Eran Halperin & Daniel Bar-Tal[1]

The fall of the peace camp in Israel: The influence of Prime Minister Ehud Barak on Israeli public opinion: July 2000 – February 2001

Kurzfassung: Die vorliegende Studie beschäftigt sich mit dem tiefgehenden Einstellungswandel, welcher in den Sommer- und Herbstmonaten des Jahres 2000 innerhalb der jüdisch-israelischen Öffentlichkeit und insbesondere unter Sympathisanten der Friedensbewegung beobachtet werden konnte.
Als bedeutsamer Einflussfaktor auf den plötzlichen Wandel der öffentlichen Meinung werden Informationen angesehen, die von Ehud Barak zum damaligen Zeitpunkt publiziert wurden. In diesem Artikel sollen zunächst die bedeutsamen Ereignisse und Fakten beschrieben, die Informationspolitik des Prämierministers evaluiert und abschließend die Einstellungsänderungen der jüdisch-israelischen Öffentlichkeit dargestellt werden. Die klassischen Modelle der Medienwirkungsforschung von Hovland und Kollegen dienen hier als konzeptueller Rahmen, um die Wirkung der massenmedial verbreiteten Information auf die Einstellungen der Öffentlichkeit zu untersuchen. Hovland geht in diesem Modell davon aus, dass massenmediale Beeinflussungseffekte durch die Art der Kommunikationsquelle, die Eigenschaften der Zuhörer und den Inhalt der Botschaft hinreichend erklärt werden können. Den Modellannahmen entsprechend wird also in dieser Studie der Einfluss von Ehud Baraks Informationspolitik auf die Einstellungen der (friedensbewegten) jüdisch-israelischen Öffentlichkeit untersucht.

Abstract: The present paper tries to analyze the significant changes in Israeli Jewish public opinion, and especially among peace supporters, that occurred in the summer and fall of 2000. It proposes that particularly influential factor in the psychological earthquake the Israeli public underwent was the information provided by Ehud Barak. The paper presents the major events and the major sets of information coming from Ehud Barak, evaluates the validity of the provided information validity and then describes the changes that Israel's Jewish public went through. In order to analyze the persuasive effects of the information, we use the classical work of Hovland and his colleagues, which was done in the 1950s, as a conceptual framework. They suggested that the key to understanding why people are persuaded lies in the study of the characteristics of the communicator (source), the content of the message and the characteristics of the audience who receive the message. We analyzed the persuasion process of the Israeli Jewish public in this line.

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1.   Introduction

Societal public opinion reflects the experiences, beliefs, values, identifications, attitudes and emotions of society members. It is fluid and can change as a result of various factors. A leader, as one of these influencing factors, may have an enormous impact on public opinion. This influence is based on a leader's capacity to influence the course of events themselves and thus the lives of the public, or alternatively, on the ability to persuade at least a large part of the public, regarding its interpretations of the reality. The leader's ability to persuade public opinion is significantly related to the extent to which his/her supporters perceive him/her as an "epistemic authority" (i.e., a source that exerts determinative influence on the formation of an individual's knowledge, see Kruglanski, Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv, Sharvit, Ellis, Bar, Pierro, & Mannetti, 2005, for a detailed overview of this concept).

Though different scholars have described the process of influence on public opinion in different ways and from various perspectives (see for examples: Gitlin, 1980; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), there is a vast agreement that events and information are among the most basic cornerstones of any such process. In other words, above and beyond the specific process, leaders may influence and shape public opinion via at least two ways that are relevant to the present case: a. initiate *major events*[1] that can affect experiences of society members, either directly or indirectly; and b. provide major information "to enlighten the reality" of society members (Bar-Tal. & Sharvit, in press). Major events may be violent conflicts, wars, or peace agreements. They are often accompanied by "political waves" which according to Wolfsfeld (2004), are a result of massive media and public attention. They create new conditions that require psychological adaptation, cognitive reframing, attitudinal-emotional change and behavioral adjustments, and, as such, they often have a profound effect on the thinking, feelings and behavior of society members and on the functioning of society as a whole.

Major societal information refers to information supplied by an epistemic authority about a matter of great relevance and importance to society members and to society as a whole. It has wide resonance, involves society members, occupies a central position in public discussion and on the public agenda, and forces society members to reconsider and change their psychological repertoire. Major information does not create observable changes in environmental conditions and, therefore, does not provide experiential participation in event's experience, but consists of information that eventually may change the conditions in a society, influencing society members' thinking, feelings and behavior.

The present paper, by analyzing a specific case, focuses mainly on how a leader may shape public opinion by supplying major information. Society members often have no direct access to political or military information and therefore must rely mostly on information provided by their leaders and by other sources, such as the mass media (Little, 1988; Mutz 1998; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000; Kinder, 2003; Norris, Kern, & Just, 2003). But leaders, who are the focus of this paper do not necessarily provide truthful or complete information (e.g., Denton, & Holloway, 1996; Jacobs & Shapiro, 2000; Kurtz, 1998). All this can be crucial because of leaders' formative impact on public opinion, and thereby on the course of major events which determine the well being of their society and of the international community.[2]

It should be noted that the release of major information and the occurrence of major events often take place concurrently, or closely follow each other, and both are related to the leadership which initiates at least a part of the events and provides most of the information to the public. A leader, after providing major information, may initiate a major event based on this information. For example, President Bush provided major information about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and then initiated the war in Iraq. In addition, major events, especially those that are initiated by human beings (such as the invasion of Cambodia in 1970 or Al Qaeda's Sept. 11th, 2001 terror attack on the US), may be accompanied by major information which is provided to shed light on the events.

In the current paper, we will analyze a specific case study in which three sets of major information were transmitted by a leader and later by mass media. Then we will suggest that they were adopted by a large sector of the public., The analyzed case concerns the information provided by the then Prime Minister of Israel, Ehud Barak, regarding the events before and after the Israeli-Palestinian Camp David summit in July 2000 and about the outbreak of the second Intifada in September

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1.   A *major societal event* is defined as an event of great importance occurring in a society; this event is experienced either directly (by participation) or indirectly (by watching, hearing or reading about it) by society members, causes wide resonance, has relevance to the well-being of individual society members and to society as a whole, involves society members, occupies a central position in public discussion and on the public agenda, and implies information that forces society members to reconsider, and often change, their accepted psychological repertoire (Oren, 2004). They can be carried by the nature (e. g., earthquake), or be a result of human decisions (e. g., war), or both (e. g., famine).
2.   The world at large experienced just such a case, with severe consequences for the entire international community, when U.S. President Bush, government officials and intelligence agencies provided the major information that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction in violation of UN resolutions and supported terrorist activities of organizations such as Al-Qaeda. This information was presented to the public shortly after the events of September 11, 2001, and served to mobilize American society for a military attack on Iraq. It evoked feelings of threat, fear and anger. It is clear that subsequently many Americans supported the war against Iraq – something they most likely would not have done were it not for the information they received.

