

# A Nation that Dwells Alone? Foreign Policy in the 1992 Election

---

**Gerald M. Steinberg**

Director, Program on Conflict Resolution and Negotiation  
and BESA Center for Strategic Studies

Bar Ilan University  
Ramat Gan, Israel

Tel: 972-3-5318043

Fax: 972-3-5357931

Email: [gerald@vms.huji.ac.il](mailto:gerald@vms.huji.ac.il)

Published in Israel at the Polls: 1992, edited by Elazar and Sandler, Rowman and Littlefield, 1994

Israeli Foreign Policy and the Peace Process: 1988-1992

## "A Nation That Dwells Alone? Foreign Policy in the 1992 Elections"

Israeli foreign relations have undergone a drastic transformation in the four years between the 1988 and 1992 elections. In this period, the Cold War ended, the Soviet Union collapsed, the hegemonic power of the United States grew, and the Middle East peace process began with the Madrid conference in October 1991. The American role in the 1991 Gulf War against Iraq, and the continued presence of United Nations inspectors, seemed to indicate a major change in the region, but the implications were far from clear. At the same time, in the months leading to the election, American-Israeli relations were increasingly characterized by confrontation and conflict. All of these issues played a major role in the elections.

In a broad sense, the campaign and the confrontation between Rabin and Shamir provided expression to the two diametrically opposed "operational codes"<sup>1</sup>, or perceptions of Israel's place in the world, and the attitudes of outside powers towards the state and to the Jewish people. Shamir, echoing the Biblical view of the Jewish people as "a nation that dwells alone", perceives the outside world as inherently hostile, unsympathetic, and, in many cases, anti-Semitic. Like Menachem Begin, who preceded him as Prime Minister, many members of Shamir's family were murdered in the Nazi Holocaust. Under Shamir, the Israeli government interpreted the effort to convene negotiations with the Arabs as a trap designed to isolate Israel politically and weaken her militarily, in preparation for another Arab military onslaught aimed at crushing the Jewish state. Since peace was seen as impossible, there was no point to discussion of territorial concessions, and American efforts to negotiate a settlement were viewed as particularly dangerous.

In contrast, leaders of the Labor Party, including Rabin, hold a more optimistic view. Rabin personifies the Zionist and native Israeli confidence that the establishment of Jewish sovereignty has ended centuries of persecution and isolation, and despite the Arab threat, is essentially a nation like all others. He is an "Americanophile", and served as Israel's ambassador in Washington during a period of close cooperation with the US government. Rabin welcomed the American efforts to convene direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab states. Although by no means a "dove", Rabin accepts the general concept of trading "land for peace" and opposes settlement activity outside of security zones around Jerusalem and along the Jordan river. Members of the Labor party see peaceful coexistence with the Arabs as an attainable goal, and are eager to pursue this process.

These contrasting views are not confined to the leaders of the major parties, but rather, represent two opposing but often co-existing perceptions among the majority of Israeli citizens. In electing Rabin, the Israeli electorate expressed the view that the isolation and conflict with the outside world, in general, and America, in particular, was

unnecessary and self-destructive. It was time to try a different and more positive approach, and to restore the alliance with the leader of the democratic world. If Rabin succeeds, this more optimistic attitude will dominate, but if he fails, the Begin-Shamir view of an implacably hostile world may again come to dominate Israeli political philosophy and foreign policy.

## PRELUDE TO THE CAMPAIGN: THE LONG ROAD TO MADRID

Prospects for negotiations with the Arabs, the status of relations with the United States, and other aspects of Israeli foreign relations were important issues in the 1988 elections.<sup>2</sup> These issues continued to be central, and their salience increased throughout the term of the 13th Knesset and prior to the 1992 elections. The broad coalition government that was created after the 1988 elections was split over the peace process and incapacitated almost immediately. It lasted for only 15 months (until March 1990), when it was replaced by a narrow government dominated by the Likud.

The initial government formed after the 1988 elections was led by Yitzhak Shamir, with Moshe Arens serving as Foreign Minister and Rabin continuing as Defense Minister. In the effort to keep Shimon Peres from attempting to control foreign policy, he was offered the Finance Ministry. (During the previous national unity government, between 1984 and 1988, Peres had sought to convene an international conference, but this was bitterly opposed by Shamir and the Likud.) Although the Likud could have formed a narrow government without Labor, Shamir included Labor in order to limit internal conflict over relations with the United States and the efforts to promote negotiations.<sup>3</sup> King Hussein had formally renounced Jordanian claims to a major role in the West Bank, and Israel was under increasing international pressure as a result of the "intifada". In November 1988, immediately after the Israeli elections, Arafat addressed a special meeting of the United Nations in Geneva, in which he appeared to recognize Israel and to renounce terrorism. In response, the US opened a formal dialogue with the PLO. This marked a major change in American policy, and had a profound impact in Israel.

The pressure on Israel increased in January 1989, when George Bush took office as President of the United States, and James Baker became Secretary of State. Baker and his staff, including Dennis Ross and Dan Kurtzer, immediately intensified the diplomatic activity that George Schultz had initiated. Although the Bush Administration did not have a blueprint of its own, and claimed to oppose the creation of a Palestinian state,<sup>4</sup> Baker and his aides believed that the process of negotiation between the Israelis and the PLO would itself somehow lead to mutual understanding and compromise. In the first few months of the elections, all the major figures in the Israeli government were invited (or summoned) to Washington, including Shamir,

Arens, and Rabin. Egypt's President Mubarak and other Arab leaders met with Bush and Baker at the same time.

