of the Israeli Palestinian conflict is extremely difficult because of the socio–psychological barriers that have evolved through the years. If we concentrate only on the conflict-supporting ideological beliefs, Jews in Israel developed a well-grounded national ideology that provides well-based arguments for leaving the present situation as it is. The foundations of the present ideology are in Zionism and in Judaism and served the initial return of Jews to their homeland and the eventual establishment of the state. The 1967 war, with the occupation of new territories and with its unintended results, led to reconstruction of the ideology which aimed to present a new view regarding the situation which had emerged. Basically this ideology reformulated the ethos of conflict that had dominated Jewish society prior to the 1967 war. In principle, it provided a system of organized societal beliefs (we call them conflict-supporting ideological beliefs) that came to justify holding on to the occupied territories for various reasons—religious, historical, national, and security based. In addition, these beliefs delegitimized the Palestinians, negated their national identity, delegated them responsibility for continuation of the conflict, and presented them as a threat. All this stood in contrast to the glorification of the Jews and their deep sense of being the victims in this conflict (Bar-Tal, 2007b). Moreover, they served as the epistemic basis for the extensive Jewish settlement of the occupied territories (Zertal & Eldar, 2007).

These ideological conflict-supporting beliefs of ethos of conflict were transmitted through channels of communication and societal institutions. Through the years, Jewish society in Israel has gone through major changes. But nevertheless many of the core societal beliefs of ethos of conflict have remained dominant (Bar-Tal, 2007b). The basic reflection of this ideological system is in the entrenched view of the majority of Israeli Jews that they solely must give up their own territories and resources in favor of settling the conflict. This means that the point of departure, even for many of those who favor settling the Israeli–Palestinian conflict peacefully, is that the West Bank belongs to the Jewish nation and Jews are the only side which contributes to peace making. This view clearly explains the difficulty, reluctance, as well as refusal of many to withdraw from the occupied territories, to divide Jerusalem, and to dismantle the Jewish settlements (Halperin, Bar-Tal, Sharvit, Rosler, & Raviv, 2010). No nation willingly yields its territory and the growing readiness of the Israeli Jews to withdraw from at least part of the

territories is mainly a result of an insight that holding the territories may be very costly for the Jewish nation and the State of Israel in the future.

Returning back to the presented process model of the socio–psychological barriers (see Figure 1), we remind that the ideological conflict-supporting beliefs are accompanied by circumstantial conflict-supporting beliefs which appear under different conditions, in different periods of time. These beliefs support and provide an additional concrete rationale for postponing the peace process. These two sets of beliefs constitute a coherent system that has a consistent structure with a teleological basis that inhibits peace making. This system of beliefs is frozen as a result of structural, motivational, and emotional factors. Moreover, this system is often supported by general worldviews which provide a conservative outlook on the world. In addition, it should be noted that this system of beliefs is related to the emotional system which is an inseparable part of the socio–psychological repertoire. Specific negative emotions, such as hatred, fear, or humiliation uphold the system of beliefs. On the one hand, the beliefs provide the narrative that elicits these emotions. On the other, these emotions feed back, strengthen, and reinforce the contents. Finally, directing the attention to the context, one cannot forget that all these processes take place in the context of a threatening conflict. In this context, the channels of communication and societal institutions, including the leaders, continuously mobilize for the conflict, with messages of conflict-supporting beliefs.

The socio–psychological barriers greatly affect information processing of society members as individuals and as a collective. They lead to a selective, biased, and distortive flow of information which in essence prevents absorbing and accepting alternative information that could enlighten the conflict situation, the rival, one's own society, or the history of the conflict in a way that could contradict the ideological beliefs and advance new ideas about the necessity of peace making.

After presentation of the general framework, a question should be asked. Can social–psychological barriers work in the opposite direction as well? Can they operate among segments of a society who rigidly support peace under conditions that do not allow a peace process and in this way even harm the society? At least two situations can subscribe to these conditions: First, when the conflict involves an extremely evil rival who has to be conquered to stop the evilness, as for example, the case of Nazi Germany. Indeed, in this case there were groups of people in different nations who strived to achieve peace with the Nazi regime and it is possible that they rigidly pursued these attempts. This is indeed an opposite case that has to be judged in accordance with moral values and human rights violations performed by the evil side and the alternatives that appear. These are very rare cases and the international community is moving toward a well-defined set of principles, rules, and processes that define a war that is justified (see, e.g., Walzer, 2006). It is always possible that even in these very limited cases there will be people who stick rigidly to ideas that peace making is possible.