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2000. We want to say explicitly that we do not suggest in anyway that the information provided by Ehud Barak was manipulative or mal-intentional. On contrary there is evidence that he believed deeply in what he said to the Israeli public (Baltianski, 2005; Edelist, 2003). Nevertheless, we believe that the provided information by him had an influence on the Israeli public opinion and affected course of events. Thus the main goal of the paper is to elaborate the reasons for the changes in Israeli Jewish public opinion in general and especially among the peace supporters (called also doves or leftists), following the noted events and the information about them provided by Ehud Barak. We realize that the study has obvious limitations of elucidating causality- this is the nature of real life field studies in which it is impossible to control fully all the variables and get all the needed information. Still there is value in this line of research as it attempts, with data and inferences, to tap important phenomena of political life that have importance for the understanding of human behavior (Bar-Tal, 2004; Himmelweit, 1990; Israel & Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel, 1984). To this end we will first briefly describe the events and the major sets of information supplied. This will be followed by short discussions regarding the credibility of these sets of information. We will then examine how this information was received by Israeli Jewish society as a whole and specifically by the so-called "peace camp", who accepted it as major information and eventually lead to change of their views. In the final part of the paper we will try to explain why the major information provided by Ehud Barak was accepted as valid. This explanation will be based on the conceptual framework of persuasion, originally suggested by Hovland, Janis and Kelley back in 1953.

Although it is beyond the scope of the paper to deal at length with the issues of mass media and public opinion, we would like to say few sentences about each of them, because the study refers to them, before beginning the analysis.

Leaders, as one of the most influential socializing agents, use the mass-media as a mediator in order to reinforce their impact on public opinion (Little, 1988). Hence, in many cases, the media not only reflects the existing changes in public opinion, but also plays a role in creating them by providing leaders' new information and knowledge and then amplifying them (Gitlin, 1980; McQuail, 1994). The role of the mass-media becomes even more pivotal in times of peace negotiations or war (Norris, Kern & Just, 2003; Wolfsfeld, 2004), especially when changes take place in the political environment. Then, according to Wolfsfeld (2004) mass media tends to provide temporal and narrative structure by constructing a frame and later validating it. It is this frame that provides the particular meaning to the provided information (Gitlin, 1980). By framing the information in a specific way, the presentation suggests particular organizing story line, which points out to its scope and essence, the underlying causes, possible consequences and thus provides a particular enlightenment for its understanding. Consequently, frames shape the view of the mass media's consumers about specific issues (Iyenger, 1991, Mutz, 1998).

Through the years the Hebrew mass media has played an important role in shaping the Jews' view of the Arab-Israel conflict and of Arabs, mostly in line with official narrative provided by the government and the Israeli army (see for example, Cohen, Adoni & Bantz, 1990, Liebes, 1992). This is especially true during times of crisis and holds till these days (Dor, 2004; Naveh, 1998; Wolfsfeld, 2004). Moreover, the Israeli public relies almost entirely on information from the formal Israeli channels of communication, especially on issues related to conflict and security, in spite of the fact there is access to foreign channels as well (Naveh, 1998). This reliance serves as a basis for a formation of relatively uniform public opinion which holds an essential role in a society by mediating and accommodating social change (Shamir & Shamir, 2000). The influence of the media is especially pronounced when the elite supports the information supplied by the leader (Carmines & Stimson, 1989; Shamir & Shamir, 2000: Zaller, 1992). Zaller suggested that in most cases' the public does not have alternative salient information, in a world in which events are ambiguous and in which the public must regularly have opinions about matters that are of importance to a society. As result, public opinion may often accept the discourse of the leaders and elite, and then may form erroneous, biased or false interpretation of the situation (Page & Shapiro, 1992).

2.   Two major events and three sets of major information

Background

On May 17, 1999, with the election of Labor Party leader Ehud Barak as Prime Minister, many supporters of the peace process felt a new surge of hope. After the murder of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a Jewish radical fundamentalist in 1995 and the victory of Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu over Labor party candidate Shimon Peres in 1996, the election of Barak led many to believe that peace finally was near. In his election campaign, Barak had promised to continue the heritage of Yitzhak Rabin and to seriously and vigorously advance the peace process. Surprisingly, sooner than anyone expected, after less than two years in office, in February 2001, Barak lost a new election to the Likud leader, Ariel Sharon, without having achieved any significant progress towards promised peace with Syrians and Palestinians. Barak's truncated term in office was a huge disappointment to peace supporters inside Israel and abroad. During the elections of 2001 and 2003 many of them left the "peace camp" and voted for the Likud leader (in 2001) or for one of the center-right political parties in the 2003 elections (Arian & Shamir, 2004).

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The cardinal question then is - what are the factors which influenced the change in Israeli public opinion within such a short time? In our perspective, the answer to this question can be found in two major events that took place between July 2000 and January 2001, and three sets of major information which were provided to clarify these events. *Thus, our overview does not include Barak's entire term in office, but focuses only on the crucial period which began a few weeks before the Camp David summit and ended few months after the beginning of the second Intifada.* The following section will present these major events and sets of information and also evaluates the validity of this information.

Major information about the necessity of convening the summit meeting

The first major information concerned the necessity of convening a summit meeting between Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Prime Minister Barak provided the major information that the time had come for crucial decisions in the negotiation process with the Palestinians (Drucker, 2002; Pressman, 2003; Sher, 2001; Swisher, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 2004). This implied that Israelis were ready for historical compromises and that this was the moment that would reveal whether the Palestinians really wanted to settle the conflict peacefully.

The idea of convening the summit meeting came from Barak, who had to convince President Clinton of the need for it and twist the arm of Arafat to participate (Quandt, 2001, Ben Ami, 2004). Arguments to proceed with negotiations on the final settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict at this particular time, in this particular format, were advanced by Barak, who believed that he could convince the Palestinians to accept his proposals. They were related to the particular circumstances of Israeli and US politics (the disintegration of the government coalition on the Israeli side and the approaching presidential elections in the USA) and the personality of the Israeli leader (Edelist, 2003). Barak wanted to go for all (that is, achieving "an end to the conflict" and "an end of the claims", Edelist, 2003, p. 342) or nothing. According to Edelist, an authorized Barak biographer, Barak said, "I am sure that it is possible to achieve a settlement. But I am not sure that I have a partner who understands the extent of the opportunity" (p. 337). Later he said "Our intention is to empirically examine whether there is or there isn't a serious Palestinian Authority which is ready to proceed to the end goal" (p.342).

A number of Israeli and Palestinian leaders and negotiators warned that the Camp David summit was not well-prepared and that Barak's demand for an end to all claims in the final settlement could not be achieved (Ben-Ami, 2004). Moreover, both Israeli intelligence and the Foreign Ministry specified the terms that the Palestinians could accept as a resolution of the conflict, terms that Barak could not offer. In June 2001, Major General Amos Malka, who headed the IDF Intelligence in 2000, said "Yasser Arafat was determined to reach some sort of resolution in 2000. That determination did not stem from the symbolism of the year but from his desire to fulfill, at least for the most part, a strategic vision based on four components: (a) an independent state; (b) Israel's return to the 1967 borders with amendments, minor concessions, and compensation via exchange of territories; (c). the designation of East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state; and (d) the finding of an appropriate solution to the refugee problem. These components represented his four red lines and demarcated the range of his flexibility" (Malka, 2004, p. 20). But Barak ignored these warnings and interpretations (Kaspit, September 13, 2002) and set the terms for what a few journalists described as an impossible and insufficiently prepared summit meeting (Drucker, 2002; Kaspit, September 17, 2002). This view is also corroborated by some of the American participants in the summit (Lessons of Arab-Israeli negotiating, 2005).