Shamir, his closest advisors, including Yosef Ben-Aharon and Avi Pazner, and prominent members of the Likud, such as Benyamin Begin and Benyamin Netanyahu, saw no prospect of any significant agreements with the PLO, or with Syria, Iraq, and the other rejectionist Arabs. In Washington, Bush told Shamir that Israel could not maintain sovereignty over the West Bank indefinitely. In response, Shamir pointedly declared that Israel would never relinquish Judea and Samaria.<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Ben Aharon declared that Israel would never negotiate on the basis of land for peace.<sup>6</sup>

For Shamir and the Israelis who supported him, Arab terror and warfare is seen as a continuation of the long history of efforts to destroy the Jewish people. (According to poll data, some 60% of Jewish Israelis believed that the ultimate Arab objective continued to be the destruction of Israel, despite the peace talks.)<sup>7</sup> From this perspective, the silence and even cooperation of the rest of the world in the face of Arab violence is evidence of the continuation of these basic attitudes towards Jews. Nothing Israel could do, short of committing national suicide, would satisfy this hostile world.

On this basis, Shamir had opposed the peace agreement with Egypt and the return of the Sinai, and now, formal negotiations, particularly in the form of an international conference, would lead to massive pressure from all sides to force Israel to give up more land and make other concessions. If Israel agreed, it would weaken national security, and if Jerusalem refused, Israel would be blamed for the collapse of the process. The Arabs, Shamir was convinced, had no interest in making peace with or accepting the legitimacy of Israel, and each of the proposals and efforts to begin negotiations posed a dangerous trap that could only lead to greater danger. Any process of negotiation was seen as a "slippery slope", and once movement started, Israel would lose control, and be forced to make dangerous concessions. The status quo, in which Israeli maintained control over Judea and Samaria, and the Golan Heights, was least dangerous.

However, Shamir was also realistic, and recognized that outright rejection of the American initiative would be very costly. He therefore sought to delay the process, until the Americans lost interest, as had happened consistently over the previous four decades. By including the Labor party in the government, Shamir also hoped to present a united leadership, and block attempts to undermine his government by appealing to the opposition.

Immediately after forming the new government, and in response to the American diplomatic pressure, Shamir began to develop and discuss a proposal in response to all

the pressure for negotiations with the Palestinians and Jordan. The Israeli initiative was largely based on Yitzchak Rabin's January 1989 plan for elections in Judea and Samaria, and represented a major change in policy. Shamir outlined the proposal in a trip to Washington in April 1989, stressing the agenda for negotiations would be based on the autonomy plan outlined in the Camp David agreements, and insisting that direct talks with the heads of the Arab states must precede negotiations with the Palestinians. If this stage could be reached, elections would be held for 10 Palestinian representatives who would negotiate with Israel for a 5 year autonomy arrangement. Once agreement on this phase was reached, and the autonomy period began, the final status of the areas would be negotiated. Although Shamir had no expectations that this process would lead to an end to the conflict with the Arabs, he realized that he had little choice to go along, albeit slowly, and wait for a change in the international climate.

Even this limited proposal, and, more importantly, the signs of engagement in the political process that could force Israel to make concessions, immediately created opposition from the Israeli right. Shamir was accused of allowing the Americans and the Labor party to make policy. Within the Likud, a triumvirate of Ariel Sharon, Yitzhak Modai, and David Levy (all of whom lost major Cabinet positions when Shamir chose to form another coalition government with Labor, and, in the case of Sharon and Levy, hoped to succeed Shamir as party leader) sought to galvanize opposition in order to capitalize politically on the fears of these negotiations. They succeeded in gaining a formal statement from the Likud Party that limited the scope of the official proposal even further. In response, Labor leaders, specifically Shimon Peres, threatened to leave the government. This crisis was defused when Shamir affirmed the initial proposal, without the limitations demanded by his party.

The PLO rejected Israeli restrictions on the inclusion of East Jerusalem and the proposed agenda for negotiations, and Baker continued to press all sides. To break the impasse, he suggested direct talks between Israel, Egypt, and the US. Shamir, under pressure internally, and with little interest in hurrying the process, rejected Baker's plan, but Peres and Rabin accepted it. In October, the inner cabinet split evenly in response to an Egyptian invitation to discuss the process with Palestinian representatives in Cairo. At this point, the Israel's hydra-headed government spoke with many voices; Shamir was contradicted within the Likud by the hard-liners, and externally by Peres, (who was active in foreign policy despite his responsibilities in the Treasury) and, to a lesser degree, Rabin. Each major figure met with American officials separately, and although Bush and Baker may have been attempting to play them off against each other, in the end, confusion reigned.

From here until the collapse of the government in March 1990, there was little change. Proposals were made, discussed, revised, and criticized, but the policy, or lack of

such, remained the same. Although this government collapsed due to a variety of personal and political factors, substantively, the rejection of the Baker plan was a major contributor.

After a few months of wrangling, in which Peres tried and failed to form a government, Shamir presented a cabinet dominated by the Likud. From this point on, the direct opposition to the peace talks increased. With Peres and Rabin gone, the ideologically oriented and unpragmatic smaller right-wing Tehiya and Moledet parties entered the government, and their influence increased. Although Shamir appointed his ally, Moshe Arens, as Defense Minister, the hard-liners that had opposed Shamir's "concessions" to Baker gained power, with David Levy becoming Foreign Minister, and Modai Finance Minister. Modai soon lost interest in the peace talks, and Levy, under the tutelage of Baker, became a dove (compared to his previous very hawkish positions), but Ariel Sharon's power was a growing internal threat. As Housing Minister, Sharon greatly accelerated funding for settlements in Judea and Samaria, and for the purchase (or recovery) of property in the Moslem Quarter of East Jerusalem. In this alignment, Shamir seemed to be a pragmatic centrist.

This process was interrupted by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990, and provided the diversion Shamir had expected to shift international attention away from the peace efforts. However, in 1991, following the war, the United States resumed its pressure, (see detailed discussion below). After further conflict regarding the Palestinian representatives, most Israeli demands were accepted, including limits on Palestinian representation, limitations on the agenda, and the two-stage approach to the negotiations. As a result, Shamir finally agreed to participate in negotiations, but he still had no enthusiasm for this process, or hope that it would lead to anything positive for Israel.