The second case is no less problematic. A peace process is very difficult and complex and its successful completion is not guaranteed; many cases show that it often fails. The cases of Sri Lanka or Cyprus provide examples. Social scientists that attempt to account for these failures have outlined a list of conditions that in their view are necessary for this process. The theory of ripeness by William Zartman is an example of this approach (Zartman, 2000). He suggested that ripeness to resolve a conflict emerges when the two parties "(1) perceive themselves to be in a hurting stalemate and (2) perceive the possibility of a negotiated solution" (pp. 228–229). In view of these outlooks, the cases of initiating a peace process when the conditions are not ripe may indicate a rigid support of peace. Moreover, researchers as well as practitioners may view the untimely adherence to an ideology of peace making as a barrier that eventually extracts a high cost to the society which prematurely begins it.

In our view, it is easier to deal intellectually with these kinds of cases. First, on the assumption that, in these cases, peaceful resolution of the conflict and reconciliation are valued positively and consist of the well-desired objective, these ideas must be raised even when conditions are not ripe. The small minority that raises these early and untimely ideas about the necessity of ending the conflict peacefully is the breakthrough group of innovators who, against all odds, begin the long journey to stop the bloody and vicious carnage (see literature about minority influence De Dreu & De Vries, 2001). They provide the light at the end of the tunnel for the suffering and bleeding society. Their march begins with very few supporters who are viewed by the great majority of the society members at best as naïve and detached from reality, but more often as traitors, who harm the patriotic cause and hinder the group cause.

But with their insistence and sacrifice the ideas may spread, be legitimized and eventually be institutionalized in the society. The group may also ignite a similar process in the rival group. Beginning the first step of the long march, this group or these groups are acting against the tide, but with time, as this small minority gains support and the conditions change, their rigid adherence may serve as a basis for a movement and a change of the context that eventually opens the possibilities to launch an effective campaign for resolving the conflict peacefully (see Bar-Tal, Landman, Magal, & Rosler, 2009).

The Middle Eastern conflict shows us that this process is a difficult one, stubbornly resisted by various groups that have a vested interest in its continuation. We do not include the economic–military–political interests that play a role in the will to continue the conflict, but focus only on the ideological investments, as people from an early age have been inculcated with well-established, coherent, systematic, and interrelated ideas about why to adhere to far-fetched national goals and how to disregard the goals of the other party; why to distrust, dehumanize, and hate the rival; why to view one's own group in glorified terms and as the eternal and sole victim of the conflict; how to disregard, deny, and repress the suffering

of the other group while focusing only on one's own suffering and omitting from the repertoire empathetic and moral considerations that may spoil the whole view of the conflict. This ideology is supported through life by various channels of communication and societal institutions that also make all the educational efforts to be perceived as reliable and trustworthy. They teach that all those who provide alternative view either from inside or from outside have negative intentions, are not reliable, and harm the causes of the group.

The internal socio–psychological barriers and the mechanism that society employs are potent inhibitors of the peace process. And only determination of the minority, and its involvement and activism with innovative ideas, can overcome the human tendency to stick to the known patterns of thoughts and action, to overcome the inherent threat and danger to build a better world, free of violence, suffering, and destruction.

We would like to end our article with a question: How do we overcome the socio–psychological barriers to move societies engulfed by intractable conflict into an era of peace making? We realize that it is easier to elucidate and illuminate the socio–psychological barriers than to respond to this question with practical implications. Nevertheless, we will try to outline a short conceptual response that can serve as a basis for developing more comprehensive thoughts and as a compass for practitioners. We believe that the great majority of society members are not persuaded by arguments that are based on universal morality, justice, equality, freedom, or ethno-empathy. Most society members in intractable conflicts are frozen in their own suffering, self-righteousness, self-defense, and revenge, engulfed by the ideological beliefs supporting the conflict, that are reinforced by negative emotions. However, they may be persuaded with arguments of utilitarian nature that point out either the potential costs that their society may incur if the conflict continues and/or the rewards that it may gain if society resolves the conflict peacefully.