The first major event: The Camp David summit

The first major event took place on July 11-24, 2000 when top-level delegations of Israelis and Palestinians met at Camp David, in Maryland, with the participation of a U.S. team led by President Bill Clinton, to try to reach a final agreement and end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the two sides did not succeed in reaching an agreement and the peace summit failed. As noted, due to the fact that the summit was closed to the media and because summit's discussions were confidential, information provided by leaders with regard to the failure of the summit is crucial.

Major information about the Camp David negotiations and the outcome

When negotiations ended without reaching an agreement, Barak provided major information, saying that he had done everything, leaving no stone unturned in the search for peace by making an extremely generous and far-reaching offer at Camp David, that Arafat had refused to accept it, while not making any counter proposals. This left the responsibility for the failure solidly on the side of the Palestinians (Ben-Ami, 2004; Drucker, 2002; Enderlin, 2003; Pressman, 2003; Sher, 2001; Swisher, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 2004). This important information was supported by statements from U.S. President Bill Clinton (who convinced Arafat to join the summit only after promising that in case of failure he would not put the blame on the Palestinian side) and from almost all Israeli participants at the Camp David conference. Subsequently, almost all of the country's political, social and religious leaders, as well as the Israeli mass media, intensely circulated this information time and time again (Dor, 2001, 2004; Harel, 2005; Swisher, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 2004).

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This major information affected the construction of Israelis' view of events, especially because of Barak's proposals with regard to Jerusalem, which had broken the taboo about dividing the city ("re-united" in 1967). It implied that while Israel had made its ultimate compromise and had "given everything", Arafat and the Palestinians refused to accept the offer. This meant that Arafat and the Palestinian leadership were not interested in resolving the conflict through compromise and in a peaceful way, and that they were still striving to annihilate Israel. This intention was directly implied because provided information stated that Palestinian delegation insisted on the right of return for millions of Palestinian refugees to Israel.

The campaign to blame the Palestinians was well-prepared in advance, and was extremely successful, especially in Israel, but also abroad (Ben, July 21, 2001; Drucker, 2002; Weymouth, July 23, 2001, see also a detailed description by Wolfsfeld, 2004). It focused mainly on Arafat, presenting him as "not a partner" for a peace process. Baltianski (2005), who was Barak's spokesman during the Camp David summit, said that the information about "no partner" was solely Barak's spin in his first press meeting after the summit. According to Baltianski, Barak genuinely believed he had the ability to convince Arafat to make the agreement and if he could not convince Arafat, no one would and this will be a sign that Arafat does not want a peaceful settlement of the conflict.

By now, there are numerous published accounts of the negotiation process in Camp David that come from individuals with different world views (e.g., Ben-Ami, 2004; Enderlin, 2003; Hannieh, 2001; Hussein & Malley, August 9, 2001; Kacowitz, 2005; Klein, 2003; Lessons of Arab-Israeli negotiating, 2005; Pressman, 2003; Pundak & Arieli, 2004; Rabinovich, 2004; Ross, 2004; Rubinstein, 2003; Shamir & Maddy-Weitzman, 2005; Sher, 2001)[1]. These and numerous other accounts criticize not only Palestinian behavior, but also the insufficient Israeli proposals, Barak's negotiation conduct and lack of American preparation, among other factors. It is clear that the disagreement over Temple Mount significantly contributed to the collapse of the Camp David summit (Ben-Ami, 2004; Globes, July 25, 2000; Klein, 2003; Steinberg, 2002). It also became clear that, while from the Israeli perspective, Barak's offers were unprecedented and far-reaching, from the Palestinian perspective they were far from satisfactory, since according to the proposed terms, the future Palestinian state would not have been a sovereign, contiguous and viable state, since it would be divided into three separate enclaves covering 87-88% of the West Bank and the entire Gaza Strip, without control of the Jordan Valley for many years to come (Pressman, 2003; Pundak & Arieli, 2004). In addition, some of the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem (e.g., Sheikh-Jarah, Wadi-Joz, Silwan) would be kept under Israeli sovereignty with neighborhood autonomy and Israel would retain sovereignty over the Temple Mount (Klein, 2003). The acceptance of the Clinton proposals in December 2000 by Israel and the offering of further concessions to the Palestinians at Taba indicate that the Camp David proposals were in fact not the most far-reaching ones that Israel could offer. On these two occasions Barak improved the Israeli offer. Moreover, there was a fundamental orientation gap between the Israeli and Palestinian positions at the Camp David negotiations. While the Palestinians demanded, in principle, that UN resolutions should be the basis for the negotiations leading to a realization of objective rights stemming from international legitimacy, the Israelis wanted compromise and a fair solution based on the existing situation, mainly concerning security and the settlements (Ben-Ami, 2004; Lavie, 2003).

The second major event: The beginning of the Second Intifada

The second major event began on September 28, 2000, when violent conflict erupted. Triggered by the visit of Israel's then opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the Temple Mount, where the holy mosques of the Muslims are located, Palestinians began disturbances accompanied by stone throwing, demonstrations and shootings. These were met with violent responses by Israeli security forces.

Israelis and Palestinians remember the beginning of the Second Intifada in different ways so that we are talking here about collective memories rather than historical facts. With regard to the hard facts, during the first four days of the uprising, 39 Palestinians and five Israelis were killed; by the end of October, 141 Palestinians were killed and about 500 were injured, while 11 Israelis were killed and one was injured. During the months of November and December of 2000, 186 Palestinians were killed and about 540 were injured. In the same period, 31 Israelis were killed and 84 were injured. From the beginning of the Intifada in September 2000, until April 1, 2001, 409 Palestinians were killed and about 1740 injured and, during the same period, 70 Israelis were killed and 183 injured.[2] During the first months of the Intifada, the Palestinian uprising consisted mostly of both spontaneous and organized demonstrations that were met with excessive military power by Israel. With regard to terror attacks, Palestinians shot mostly on Israeli cars in West Bank roads, and at soldiers. In November 2000, a bomb went off in the Jerusalem market and later in Hadera. Then, on March 1, a bomb exploded in a taxi. The first suicide attack took place on March 28, 2001, east of Kfar Saba (after the election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister in February 2001).

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1. It should be noted that there has been relative agreement in many of these accounts about the details of the proposals and procedures of the negotiations. But firm disagreement has remained with regard to their meaning, implications, and especially as to the evaluations of the responsibility for the failure of the summit.
2. The numbers of the Palestinian casualties were taken from the Palestine Red Crescent Society – www.palestinrecs.org and those of Israelis from the Israeli Foreign Ministry- www.mfa.gov.il, where the nature of the events is also described.