The Madrid conference, which formally inaugurated this process, finally took place in October 1991, and Shamir's opening statement was generally considered to be an accurate representation of the Israeli consensus. This marked the first time in over 40 years that representatives of the Syrian government agreed to sit face to face with Israeli leaders, and this was an important achievement. Among Israelis who favored the negotiations but wanted the national interest defended by a strong leader who would be able to match the demands and tactics of Palestinian and Syrian negotiators, and who could be counted on to get the "best deal" for Israel, Shamir's policy gained support. At this point, polls indicated that if elections had been held, Labor would only have received 22 seats in the Knesset.<sup>8</sup>

However, the bilateral talks that began immediately afterwards reached an impasse. The Palestinians and the Arab states demanded an Israeli commitment for the exchange of "land for peace", while Shamir insisted on "peace for peace". This policy

was criticized as obstructionist, not only by Labor and the Left, but also by some members of Likud, including Foreign Minister David Levy. Instead of being tough in order to get Israel "the best deal", Shamir seemed to be intent on blocking the negotiations completely.

## FROM BAD TO WORSE: RELATIONS WITH WASHINGTON

Throughout this process, American-Israeli relations declined continuously, and were very tense in the months prior to the elections. In addition to the conflicts over the peace process, the strategic relationship, that had been developed over the previous decade, was undermined by a series of inspired leaks to the press from the American government.<sup>9</sup> These tensions had been growing steadily worse for the previous four years. In October 1988, US Secretary of Defense Frank Carlucci attacked pro-Israel lobbyists and Congressmen who support them for opposing American arms sales to Arabs, claiming that this could cost "billion of dollars worth of jobs".<sup>10</sup> Robert Dole, the Republican leader in the US Senate, spoke of reducing economic and military aid to Israel.

The most intense conflict, however, surrounded the peace process. In a May 1989 speech before the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Baker placed the blame on Israel for the conflict, and seemed to echo Arab propaganda, demanding an end to the "unrealistic vision of a greater Israel" and calling on Israel to reach out to Palestinians as "neighbors who deserve political rights." From an American Secretary of State, public expressions of hostility towards Israel, particularly in a forum such as AIPAC, was unprecedented. At increasingly frequent intervals, Baker warned that if the Israeli government did not like his proposals, the US would endorse the convening of the international conference so disliked by Shamir, or turn to the UN.

The conflict intensified after March 1990, when the coalition government finally broke down. The US was then forced to deal exclusively with Shamir, who did not establish warm relations with the American leadership. Shamir continued to reject Baker's five point plan, even after most of the Israeli demands had been accepted. Frustrated by this process, Baker sarcastically provided the White House telephone number and suggesting that Shamir call when he was "serious about peace".

These events served to reinforce Shamir's distrust of the outside world, which was seen as hostile and willing to sacrifice Israel and the Jewish people for their own interests. Although the Americans had occasionally acted contrary to this model, Bush and Baker, in contrast to Reagan and Schultz, lacked personal and emotional links to the American Jewish community or to Israel.<sup>11</sup> The prominence of Jews in the State Department and National Security Council provided little comfort. They were seen by

Israelis as officials of the US government whose presence acted to legitimate pressure on Jerusalem and they were not "true" Zionists who had chosen to make Aliya and live in Israel, sharing the fate of the Jewish people.

The interactions between Jerusalem and Washington during and after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Gulf War served to increase the conflict and Shamir's distrust of the US. Between August 1990, when Iraq invaded Kuwait, and February 28, 1991, when the US declared a unilateral cease-fire and the war with Iraq ended, the US invoked the framework of strategic cooperation to request that Israel act with "restraint". Despite Saddam's threats to use chemical weapons, the IDF did not attack Iraqi missile sites or command centers. When the war began and Scud missiles began to hit Israeli cities, no retaliation attacks were initiated. US envoys, led by Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, came to Israel to request continued restraint in order to maintain the political cohesion of the anti-Saddam coalition, and pledged to destroy the Scud launchers and the Iraqi military threat. Acting against advice from some senior officers, Shamir decided not to order retaliatory attacks, or Israeli action to destroy the Scud launchers, even in the last days of the war.<sup>12</sup> President Bush and other American decision makers acknowledged the importance and inherent difficulty of the Israeli policy, and pledged increased military and political cooperation. In addition, the US condemned Jordanian and Palestinian support for the Iraqis, and images of Palestinians celebrating the Iraqi Scud attacks on Tel Aviv were expected to mark a major turning point in the US and international view of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

However, these pledges and images were quickly forgotten, and pressure on Israel resumed immediately after the cease fire agreements were signed with Iraq. Baker used the victory in the Gulf War, and the coalition that included Syria and Saudi Arabia, as a lever for getting the Arab-Israeli peace process moving. This time, with the Soviet Union in the process of disintegration, the Americans adopted the formula of an international peace conference as the best forum for negotiations. Baker made a number of trips to the region, including Israel, in the effort to define the basis for this conference. Shamir saw no reason to hurry this process, and reiterated the refusal to negotiate with members of the PLO or with representatives from East Jerusalem, or to provide a major role for the UN and the European Community, which, he argued, had an anti-Israeli bias.

These conditions and Shamir's policy led to further rancor with Washington. In addition, continued settlement activity in Judea and Samaria, and the Israeli request for \$10 billion in loan guarantees from the US initiated during the Gulf War, added another dimension to the conflict. The Administration sought to link the loan guarantees, requested for the absorption of Soviet Jewish immigrants, to an end to the settlement activities, but the Shamir government rejected this effort. In September

1991, President Bush angrily attacked the political effort, led by AIPAC, to gain Congressional approval of the loan guarantees. He spoke of the "powerful political forces" of the American Jewish community, thereby invoking terms that, according to some American Jewish leaders as well as Israeli officials verged on anti-Semitism.<sup>13</sup> In addition, Shamir's policy of restraint during the Gulf War was used against him, when Bush claimed that American troops had risked their lives to protect Israel. (By this time, many Israelis saw the policy during the war as a mistake. Despite the pledge to destroy the Iraqi military threat to Israel, the US failed to knock-out the Scud launchers during the war, and the Patriot missiles were ineffective, and actually increased the damage. The US had withdrawn its ground troops precipitously, before Iraq had destroyed its unconventional weapons, and Saddam was openly defying UN inspectors.)