We suggest that the process of unfreezing usually begins as a result of the appearance of a new idea (or ideas) that is inconsistent with the beliefs and attitudes held, thereby creating some kind of tension, dilemma, dissonance, or even internal conflict, which may stimulate people to move away from their basic positions and look for alternative ideas (e.g., Bartunek, 1993; Festinger, 1957; Kruglanski, 1989). In the case of our conflict, the new idea (a belief), which we call *instigating belief*, has to contradict the held belief that there is a need to continue the conflict. We suggest that the instigating belief that fuels the motivation to unfreeze is based upon the recognition of the incompatibility between the desired future, on the one hand, and the emerging future, and/or the current state and/or the perceived past, on the other. Put differently, motivation to evaluate the held beliefs and entertain alternatives is based on the understanding that the continuation of the current situation (i.e., of the conflict), will not lead to a better or a desired future but may hurt or is even already hurting the fundamental goals and/or needs of the society

(Bartunek, 1993). Thus the instigating belief motivates reevaluation of the held beliefs and in fact, leads to their unfreezing on the way to possible adoption of alternative beliefs. This instigating belief or beliefs may appear spontaneously in the minds of people without any special circumstances, but usually they come to mind as a result of external conditions in the stimulating context, which force a reevaluation of the conflict-supporting repertoire (see the comprehensive analysis of the conception in Bar-Tal & Halperin, 2009).

Specifically, the equation that facilitates openness to alternative information supporting a peace process is awareness that the costs of continuing the conflict exceed the costs of compromises in peace making. Furthermore, it is known that the recognition of the costs is weighed more heavily than the recognition of possible gains resulting from peace making (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). This principle can be easily applied to the case of Jewish Israeli society which accepts the principle of a two-state solution mainly because of "the demographic threat." This threat implies that the much higher population growth of the Palestinian communities in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority will soon affect the proportion between the Jews and the Palestinians, leading to the formation of a Palestinian majority within the next few decades (Gayer, Landman, Halperin, & Bar-Tal, 2009; Soffer 2008). This realization led to unfreezing and acceptance of alternative beliefs supporting considerable compromises by known Israeli ideological hawks such as the past Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and past Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni.

No doubt there are other arguments as well as processes and ways that lead under certain conditions to unfreezing that may later result in the acceptance of beliefs that support peace making and even reconciliation. In any event, this process almost always begins with a minority and in some cases successfully spreads through the society until the ethos of peace becomes dominant. We must always remember that human beings are the ones who make their minds up to launch bloody conflicts and they also have to make their minds up to initiate and finalize a peace process. It is therefore their responsibility to be aware of the role the socio–psychological barriers play in obstructing peace building process to overcome them.

We want to end the article with two quotations by political leaders that had the courage to break the walls of the barriers and both paid an ultimate price for these acts.

President of Egypt Anwar Sadat, when he arrived to make peace with Israel said on November 20, 1977 in his speech in the Israeli Knesset:

As we really and truly seek peace, we really and truly welcome you to live among us in peace and security.

There was a huge wall between us which you tried to build up over a quarter of a century, but it was destroyed in 1973 . . . . Yet, there remained another wall. This wall constitutes a psychological barrier between us. A barrier of suspicion. A barrier of rejection. A barrier of fear of deception. A barrier of hallucinations around any action, deed or decision.

A barrier of cautious and erroneous interpretations of all and every event or statement. It is this psychological barrier which I described in official statements as representing 70 percent of the whole problem.

Seventeen years later Prime Minister of Israel Yitzhak Rabin, who was the architect of the Oslo process, said when he received the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo for this achievement on December 10, 1994:

We will pursue the course of peace with determination and fortitude.

We will not let up.
We will not give in.
Peace will triumph over all our enemies, because the alternative is grim for us all.
And we will prevail.
We will prevail because we regard the building of peace as a great blessing for us, and for our children after us.

These messages should be well learned and then practiced by those who strive to overcome the socio–psychological barriers to peace making.

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