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These facts indicate that Israeli army and police responded to the Palestinian popular uprising with great force. The numbers of casualties on both sides reveal the indiscriminate use of fire power by the Israeli army, which caused massive killings including many innocent civilians of all ages (Drucker & Shelah, 2005; Harel & Isachroff, 2004). The Israeli army was well-prepared for the outbreak of the uprising, and decided to use force in order to teach the Palestinians a lesson.[1] During the first 30 days of the Intifada the Israeli army fired over million bullets and shells. Kaspit wrote, "In the political system, as well as in the military system, it is considered possible that the destructive reaction of the IDF and the blow that Palestinians suffered in the first weeks led to a deterioration of the situation and an escalation in the violence" (Kaspit, September 6, 2002, p. 8, see also Drucker & Shelah, 2005; Harel & Isachroff, 2004; Hirsch, 2004; Peri, 2002). The army got the freedom to use extremely excessive force (Drucker & Shelah, 2005). But even with the high degrees of freedom, it was granted from above, in some cases the Israeli army still ignored the orders of the political echelon when it tried to moderate the level of violence (see Drucker & Shelah, 2005; Kaspit, September 6 and 13, 2002; Michael, 2004; Pedazur, 2001; Peri, 2002, 2005). Shlomo Ben Ami, who was Foreign Minister and the Minister for Public Security at this time, wrote in his memoirs that there was

"a gap between the directives of the political echelon and their translation in the field. It was a structural failure that was expressed in the political echelon-army relationship; as well as in the political echelon–police relationship, with regard to the ability of the political echelon to govern and control the dynamics of events in the field and the reaction of the operational echelon" (Ben Ami, 2004, p.295).

Major information about the beginning of Intifada and its course in the first phase

Later, after the violence began, major information coming from Barak, the Israeli government and from a number of military figures[2] was that the outbreak of the Second Intifada had been well-prepared by Arafat and the Palestinian Authority (Dor, 2001, 2004; Wolfsfeld, 2004). This was the government explanation, even though at the beginning of the violence most of the intelligence sources interpreted the events differently (Bar-Siman-Tov, Lavie, Michael, & Bar-Tal, 2004; Dor, 2001; Drucker & Shelah, 2005). Nevertheless, very soon all security and government sources rallied behind the major information which was continuously disseminated by the media. As the violence continued, both government and military sources and much of the media kept providing information to the effect that the goal of the Palestinians was to destroy Israel; according to this major information, Israel was engaged in a war for its survival (Bar-Siman-Tov, et al., 2004; Dor, 2004, 2005; Feldman, 2002- see also interviews with Ehud Barak in the Haaretz magazine supplement, September 6, 2002 and with Moshe Ya'alon, former Israeli Chief of Staff, in the Haaretz magazine supplement, August 8, 2002). Also, governmental and military sources continuously repeated major information stating that Arafat was personally responsible for every terror attack and that Palestinian leaders (especially Arafat and leaders associated with him) were not partners for negotiation because of their involvement in terror and their refusal to fight terror (see reviews by Bar-Siman-Tov, et al., 2004; and Swisher, 2004). And so the campaign "there is no partner for peace negotiations", which began immediately after the Camp David summit went on. Barak even openly explained later on that the negotiations that continued until the elections of 2001, including the Taba talks, were not genuine but kept going only because of "general political considerations" so that Israelis should not be held "responsible for the cessation of the political process before the end of Clinton's tenure in office" (Barak, June 17, 2003)

In contrast to the popular major belief perpetuated by Ehud Barak and some of the high ranking military officers, an alternative narrative, which by now has gained a wide basis of factual support, suggests that Arafat did not plan the Intifada, but that it erupted spontaneously and then evolved, at least partially, due to the overwhelming forceful responses of the Israeli army, on the one hand, and the lack of political incentives to stop it, on the other. This alternative narrative has been advanced by the Intelligence Branch of the army (the commander and the head of the Palestinian desk), as well as by the evaluation organs of the General Security Service and Mosad (all professional intelligence agencies). As Ami Ayalon (Major General in the Reserves and head of the General Security Service until half a year before the beginning of the Intifada), put it,

"The Al-Aqsa Intifada was initially a popular phenomenon, spontaneous and lacking a clear political objective. … The PA chairman has been drawn into this violent whirlpool, and to stop it he must create political hope." (2004, p. 16)

This view was also supported by Yuval Diskin, who was at that time deputy to the head of the General Security Service and later headed it (Asenheim, June 10, 2005; Haaretz, February 10, 2005), Matti Steinberg, advisor on Palestinian matters to the Head of the General Security Service (Steinberg, 2002) and high official of the Mosad who was asked to investigate the eruption of the Intifada (Drucker & Shelah, 2005).

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1. The preparations were made in view of intelligence evaluations that Palestinian disturbances might take place in a situation in which Israeli-Palestinian negotiations would be stalled and Arafat would unilaterally declare an independent state. In such a case, Israel planned to initiate punishing steps. No intelligence data suggested that Arafat would retreat from the idea of two states and initiate a wide-scale violence to destroy the State of Israel (Drucker & Shelah, 2005; Lavie, June 13, 2004).
2. The most notable propagators of this information at the time were Chief of Staff Saul Mofaz, Deputy Chief of Staff Moshe Yaalon and Chief of the Research Unit in Intelligence Branch Amos Gilad.

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Amos Malka (Major General in the Reserves who headed the Intelligence Branch of the IDF during the beginning of the Intifada) challenged Amos Gilad's professional integrity

"During my entire period as head of Military Intelligence not a single document came from the research department including the assessment that Gilad claims to have presented to the Prime Minister. It is obligatory under the work regulations, that no document can leave the research department without getting the approval of the head of the division" (Eldar, June 11, 2004)

and he added,

"I did everything I could. I went to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee several times and submitted reports to the Chief of Staff. Nowhere did I say that I accepted the conspiracy theory that Oslo was a plot to eliminate Israel. To my regret, Mofaz [current Defense Minister and then Chief of Staff] and Bogey [Moshe Ya'alon, former Chief of Staff], his deputy, ignored what I said. What Gilad said suited them better, and therefore they adopted it." (ibid)

Malka insists that even after the peace talks gave way to hostilities, the Intelligence Branch did not revise its assessments. Neither did the research units at the Shin Bet, the Foreign Ministry and the Office of the Coordinator of Activities in the territories adopt the thesis that the Camp David summit had revealed "the Oslo plot".