In the beginning of 1992, the Bush administration accused Shamir of deliberately sabotaging the peace process by continuing to establish settlements, and Bush and Baker were accused of inherent hostility to Israel and anti-Semitism. In an interview with the Jerusalem Post in April 1992 Shamir blamed the US government for the failure to reach an agreement on the loan guarantees, claiming that Bush "promised the Arabs" that an agreement would not to be reached.<sup>14</sup> When former New York Mayor Edward Koch claimed that Baker had used an obscenity in speaking about "the Jews", this was the major headline in all the Israeli newspapers, and was cited as evidence of the Secretary of State's views and the basis of his policies.

As a result, the state of American-Israeli relations became a central issue in the Israeli elections. Beyond the substantive political differences, including the conflict over settlements the loan guarantees, the peace process, and the conduct of the Gulf War, American behavior and policy was interpreted as evidence that ultimately, Israel stood alone, and even the most supportive outsiders were willing to sacrifice Israeli interests for their own goals, or were inherently anti-Semitic. As will be discussed below, these perceptions were expressed and debated intensely in the election campaign.

## Europe and the Third World

Paradoxically, despite Shamir's overall distrust of the outside world, and the isolation that was seen to be the lot of the Jewish people, Israel's international position improved markedly in the past few years. As noted in the Likud campaign platform, the number of states with which Israel had diplomatic relations grew steadily. In its last days, the Soviet Union had stopped its unabated hostility towards Israel, allowing hundreds of thousands of Jews to emigrate, reduced the military and diplomatic support for the Arabs, and established diplomatic ties unconditionally, as had been demanded by Shamir, with Israel. The eastern European states, including Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, etc. established political, economic, and, in some cases,

economic and military ties with Israel. Links with China, India, and many African states were improving as well, and Israeli isolation in international bodies, including the United Nations, was also diminishing. (In 1991, the General Assembly formally voted to repeal the infamous resolution equating Zionism with racism.) The number of Israeli diplomatic personnel around the world expanded rapidly, and more and more representatives participated in international events.

Yet, at the same time, relations with the western European powers, such as France, Britain, and Germany, and with the European Community and its institutions, continued to deteriorate between 1988 and 1992. Europeans generally took the Arab side in the conflict with Israel, continued to sell arms to the Arab states (they were the primary sources for Iraqi weapons, including missiles and chemical and nuclear facilities), held talks and gave diplomatic recognition to the PLO, and sought to link economic ties with Israel to political concessions.

In addition, Shamir and members of his government were very aware of the rising anti-Semitism in Europe, both in the former Soviet satellites, such as Hungary, Poland, and East Germany, and in countries such as France and West Germany. The election of Kurt Waldheim as President of Austria brought an angry response from the Israeli government. From Israel's perspective, Waldheim's Nazi past, and the hostility he showed towards Israel during his period as United Nations Secretary General made him anathema. The absence of a forceful response to the rise in anti-Semitism was considered to be symptomatic of a hostile world.

## THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

According to a Gallup Poll taken for the Jerusalem Post and published on March 29 1992, 39% of all voters ranked security as the most important issue in the elections, and 22% considered the peace talks to be the primary issue. However, among voters who identified themselves as likely to vote Labor, the two issues ranked equally at 39%. For Likud voters, 58% considered security as the key issue, but 20% still ranked the peace talks as the most important issue. (51% of Meretz voters declared that the negotiations were the key issue.)

Within this framework, the sharp divisions over how to approach the peace process and the status of Judea and Samaria, that have characterized Israeli politics for over two decades, remained.<sup>15</sup> The population continued to be split between those who favored some form of territorial compromise, either in the form of a Palestinian State or Jordanian-Palestinian federation, and those favoring solutions ranging from limited autonomy to annexation and transfer of the Palestinian population. According to public opinion polls, the Madrid conference and the beginning of negotiations increased support for autonomy for the Palestinians (from 23% in 1991 to 36% in

1992), while support for a Palestinian State and territorial withdrawal declined from 25% to 18%.<sup>16</sup> Thus, autonomy was clearly the preferred option, and central question in the campaign was which party would be best able to appeal to the centerist voters. (Table 1)

### The Role of Rabin

For almost two decades, Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres have fought for the leadership of the Labor Party. In 1992, after Peres had led the party to defeat in four successive elections, a newly adopted system of primary elections led to the selection of Rabin as head of the party and candidate for Prime Minister. Peres and his followers, such as Yosef Beilin, Haim Ramon, Avraham Burg, and Yael Dayan, constituted the left-wing of the party, opposing settlements, favoring talks with the PLO, withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, and often joining with groups such as Peace Now. Rabin, in contrast, took a center-right position, generally favoring some form of settlement with the Palestinians, but not full withdrawal. As a former Chief of Staff, and Defense Minister during the "intifada", Rabin was seen as more hard-line, and less willing to take risks for national security, or to be forced into making dangerous concessions.

The choice of Rabin as party head was in many ways an anomaly for Labor. In the primary elections to select Knesset nominees, the left-wing was far more successful, and the party platform reflected a "left-wing" tilt. In many respects, Rabin's primary victory can be attributed to rank and file rejection of Peres' leadership and personality, and not necessarily to the political differences between them. At the same time, there is evidence to support the claim that the members of the Labor party chose Rabin in the hope that he would be more likely to gain the support of potential supporters who favored making concessions if they would lead to peace, but wanted to proceed cautiously.<sup>16</sup> Thus, although Rabin was the party's leader and selection for Prime Minister, the platform and many of the other leaders and potential ministers were from the left wing.

### The "Peace Issue" in the Likud Campaign

In developing its campaign themes, the Likud was clearly faced with a dilemma. Public opinion polls showed broad support for the negotiation process, and for exchanging "land for peace" in some form. Indeed, it was, in part, this broad national consensus that forced Shamir to finally agree to participate in the process that began in Madrid. However, Shamir and the Likud were also clearly unenthusiastic about these negotiations, and, as noted above, did not expect them to go far. In his campaign, Shamir had to somehow link these divergent tendencies into a consistent whole.

The difficulty of this task is illustrated in the text of the Likud's election platform. The first section stated "The government under the leadership of the Likud will continue to place primary emphasis on the desire for peace and will not spare any resources to advance this goal." It went on to promise to continue direct negotiations between Israel and the Arab states, with the objective of reaching formal peace treaties with Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. Regarding the Palestinians, or, in the terms of the platform, the Arab residents of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, the Likud proposed continued talks with the goal of reaching an interim autonomy agreement based on the Camp David formula of 1978. However, the Likud excluded any territorial concessions or an independent Palestinian state, noting that the "Arab people" can realize their goal of sovereignty in the 21 states that already exist.

In the campaign itself, the Likud began with a personal attack on Rabin, that failed (and probably helped to increase Rabin's stature). Later, when the campaign began to emphasize substance, the issue of the peace process and the differences between the Labor and Likud approaches (and, it should be noted, not Rabin vs. Shamir) were central. In its campaign material, the Likud charged that if Labor formed the next government, its policies would be determined by the Left, including Peres, Beilin, and coalition partners from Meretz (the party led by Shulamit Aloni, and formed by CRM, Shinui, and Mapam).

Responding to the popular support for the peace negotiations, even among Likud supporters, Shamir sought to counter the image of implacable opposition. Addressing an election rally, Shamir charged that "Labor's politicians are being driven out of their minds when they see the peace process progressing and the expansion of Israel's international ties."<sup>15</sup> The Likud began its television advertising by stressing its foreign policy achievements, and throughout the campaign, party campaign material included photos of Shamir in Madrid. Other spokesmen, including Binyamin Netanyahu argued that only the Likud "knows how to negotiate with the Arabs". Shamir's ability to extract concessions from the Arabs while losing minimal ground was highlighted by the tenaciousness with which the Israeli team conducted the bilateral talks with the Palestinian-Jordanian representatives (beginning in the hallway of the US State Department) and with the Syrians.

According to Likud campaign speeches, a Labor government, whether under Rabin or any other leader, would "give away the store" in the negotiation, and would be ready to withdraw from almost all of the West Bank, up to the very outskirts of Jerusalem.<sup>16</sup> The Likud circulated excerpts from a speech by Labor MP Haim Ramon in the Knesset, in which he stated that "during negotiations, all settlements in the administered territories, without exception, would be halted for one year."<sup>17</sup> The Likud also warned that a Labor government would negotiate with the PLO, leading the way for a PLO-dominated Palestinian state, that, according to opinion polls, the

majority of the public opposed as a threat to the existence of the Israel. The Likud cited Labor and Meretz politicians who had met with PLO officials, and sought to publish a photo-montage of Rabin and Arafat, but this was disallowed by the Election Commission. The Peace Issue in the Labor Campaign

The Labor Party's platform emphasized the issues of the peace process and foreign policy, in general. Reflecting the more idealistic views of the left and of Shimon Peres, the authors of the platform invoked the "vision of a new Middle East, in which there will be no wars or terrorism", and in which an economic common market and other forms of cooperative development would replace the arms race. In contrast to the Likud platform, Labor specifically referred to UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 on all fronts as the basis for peace talks with the Arab states and with the Palestinians, and to the need for "territorial concessions". The platform included a three stage plan: Full autonomy in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza (like the Likud, Labor used these terms and not "the West Bank"), and an interim agreement with Syria; permanent agreements based on territorial concessions and security arrangements; and then the development of a "new Middle East". The territorial concessions, however, would not include vital security areas or Jerusalem, and continued Israeli control over the Jordan valley was specified as necessary for security purposes. In discussion of the permanent arrangements, Labor rejected the creation of a Palestinian state, and the "right of return" claimed by the Palestinian refugees. Instead, each of the Arab states in the region would be called on to resettle a portion of the refugees.

To counter Likud's charges that this program camouflaged more dovish policies, and would endanger Israeli security, Labor stressed Rabin's achievement a soldier in the wars of 1948 and 1967. This image was enhanced during the campaign period, that included the 25th anniversary of the 1967 war and the reunification of Jerusalem. The public celebrations of these events focused attention on many Labor party leaders, such as Rabin, who was IDF Chief of Staff during the war, as well as Mordechai Gur, who led the forces that recaptured Jerusalem and the Jewish Quarter. The 1967 war, in many ways, is recalled as the high point of the State's history, and the association of the leaders of the Labor party with these achievements substantially diluted the charge that Labor was incapable of standing up to the Arabs. (Shimon Peres played no substantial role in the 1967 war, and had he been the leader, he would not have gained much from the anniversaries.)

During the campaign, Rabin asserted his leadership and sought to overcome the charges that a Labor government would be dominated by leftists and would make ready concessions to the Arabs. While emphasizing his centrist views on the peace process, Rabin also argued that negotiations with the Arabs were possible and not inherently dangerous for Israeli national security. Reiterating his opposition to full withdrawal from Judea and Samaria, he pledged that no withdrawals would take place

in the next four years he also supported the option of trading some "land for peace". His basic position, repeated throughout the period before the election, was based on opposition to a Palestinian state, rejection of a return to the pre-1967 borders, rejection of withdrawal from the Golan Heights, but negotiation of an agreement on Palestinian autonomy. Rabin emphasized the positive impact of autonomy for Israeli interests, and pledged to include much greater authority and reach an agreement far more quickly than Shamir was willing to consider. He also did not rule out eventual Israeli withdrawal from the densely populated areas of Judea and Samaria and from the Gaza Strip. This package, he argued, was "negotiable", in contrast to the proposals of the Shamir government, which would lead to stalemate, an end to negotiations, and, ultimately, the eruption of another major war.