Ephraim Lavie (colonel in the reserves), who headed the Palestinian desk at the Intelligence Branch of the IDF, said that he "could determine, unequivocally, that in written formal evaluations of the research department formulated during my service from summer 1998 till February 2002, there was no intelligence basis for the conception existing today", (Lavie, in an interview with Yoav Stern, June 13, 2004, p. B3). Drucker summarized Ehud Barak's problematic narrative by writing

"This Intifada was unnecessary in the bad case and could have been stopped in the earlier stages, in the good one. More seriously: The heads of state sold us a false tale on its basis we went to war. Anyone who thought differently and said so was thrown aside. Raw, pure intelligence reports were trashed. People like Bogey Yaalon and Amos Gilad put together a narrative which was based more on their private whims than any solid intelligence. … No one was willing to contradict the dominant opinion". (Drukker, 2005, p.7)

At this point it is important to show that the described crucial sets of information, especially the one about the outcome of Camp David summit meeting and the other about the beginning of the Intifada, were transmitted in the mass media to the Israeli public. Two studies investigated newspapers reports abut the noted events: The study by Harel (2005) content analyzed the reports of the Camp David Summit and Dor (2001) examined the reports about the beginning of the Al Aqsa Intifada in three major Israeli newspapers, Haaretz, Maariv and Yedioth Ahronot. The findings of these two studies show that the three newspapers transmitted the information propagated by Barak and others very saliently as news. These sets of information were presented as the dominant narrative, while the alternative information was marginalized. Thus the Israeli public was massively exposed at large to the information that Barak provided to the mass media.

It is therefore interesting to see now whether Israeli public accepted these sets of major information.

3.   Changes in Israeli Jewish public opinion

In order to monitor the changes in Israeli public opinion throughout the relevant period, we systematically collected the lion share of Israeli public opinion surveys that focused on attitudes that are related to our case study. More specifically, most of the data we have used is based on two bulks of large scale representative surveys that were conducted in Israel between 1999 and 2002. The first is the National Security and Public Opinion Project (Arian, 1999a, 1999b, 2001, 2002)[1] and the second is the Peace Index (Peace Index, 2000-2002).[2] The added value of both projects is their prolonged and representative nature, which enabled us to cautiously provide some insights about trends in Israeli-Jews public opinion. In addition to these two projects, in order to accurately serve the goals of the current study, we have conducted our own survey during March, 2002, among a representative sample of the Israeli population (N=430).[3]

In general, it can be said that the Israeli public formed a hegemonic opinion that was in line with Barak's information. With regard to the major information about the outcome of the Camp David meeting, data from the peace index carried out at

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1.   The surveys presented here were conducted in: January 25-March 7, 1999 (N=1203); January 24–February 26, 2000 (N=1201); April 12-May 11, 2001(N=1216); January 29-February 27, 2002 (N=1264). All surveys were prepared, conducted, and analyzed by Asher Arian and the fieldwork was done by Machshov research institute (Arian, 1999, 2001, 2002).
2.   he Peace Index Project is conducted at the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research and the Evens Program in Mediation and Conflict Resolution of Tel Aviv University, headed by Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann. All the telephone interviews were conducted by the Machsov research institute, apart from the 2002 survey that was conducted by B. I.Cohen Institute of Tel Aviv University. The surveys were conducted in: July, 2000 (N=509); October, 2000 (N=585); November, 2000 (N=575); March, 2001(n=578); May, 2001 (N=570); August, 2002 (N=588). , All samples represent the adult Jewish and Arab population of Israel.
3.   The survey was prepared and analyzed by us and the fieldwork was conducted by Smith research institute in 24-25 March, 2002. The current analysis is based only upon the Jewish part of the sample which consisted of 385 adult participants.

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the end of July 2000 showed that 67% of Israeli Jews believed the Palestinian side to be entirely, or mainly, responsible for the failure of the Camp David summit. Only 13% thought that the Israelis were either solely or largely responsible, and 12 percent thought that both sides were equally responsible for the failure (Peace Index, July 2000). Two years later, in August 2002, 92% of Israeli Jews believed that the Palestinians did not fulfill their commitments as specified in the Oslo agreement, while 66% believed that Israel did fulfill its own part (Peace Index, August 2002).

With regard to the last set of major information, the polls showed that in November 2000, about 80% of Israeli Jews blamed the Palestinians for the eruption of the violence (Peace Index, November 2000), and in 2002, 84% of the Israeli Jewish respondents thought that the Palestinians were solely or mostly responsible for the deterioration in the relations between them and the Israelis, while only 5% thought that Israel was solely responsible (Arian, 2002). In addition, the polls showed, as early as October 2000, 71 percent of the Israeli Jews thought that Arafat behaved like a terrorist, in comparison to two years earlier when only 41% thought so (Peace Index, October 2000).

These findings are only specific examples of the "psychological earthquake" (Bar-Tal & Sharvit, 2007), which public opinion in Israel experienced during the first year of the second Intifada. The promises Barak made after he was elected in 1999 were welcomed by the majority of the Israeli public; they expressed optimistic and conciliatory attitudes. In a national survey carried out by Asher Arian between January 25 and March 7, 1999, during the election campaign, he found the following opinions, presented in Table 1 (see Arian, 1999a). But about twenty months after Ehud Barak had taken office, a major change in public opinion could be observed. A large number of dovish and centrist Israeli Jews dramatically changed their views in comparison to the ones they had expressed in 1999. In a national survey carried out by Asher Arian between April 12 and May 11, 2001, a few months after Barak's loss in the elections, the following responses were found (see Arian, 2001, 2002 and Table 1 for selected findings):

Responses	1999 Survey	2001 Survey
Reported enhanced feeling of personal security since the peace process began in 1993	80%	
Reported that personal security became worse since the peace process began		63%
Preferred peace talks over strengthening military capacity	69%	47%
Believed peace would be maintained during the next three years	68%	35%
Thought that signing peace treaties would actually mean an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict	67%	30%
Supported the Oslo process	70%	58%
Thought that only through negotiations would terror attacks be curtailed	59%	
Favored unleashing IDF to fight terror		52%
Believed that the majority of the Palestinians want peace	64%	46%
Wanted a continuation of the peace talks	63%	42%
Believed that there was a military solution to the conflict		47%
Did not believe in a military solution to the conflict		41%
Reported that violence decreased their willingness to make concessions		38%

Table 1: Results of National Surveys – 1999 and 2001 (Arian, 1999a, 2001, 2002)

In addition, the peace index of May, 2001 found that 70% of the Israeli Jewish public estimated that Arafat personally lacked the desire, or the capability, of signing an agreement to end the conflict with Israel, even if Israel agreed to all his demands – and that he would make additional demands aimed at foiling the agreement; and 80% believed that Palestinians would not honor an agreement signed by them (Peace Index, May 2001). In March 2001, 72% of Israeli Jews thought that more military force should be used against the Palestinians (Peace Index, March 2001, see review of Israeli Jews' reactions in Bar-Tal & Sharvit, in press). In general, the Oslo Index, which assesses the extent of support for Oslo accord, showed a drop of 6 points during the analyzed period (Peace Index). [issue?]

Another major change took place with regard to the self-categorization of Israeli Jews into leftist and rightist camps,[1] a change that reflects a major polarization in Israeli society. While through the 1990s Israelis were more or less stable in

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1. This is the major and long-serving division of opinion in Israeli society regarding the solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict, which has been used for years. While leftists (starting from Labor voters to the left) are in favor of compromise and support the idea of land for peace, rightists (starting from the Likud voters to the right) are less compromising and support keeping at least substantial part of the territories occupied in the 1967 war because of security, national, historical and/or religious reasons.

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their self-categorization, the events and the information after the 2000 Camp David meeting caused a major change. While in the early nineties about 36% categorized themselves to the left and about 39% to the right of center (Arian & Shamir, 2000), in May 2002 only about 19% categorized themselves to the left and 48% to the right of center. The rest categorized themselves at the center, or did not know where to categorize themselves (Maariv, May 10, 2002**).**

These data are of special significance because they mark the scope of the change. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that, in general, hawks (i.e., rightists) carried uncompromising views through the 1990s and rejected possible settlement of the conflict with the Palestinians (Arian, 1999b; Peace Index). They objected to the Oslo accord in principle, and specifically to the concessions granted during the Oslo process. During the era of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, they carried on a campaign to delegitimize Rabin's peace policy and Rabin personally (Avineri 1995; Karpin & Friedman, 1998; Peleg, 2001). A campaign against any compromise was also conducted during Barak's term by the same segment of society. Thus, during the period under discussion, this part of the population did not change the general direction of their views – the previously described crossing of the lines took place mostly among doves (i.e., leftists and many of the centrists).

As noted, in order deepen the understanding of the dynamics that underlined the public opinion change, we have carried out a poll in March 2002. The results revealed that *29% of Israeli Jews reported that "before the Camp David summit they believed that the Palestinian leadership had sincere intentions of reaching peace with Israel, but today they do not believe it"*. Fifty-six percent reported that they did not formerly believe in the sincerity of Palestinian intentions and that they continued feeling this way, and only 8% continued to believe in the sincere intentions of the Palestinians to reach peace with Israel. Among those who voted for Barak in 2001, responses were as follows: 43% changed their beliefs for the worse, 23% continued to mistrust the Palestinians and 29% continued to trust them.

Although we realize that various factors influenced the described change in Israeli Jewish public opinion, we suggest that the major information provided by Ehud Barak at various points in time played an important role in this change, especially among peace supporters (i.e., leftist and centrist camp). Violence itself during the first 5 months of the Indifada cannot explain by itself the dramatic change of the public opinion and especially by doves and centrists. We believe that the data shows that the framing of the events had an effect. This assumption is based on the following foundation: violence, including terror attacks, during the periods of September 2000 and February 2001 was not very different from other periods of confrontations, like for example during the first Intifada (1987-1991) or even in 1995-1996. In these periods, in spite of the violence, no major changes in public opinion were observed with regard to possible peace process. On contrary, during the first Intifada, the support for the establishment of the Palestinian state increased (Oren, 2005). Similarly, studies showed that during 1995-6 no changes took place with regard to the willingness of the Israeli public to compromise (Arian, 1999) and its view of Palestinians (Oren, 2005). Again, in this period there was even a slight increase in dovish views (Arian, 1999). Measures of support for the Oslo Agreement assessed by the Oslo Index corroborate these findings (Peace Index).

Finally, of special importance for the validation of our claim are more results of our survey from March, 2002, which show that when those who changed their trusting opinion of the Palestinian leadership (29% of the entire sample) were asked to indicate the reasons for this change, 85% noted, as the first or second reasons, choice of the Palestinians to use terror instead of negotiation to achieve their goals and 58% noted the rejection of the Barak offers in Camp David summit. Both reasons reflected the information provided by Barak. Thus in the next section of the paper we will try to explain why the leader of the peace camp, Ehud Barak, had such a profound effect on the public opinion at large and especially on the peace supporters.

4.   The influence of Ehud Barak on Israeli public opinion: Social psychological explanation

The question that must be addressed in this section is why the sets of major information provided by the Israeli leader, Ehud Barak and perpetuated by the mass media were accepted by the majority of the Israeli Jewish public opinion as valid and influenced public opinion in Israel, especially the doves and centrists.

Social psychology has developed a number of conceptions through the years that deal with the problem of persuasion and attitude change (see the reviews by Chaiken, Wood , & Eagly, 1996; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Petty & Wegener, 1998). It is beyond the scope of this paper to review this line of work, but we concur with Petty and Wegener (1998) who wrote that the classic question asked by Lasswell (1948) "who says what to whom with what effect?" that was well researched by the seminal work of Hovland and his colleagues in the 1950s (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953; Kelman & Hovland, 1953) and well advanced by McGuire's research (1969, 1985) provides a proper framework "for those interested in selecting variables for applications of persuasion theory for over half a century" (Petty & Wegener, 1998, p. 342). This assumption is well documented and validated by McGuire (1995). We also think that conceptual framework of Hovland et al (1953) outlines the list of variables that allows us to examine the influence of the leader Ehud Barak. These authors suggested that the key to understanding why people are persuaded lies in the study of the characteristics of the communicator (source), the content of the message and the characteristics of the audience who receive the message. We will analyze each of these components.

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Yet, before displaying a detailed analysis of each of those components, it is important to note that although the present paper focuses on the specific role of Ehud Barak in the change of public opinion in Israel, the social context – the resumption of violence on September 29, 2000 also played a pivotal role in that process. Recently, Markus (2004) have claimed that social context is "the most common source of individual feelings, thoughts and actions" (p. 3). No doubts that in extreme situations, like the one discussed in the current work, this statement gets a redoubled force. First of all the newly erupted violence as such caused a sense of threat and fear, which in turn affected people's views of the Palestinians and the peace process (Bar-Tal, 2004). Second, it confirmed the provided major information about the Palestinians' violent strategy. Third, the violent events supplied a conducive background to accept the major information provided by Ehud Barak, because it created threat and fear.

The communicator: Ehud Barak

Through the years it has been well established that a number of variables relating to characteristics of the source have meaningful effects on the acceptability of a message by an audience (Hass, 1981; Petty, & Wegener, 1998). One of the first variables investigated, and which received much attention, is *credibility*. Hovland et al. (1953) suggested that communicator credibility is composed of two components: *expertness*, which refers to the degree with which the communicator is perceived as a knowledgeable source and *trustworthiness*, which refers to the communicator's unbiased intent (motivation) to communicate information (see for example studies by Allyn, & Festinger, 1961; Eagly, Wood, Chaiken, 1978; Kelman, & Hovland, 1953). Ehud Barak had the two above noted characteristics, at least in the eyes of his supporters (Kaspit & Kfir, 1998).

First, he was considered as the expert on security matters, which is viewed in Israel as the most important knowledge for leading the nation (Bar-Tal, Jacobson, & Klieman, 1998; Yaniv, 1993). He had the image of a "number one soldier" in Israeli history; he had been the most-decorated soldier, and had had experience as a successful head of the Intelligence Branch IDF and Chief of Staff. In addition, he was considered as one of the top experts in the field of relations with the Palestinians (Edelist, 2003; Kaspit & Kfir, 1998). Finally, Ehud Barak was presented to the public as an extremely intelligent person with extraordinary analytical skills. All these attributes caused Ehud Barak to be perceived as an expert on political matters, and especially on matters of security and the peace process. We believe that this image contributed to the wide acceptance of the sets of major information he generated, regarding the failure of the peace process and the Intifada.