Rabin also attacked Likud's "political settlements" (a term that he coined), arguing that many of these settlements do not contribute to security and were an impediment to negotiations.<sup>18</sup> As a former Chief of Staff and Defense Minister, Rabin's assertions that limited withdrawal did not pose unacceptable risks for national security were taken seriously. Rabin also opposed settlement activity in areas that were not important to security, and where, as in the case of densely populated areas, settlements would be a burden on security. Rabin was also able to cite his experience in negotiating disengagement accords with Egypt and Syria in 1975, as examples of agreements that enhanced Israeli security, as well as his support for the Camp David accords. He also had the support of many former generals and officials of the security services. (Labor refrained from formal links to a group of former security officials, known as the Council for Peace and Security the 1992 elections, and in contrast to the 1988 campaign, did not endorse the dovish plan published by this group.)

At the same time, Labor charged that Shamir and the Likud were not serious about the negotiations, and were merely going through the motions while waiting for the process to collapse. Haim Ramon asserted that the third round of the bilateral talks, held in Washington just prior to the elections, was designed primarily to mislead voters into believing that the Likud was interested in making progress. He charged Shamir with deceiving the public by creating the false impression that the talks were progressing "when it is quite obvious that the negotiations have reached a dead-end and the Likud is treading water."<sup>19</sup>

The implications of these different perspectives on the negotiations came into sharp focus a few days before elections, when the heads of Palestinian negotiating team crossed the Jordan River after meeting with PLO leader Yasir Arafat in Amman. This placed the Shamir government in a difficult position. Such meetings with PLO leaders were illegal under Israeli law, and the right wing of the Likud, as well leaders of other nationalist parties, demanded that they be arrested. In addition, inaction would have been interpreted as explicit acceptance of direct PLO participation in the negotiations.

However, if legal action were taken, it could have had introduced another obstacle in the peace process. In the end, no legal action was taken against the Palestinian representatives, but the issue illustrated Shamir's dilemma.

### The Peace Process and the Small Parties

The other parties formed a broad spectrum spanning both poles. On the right, leaders of Tehiya, Moledet and Zomet, as well as the National Religious Party (NRP) voiced opposition to the talks, warning of dangers of withdrawal from any territory, and pledging to block any such proposals. The NRP reiterated the religious and historical links between all of the Land of Israel, including Judea and Samaria, and the Jewish people and religion. In calling for annexation of Judea and Samaria, the NRP's platform rejected autonomy, on the grounds that this would inevitably lead to a Palestinian state. The NRP called for restricting the negotiations with the Arab population at the municipal level regarding their "obligations and rights".

On the left, Meretz leaders argued that in a coalition with Labor, they would serve as bridge with the Palestinians and a force for talks and mutual concessions. In sharp contrast to the Labor party, the Meretz platform included references to "occupied territories", demanded an immediate halt to settlements, accepted PLO participation in the negotiations, and did not reject a two-state solution.<sup>20</sup> A major Meretz rally featured actress Hana Merom, who lost her leg in 1969 in a terrorist attack, and called for reconciliation. The noted author Amos Oz declared he "wholehearted" support for Meretz, "because its positions represent the most responsible Zionist options... [It is time] to give Palestine to the Palestinians and receive Israel in return at long last."<sup>21</sup>

Although foreign policy was not an explicit issue for the ultra-orthodox Shas party, the peace talks and prospects of territorial concessions did play a role here as well. The leaders of Shas, such as Arye Deri and former Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef were generally associated with the views similar to those of Peres and the Labor party. They did not reject all territorial compromise, and supported the negotiations. At the same time, most of the potential Shas voters, who were Jews from Arab countries, were more hawkish. This led to some internal strains, but since this issue was not central to Shas, following the elections, Shas was able to join the Rabin government with Meretz without conflict over this issue.

### Relations with the United States

As noted above, in the two years before the elections, relations between the Shamir government and Washington had grown quite bitter, and this was also a major (and related) election issue. From the beginning of the campaign, Rabin sought to highlight Shamir's failure to "get along" with the Americans, and to note his own successes in

this area. Rabin reminded voters that he had served as the Israeli Ambassador in Washington after the 1967 war, when relations between the US and Israeli blossomed. He was also Prime Minister in 1975, during the period of Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy that led to the Second Sinai Disengagement Agreement and the Disengagement Agreement with Syria. (In sharp contrast to Shamir, Rabin tends to trust the United States, and believes that the American leaders are basically sympathetic to Israeli interests.)

Rabin and Labor charged that policies of Shamir and the Likud had brought these relations to a new and highly dangerous low.<sup>22</sup> They blamed the government for the series of incidents that threatened these relations, rather than the US. In a televised debate with Shamir on June 13, a few days before the elections, Rabin emphasized the need to improve relations with the US, and to make progress on the peace talks in order to improve national security. Rabin noted that the US was now the world's only superpower, and Israel must live with the Americans.

In 1992, as in the 1988 campaign, Shamir and the Likud sought to downplay the conflicts with the United States. The Likud platform claimed that US-Israel relations will continue to be based on the "shared values of freedom, democracy, and justice", and on mutual interests in the stability of the Middle East. Noting the periodic "differences of views", the platform notes that even under these circumstances, the "special relationship" is not undermined, and the shared values and interests demand continued cooperation.<sup>23</sup>

#### The American "Tilt" towards Rabin

Formally, the US government proclaimed its neutrality during the Israeli election campaign, but it was difficult to hide the Bush Administration's antipathy towards Shamir, and the hope that Rabin and Labor would form the next government. During the initial phase of the campaign, in April and May, the new American ambassador in Tel Aviv, William Harrop, maintained a low profile and made few public appearances in order to avoid appearing to influence the campaign. Any highly visible and explicit indication of preference would be interpreted as American interference in Israeli domestic politics, and would have backfired.

However, a series of incidents in April and May made it difficult to maintain this "low profile". The conflict over the loan guarantees continued, and hopes for a resolution and agreement withered. The "inspired" leaks regarding alleged Israeli resale of American military technology, and the dispatch of a group of American inspectors to verify that Israel had not transferred any Patriot missile technology to China was humiliating to the Shamir government, and caused a great deal of anger in Israel.

On the middle of May, just one month before the elections, Margaret Tutweiler, the highly visible State Department spokeswoman and confidant of Secretary of State Baker, announced that the US government considered UN General Assembly Resolution 194, of December 1948, to be still valid and relevant to the peace talks. The PLO had used this resolution as the spearhead of its propaganda campaign, attempting to distort the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and to create the impression that the major issue was the "right of return" for Palestinian refugees and their descendants. However, instead of dismissing this 44-year old resolution as irrelevant, the US government seemed to endorse the thrust of Palestinian propaganda, which essentially rejected the legitimacy of the Jewish state. The response in Israel was quick and widespread, and brought Israeli-American relations to a level of crisis.

These events supported the Shamir government's claims that the conflicts with the US were not the result of differences over policies, but rather, inherent hostility on the part of the American leadership, and Bush and Baker in particular. Indeed, despite American claims that each of these incidents had an independent origin, from Jerusalem, they appeared to be the result of an "atmosphere" that encouraged such attacks. This view was held outside of Israel as well. In an article in the New Republic, Robert Tucker argued that the US administration had decided to support efforts to remove Shamir from power in order to create a more "compliant" government in Jerusalem. (Tucker notes that Bush and Baker failed to remove Gaddafi or Saddam Hussein from their positions, but it succeeded in the case of Shamir.)<sup>24</sup> The pressures directed against the Shamir government over the past two years were clearly aimed at changing Israeli policy, and the additional pressure during the election campaign kept the issue before the Israeli public.

At the same time, it should be noted that the extent of the American intervention was not a determining factor in the elections, and, particularly after the support for Resolution 194 was announced, was probably counterproductive to the American goals. The appearance of blatant intervention was seen to compromise Israeli sovereignty, and even supporters of Rabin, who agreed with the need to end "political settlements" and to make progress in the peace talks, resented the American role. Indeed, in some previous elections, American pressures and vocal disagreements with Begin and Shamir, increased their support.<sup>25</sup> Rather than responding angrily to the events and pronouncements emanating from Washington over the months prior to the elections, Shamir dismissed them as being unimportant, in part to show that relations with the US remained cordial, and, in part, in order to appear to be above the "mudslinging" campaign conducted by the Bush Administration.

The Impact of Foreign Policy on the Elections

In examining the basis for the outcome of the elections, it is important to note that foreign policy issues and the peace process were not the determining factors in the Labor victory. Personalities, the selection of Rabin to head the Labor Party, and disarray within the Likud were more important.

At the same time, the evidence indicates that Shamir overplayed his hand in the lead up to the Madrid conference, and the policy that he pursued once the negotiations had begun. The procedural delays and quibbles over the statements of Palestinian representatives or the location of the talks, that continued even after the Madrid conference, seemed substantively unjustified, and to hurt the Israeli position. The tactics, based on warning of the dangers of negotiations and surrender to the Arabs, that Shamir used successfully against Peres in the 1988 elections, failed to have the desired effect against the more centrist positions taken by Rabin.

In addition, the continuous conflict with the US seemed pointless. While there was no great love or respect for the Bush Administration, Israelis also know that good relations with the world's owning superpower and leading democracy are necessary. Bush and Baker were not going to be in power for ever, and their successors are likely to be sympathetic, but enough of the political and strategic cooperation had to survive in order to rebuild.

Shortly after the elections, Yitzchak Shamir was quoted as admitting that he intended to stretch out the negotiations for ten years, and to add half a million Jews to the population of Judea and Samaria.<sup>26</sup> Although he quickly denied the quote, such a strategy would be entirely consistent with his policies and perspectives. Shamir saw no real hope for peace, and expected that by dragging out the process, the outsiders who insisted on the negotiations, and the US in particular, would tire and turn their attentions to other issues and regions.

In contrast, Rabin and the members of his government had a more optimistic view of the prospects for peace, and of the relations between Israel and the rest of the world. Draft guidelines for the new government published on July 1 1992 stressed the goal of reaching a peace agreement. "The government will pursue the peace process in the region with all of the Arab states and the Palestinians without pre-conditions." Autonomy in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza was declared to be the intermediate goal, and Egypt was named as a "partner in the peace process and will act to improve mutual understanding between the people of Israel and the people of Egypt". Finally, the guidelines noted that "The government will vigilantly pursue the deepening and improvement of the special relationship between the United States and Israel" ...<sup>28</sup>

In presenting his government to the Knesset on July 13 1992, Rabin explicitly acknowledged the philosophical differences between himself and Shamir regarding

the role of Israel in the world. Citing the drastic changes in the world, Rabin argued that "No longer do we have to be a 'people that dwells alone' and no longer is it true that the 'whole world is against us.' We must overcome the sense of isolation that has held us in its thrall for almost half a century. We must join the international movement towards peace, reconciliation and cooperation that is spreading over the entire globe - lest we be the last to remain, all alone, at the station."<sup>29</sup>

Working rapidly to demonstrate that this view had triumphed, Rabin went to the United States, met with President Bush, and returned with the loan guarantees (in exchange for a freeze on "political settlements"). He presented the Palestinians and Syrians with radical new proposals, and transferred the burden of response to them. Instead of threatening sanctions on Israeli technology exports, the US promised to increase Israeli access to American technology, to expand strategic cooperation, and to preserve Israel's "qualitative edge".