Trustworthiness is the second and most important element of credibility (Hovland, et. al., 1953). It is related to the perceived intentions of a certain communicator in a specific situation (e.g., Allyn & Festinger, 1961), especially to an evaluation of what kind of interest he/she has in communicating particular information. When a communicator takes a position against her or his own interest, then this is perceived as trustworthy (Kelman, & Hovland, 1953). Ehud Barak's information was perceived in this line. Barak claimed that he had sacrificed his entire political career in order to unmask Arafat's strategy to destroy Israel and Palestinians' ill intentions (Wolfsfeld, 2004). He was elected to pursue the peace process began by his political mentor, the assassinated Prime Minster Yitzhak Rabin, but ended up declaring Arafat unfit as a partner for negotiations and for the peace process. This information negated the continuation of Rabin's policy and the promised pursuing of the peace process. Indeed Barak's claims reduced his own chances for reelection: after making compromises which were far reaching in the eyes of the Israelis without getting favorable responses from the Palestinians, whom he later presented as having seriously negative intentions towards Israel (Peace Index, January 2001). In view of this, Barak, with this particular information, was perceived as trustworthy in the eyes of the majority of Israelis.

Of special importance for the analysis of our case is the variable of similarity. It was suggested that sources that are similar to the recipients of the message are more persuasive than those that are dissimilar. Perceived similarity increases likeability and trust. In the political context, people learn to rely on knowledge from sources they believe to hold political positions similar to their own rather than on knowledge from sources with different political opinions (Sears & Freedman, 1967; Bar-Tal, Raviv & Raviv, 1991; Raviv, Bar-Tal, Raviv & Abin, 1993). This variable explains the earthquake in opinions that took place among the peace supporters. Ehud Barak was their leader and not only was he similar to them, his credibility in their eyes was especially high. Ehud Barak was the leader of the peace camp and was supposed to lead it to peace, in the way of Itzhak Rabin: information coming from him was persuasive to them and as a result many of them changed their opinion. We assume that the same information provided by a "dissimilar" leader, from the right, would not have been accepted as valid. As Wolfsfeld suggested, "the fact that a Labor prime minister was leading the initial attack against the Palestinians ensured the ultimate success of the anti-Palestinian frame" (2004, p. 205). Indeed, Ehud Barak, as the leader of the left served as an epistemic authority to many of the peace process supporters, that is, he served as a source on whom people rely in their attempts to acquire valid and reliable knowledge (Kruglanski et al., 2005).

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The message: Sets of major information

The conceptual framework we have adopted suggests that, in addition to the important role of Barak as a communicator, the communication itself played a role in the persuasion process (Petty & Wegener, 1998). Barak claimed that Arafat did not intend to reach peace agreement at Camp David and arrived there after already preparing the second violent uprising. Thus, according to Barak, the outbreak of the Intifada was not spontaneous, but aimed to achieve by violent means the Palestinian goals that had not been achieved through the peace negotiations.

This message had two main features: a high level of simplicity and extremely negative and threatening contents. According to conceptual work and empirical studies in psychology, these characteristics enhance persuasion (Baron & Byrne, 2003; Petty, & Cacioppo, 1981; Rogers, 1983). The simplicity of the message was reflected in its clear cut "good-bad" binary, presenting the Palestinians as perpetrators and Israelis as victims and attributing all responsibility for the peace summit's failure to Arafat. This narrative could only lead to one conclusion – stop negotiating and fight terror.

Furthermore, it seems that the extreme negativity of Barak's message also contributed to its persuasibility. This argument, regarding the forcefulness of negative content in changing attitudes, is well-documented in the psychological literature which generally claims that negative events and information tend to be more closely attended and better remembered and that they strongly impact evaluation, judgment and action tendencies (see reviews by Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Christianson, 1992; Kanouse & Hanson, 1971; Lau, 1982; Peeters & Czapinski, 1990). Hence, the negative nature of Barak's information and interpretations of events, associated with his threatening message regarding the future, could serve as another explanation of its major influence on public opinion.

Moreover, the information corresponded to the dominant narrative of the Israeli Jewish society as reflected in its collective memory and ethos of conflict (Bar-Tal & Salomon, in press). This narrative focuses on the following themes: the existential threats and dangers to which the Jewish people and the Jewish state in Israel have been and are still, exposed: it focuses on the history of victimhood of the Jewish people, and in particular as a result of Arab violence. This narrative also presents a positive collective image of the Jews in contrast to negative stereotyping of Arabs, and especially Palestinians. Of special importance is the collective memory regarding Jews' persecution in the Diaspora and particularly its climax, the Holocaust, during World War II (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992); as a nurtured key memory, this sensitizes Jews to possible threats. All these themes are widely shared by Israeli Jews, acquired at a very early age; they are well known even to those Israelis who later in one way or another disavow the narrative or parts of it (see for example, Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Firer, 1985; Podeh, 2002). A recent study by Sharvit (2005) has shown that when this narrative is measured implicitly, it is found that even dovish Israeli Jews hold it. We suggest thus that Barak's information contained all the themes noted above: existential threat, self victimhood, positive self-collective presentation and delegitimization of the rival. Therefore, since the message was relevant and engaging, it was easily absorbed, fitting within the existing already dominant societal repertoire. This is not surprising in view of the consistent findings which indicate that individuals are selectively attentive and well absorb information that corresponds to the knowledge they store (Bransford, 1979; Smith, 1998).

In addition, much has been written about fear-arousing messages (e.g., Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Higbee, 1969; McGuire, 1968). In general it is has been suggested that fear causes people to attend to information and process it, in order to develop a coping strategy, especially when they are vulnerable to it (Dillard, 1994; Meijnders, 1998). Review of the literature shows that individuals tend to be persuaded by fear-arousing messages, especially when the fear is of medium level (Boster & Mongeau, 1984; Sutton, 1982). These findings were replicated in the political arena, where it was observed that fear-arousing messages are used by politicians, including in Israel, to enhance their persuasibility (e.g., Pratkanis & Turner, 1996; Rosler, 2005). Barak presented fear-arousing information to the Israeli public about the destructive intentions of the Palestinians, in general and the Palestinian leader, in particular. Those were medium-level fear arousing messages, because Israel is perceived by its Jewish citizens as a state that is capable of coping with threats posed by the Palestinians (Arian, 2001). It is assumed thus that this feature also contributed to the acceptability of the information by the Israeli Jewish public.

Finally, it has been suggested that repetition of a message increases the likelihood of its awareness, comprehension, and eventually acceptance (Cacciopo & Petty, 1979). In addition, repetition increases a message's acceptability through increase of its perception as truthful (Arkes, Boehm, & Xu, 1991) and familiarity (Jacoby, Kelly, Brown, & Jasechko, 1989). Information provided by Ehud Barak was repeated numerous times not only by him, but by many of the major local sources of information: military authorities, political and social leaders, journalists, and even major intellectual and cultural personalities, who influence peace supporters (Dor, 2001; Wolfsfeld, 2004). It should be noted though that even during the fall of 2000 alternative information was available, though infrequently and not in salient places. There is not doubt that massive continuous exposure had an enormous impact on the acceptance of the information perpetuated by Ehud Barak.

In sum we suggest that the characteristics of the information provided by Ehud Barak facilitated the acceptance of the message.