Of course, doubts about the prospects for success of this policy continue to exist among the Israeli public. There are major questions regarding the interest of the Palestinians and Syrians in trading concessions, or in reaching a compromise with Israel. Terrorism continues, as does the hostile propaganda, reflecting the underlying Arab rejection of Israeli legitimacy and the right of the Jewish State to exist. Relations with the US are also uncertain, and the wide gap between the American pledges vis-a-vis Israel and the policy that is implemented remain. Less than one month after pledging renewed cooperation with Israel, President Bush sought to boost his reelection campaign by announcing the sale of 75 advanced F-15 aircraft to Saudi Arabia, clearly threatening to undermine the Israeli qualitative edge. A few days later, the announcement of arms sales to Taiwan led the Chinese government to resume the transfer of missiles and nuclear weapons technology to Iran and Syria. The results of the American elections, and the beginning of the Clinton administration seemed to present opportunities for repairing Israeli-American relations, but many questions remained, and the potential for future conflict continued.

If, before the next elections, the policies of the Rabin government elicit increased Arab acceptance of Israeli legitimacy and rights to sovereignty, gain significant concessions that enhance Israeli security in the long term, and maintain cooperative arrangements with the United States, the optimistic view of Israel's position in the world will become stronger. However, if the Arab approach to the peace process continues to focus on extracting unilateral concessions from Israel, and if the strains and conflict in the American-Israeli relationship return, and the pressures that characterized the Shamir period reappear, the sense of historic isolation and hostility are likely to return as well.

## REFERENCES:

1. Alexander George, "The Operational Code: A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision Making" *International Studies Quarterly* 13, No. 2, June 1969.
2. Gerald M. Steinberg, "Israel Among the Nations: Foreign Policy in the 1988 Election Campaign" in *Who's the Boss: Israel at the Polls 1988-89*, edited by Daniel Elazar and Shmuel Sandler, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1992
3. Daniel Elazar and Shmuel Sandler, "Who is the Boss Today? Coalition Government in Israel and the Need for Electoral Reform", in *Who's the Boss: Israel at the Polls 1988-89*, pp. 277-301
4. *Washington Post* March 22, 1989; *New York Times*, April 17 1989
5. *New York Times*, April 17 1989.
6. *Washington Post*, April 11 1989
7. Asher Arian, "Israel and the Peace Process: Security and Political Attitudes in 1993", Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies Memorandum No. 39, Tel Aviv University, February 1993, p.2
8. Shalom Yerushalmi, *Kol Hair*, June 19, 1992, p. 56
9. In March 1992, Sherman Funk, the Auditor General of the US State Department issued a report asserting that a "major recipient of American military aid" had illegally transferred weapons with American components, or based on technology developed in the US, to third parties, including China. Unofficially, it was made clear that Israel was "the unnamed state". At the same time, the US press published a series of reports based on leaks from "senior intelligence sources" claiming that Israel had also transferred components from the Patriot BMD system (or even a Patriot missile) to the PRC. These reports, which were later shown to lack any factual basis, were seen to be politically motivated and designed to weaken support for and cooperation with Israel. See United States Department of State Office of Inspector General, *Report of Audit: Department of State Defense Trade Controls*, Washington DC, March 1992
10. *Washington Post* October 22 1988
11. See Steven L. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan* Chicago University Press, 1985; and Steven L. Spiegel "U.S.-Israeli Relations in the Post Cold-War Era" *Jerusalem Letter/Viewpoints*, January 1990
12. See the analysis in Gerald M. Steinberg "The Iraq-Israel Deterrence Relationship: Lessons from 'The Mother of all Battles'", in *Regional Security in the Middle East: Arab and Israeli Concepts of Deterrence and Defense*, edited by David Wurmser, United States Institute for Peace, Washington, D.C., forthcoming.
13. *International Herald Tribune*, "Israeli Calls Bush and Anti-Semite", September 16 1991; *Maariv*, September 20 1991; *Baltimore Jewish Times*, September 20 1991, p.24
14. *Jerusalem Post*, April 17 1992
15. Guy Bechor, "They Prefer to Separate, and Return Territory", *Ha'aretz* March 11,

1993

16. See public opinion data published by Gad Barzilai and Efraim Inbar, "Do Wars Have an Impact?: Israeli Opinion After the Gulf War", *Jerusalem Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1992; Asher Arian reports somewhat a similar trend, but based on different question, found support for autonomy as the preferred option had grown from 24% in 1990 to 29% in 1993. See Arian "Israel and the Peace Process: Security and Political Attitudes in 1993", pp.8-9

16. This view is supported by public opinion surveys published in Asher Arian, "Israel and the Peace Process: Security and Political Attitudes in 1993".

15. *Jerusalem Post* May 1 1992

16. These assertions were based, in part, on the op-ed article written by Yitzhak Rabin that appeared in the *Jerusalem Post*, on June 1 1992, p.6

17. *Jerusalem Post* April 3 1992

18. *Jerusalem Post* April 3 1992

19. *Jerusalem Post* May 1 1992

20. Meretz Party Election Platform (Hebrew)

21. *Jerusalem Post*, May 4 1992

22. Labor Party 1992 Election Platform, p.7

23. Likud 1992 Election Platform, (Hebrew) p.2

24. Robert Tucker, "The Protectorate", *The New Republic*, August 10, 1992, pp.19-23

25. See Samuel Krislov, "Mutual Involvement in Electoral Politics: The Case of Israel and the United States", in *The Elections in Israel, 1981* edited by Asher Arian (Tel Aviv: Ramot Publications, 1983). See also Gerald Steinberg, "Israel Among the Nations: Foreign Policy and the Peace Process", in *Who's the Boss: Israeli Elections 1988-9*

26. David Hoffman, "Shamir Plan was to Stall Autonomy", *Washington Post*, June 27 1992, p.A13

28. *Haaretz*, July 1 1992,

29. Address by Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin to the Knesset, July 13 1992. (Translated from the Hebrew text.)