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The audience: Israeli Jewish society

The last element of Hovland et al's (1953) conceptual framework is the target audience- in our case Israeli Jewish society. As we already suggested, members of Israeli Jewish society, including supporters of the peace camp, were highly susceptible to persuasion due to their contents, their history and their needs at the juncture. First, of all we have to remember that a substantial portion of Israeli Jewish society, the hawks (mostly supporters of the right wing parties), objected to the peace process and held uncompromising positions, distrusting Palestinians and their leader, viewing them as terrorists and believing their ultimate goal was to destroy Israel. They accepted the information eagerly because it confirmed already held beliefs and in fact it showed them how right they had been, objecting to the peace process in the first place.

We want to focus on those Jewish Israelis who voted for Ehud Barak in the 1999 elections, supported his peaceful policies, but then accepted his message, changed their views during the fall of 2000 and moved to hawkish positions. Part of Barak's voters were moderately rightist or centrist, who trusted the new leader and were ready to give him the opportunity to conduct his policy of peace process (Arian & Shamir 2000). But they were highly susceptible to persuasion when the leader changed his views, because they had only hesitantly supported Oslo agreement. This relatively large group of people came to believe that if Barak, their favorite and pragmatic leader, had not managed to reach a viable agreement, in spite of his far reaching offers, then, there really was no Palestinian partner for a peace agreement.

Beyond this particular group, other Barak voters from the peace camp had two main characteristics that made them susceptible to Baraks' information. First, as noted before, they had been socialized to hold contents of the Israeli Jewish narrative as it evolved during the long period of intractable conflict, which included societal beliefs of collective memories and ethos of conflict (Bar-Ta, 2007; Bar-Tal & Salomon, 2006) The contents of these beliefs sensitize Israeli Jews to situations of perceived collective threats, especially of Palestinians (Liebman, 1978; Segev, 1991; Zafran & Bar-Tal, 2003). Thus when threatening information is presented by the leader, then by the government and military establishment, and next is circulated by the mass media, the held narrative serves as a greatly facilitating basis for its acceptance.

Second, a society that finds itself in a violent conflict has to fulfill the basic needs of its members (Bar-Tal, in press; Burton, 1990). It is especially important to satisfy the need for a meaningful understanding of the conflict (Berkowitz, 1968; Maddi, 1971; Reykowski, 1982) and for a positive self-image (Maslow, 1954; Tajfel, 1981). As it became clear that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may be renewed, Barak's major information directly and successfully fulfilled both those needs for most Jewish Israelis. Barak's information was coherent, meaningful and simple: The Israeli side had tried to do everything possible to achieve peace and was willing to make very far reaching compromises and, therefore, Israelis, as a society, could feel good about their part in the conflict. On the other hand, it was very obvious and clear cut who was to blame (Yasser Arafat) and from now on, in Barak's perspective, the reason for fighting was rightful and meaningful – defending the basic interests of the Jewish state against the Palestinians who want to destroy it.

5.   Conclusion

The present paper has tried to analyze the reasons for the changes in the Israeli Jewish public opinion, and especially among the peace supporters, during the summer and fall of 2000. There is no doubt that the massive protest and acts of violence carried out by the Palestinians during the *first months of the Intifada* were cognized by the majority of Israelis as threatening their personal security and collective well-being (see Peace Index and Arian, 2001, 2002). Having said that, it can be assumed, that violence itself in *the fall of 2000* could not have caused this major earthquake in public opinion. The Palestinian violence during the months of September 2000 – February 2001 was of limited scope and not all that different from violent confrontations in the past. Therefore, we suggest that the crucial factors in the psychological earthquake experienced by the Israeli public in the fall of 2000 was the information provided by Ehud Barak, framing the major events of the summer and fall of 2000 in a particular way. That is, we do recognize that the major events of Camp David and beginning of the Intifada had an effect on public opinion. But our point is that the determinative factor in this effect was the interpretation of these events. They do not stand by themselves, but only within the framework in which they were presented to the public. It was the provided information that gave meaning to the events. This major information stated that Barak had offered everything that Arafat had refused to accept the offer, that he intended to eradicate Israel and that he insisted on the right of return of millions of Palestinian refugees to the State of Israel; that he had planned the Intifada and had returned to tactics of terror. This information was accepted by the Israeli establishment and was transmitted massively by most of the media.[1] Eventually the information presented by Ehud Barak was accepted by the great majority of Israeli Jewish society during an early phase of the confrontation, and had a determinative effect on peace politics in Israel and thus on the course of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, the provided information has come to serve as a formal hegemonic and popular collective memory among Israeli Jewish society about the Camp David summit and the beginning

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1.   It should be noted that information providing an alternative account to the events was available and publicized, but was not advanced by the mass media, had very limited exposure and was not accepted by the great majority of the public.

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of the Second Intifada. We suggest that the wide acceptance of Barak's information was a result of a rare coinciding, at a particular point of time, between the social context, a leader (i.e., Ehud Barak), a receptive audience (i.e., most of Israeli Jewish society), information and specific environmental conditions (i.e., violence).

Barak, who was never an ardent supporter of the Oslo accord, provided a devastating blow to the peace camp, after he was elected as its leader.[1] In line with our analysis, it can be assumed that the same information provided by Likud leaders would have been met with suspicion by peace camp members. Barak had a major influence on the dovish and centrist members of Israeli society. What the Likud party and its leaders did not succeed in doing during those years, Ehud Barak, the leader of the Labor party and his associates, helped to achieve. At present, Israeli society does not have a strong peace camp, and it is important to understand the factors that greatly facilitated its disintegration. The beginning of its demise is at least partially due to the effects of provided information. Later, dramatic suicide terror events greatly enhanced this trend and justified it.

Saying all these, we would like to note that this type of study cannot unequivocally suggest the line of causality. It provides data and analysis that provide a perspective to the understanding of political phenomenon and which has to be judged on the basis of the consistency validity as suggested by Popper (1972).

In summary, the paper points out that while major events have a significant role in shaping public opinion, these events do not stand by themselves, but are illuminated by major information that frames them in particular perspectives. This is so because society members lack information about events, and many events are inaccessible to the general public. In these cases, the public depends on the information provided by leaders or other sources. In an open, democratic society it is the role of the media, academia and other institutions and channels of communication not to take the information propagated by leaders for granted, but to examine it skeptically and try to reach valid information, if exists and provide it to the public. In the case described, most of the channels of communication failed to shed light on the events as they took place, in spite of the fact that factual information was available and even published. Moreover, the same phenomena take place in other societies too and therefore it is of great importance to unveil their basis and dynamics.

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1. As a paradox, Ehud Barak who helped to create an atmosphere of existential conflict with Palestinians lost the elections in February 2001 to Ariel Sharon, the leader of Likud party. Many of the voters trusted the information provided by Barak, perceived the changing context and moved to the right. They preferred during the Israeli-Palestinian violent confrontation forceful leader as Sharon, ex general and an extreme hawk, who opposed the peace process with the Palestinians and had come to stand for forceful activities and a powerful determination to curtail the Arabs, and especially the Palestinians.

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