

Peace, Security, and Terror in the 1996 Elections

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PEACE, SECURITY AND TERROR IN THE 1996 ELECTIONS

Analysts of Israeli politics and policy are fond of quoting Henry Kissinger's assertion that Israel has no foreign policy, only domestic policy. However, as the 1996 elections clearly demonstrated, the causal relationship is often reversed. The issues of national security and the political relations with the Palestinians and the Arab states are central to Israeli political life, and differing approaches, both in terms of policy and ideology, are determining factors in domestic politics.

In contrast to the 1988 and 1992 election campaigns, in which foreign policy issues played a limited (but still significant) role in 1996, the evidence clearly indicates that these were the primary factors, at least in the election of the Prime Minister. As will be demonstrated in this chapter, ideological approaches to the Arab- Israeli conflict, the Land of Israel, and the negotiations process were less significant than pragmatic concern for personal security. Although some Israeli voters remain ideological, as seen among segments of Labor and Likud voters, as well as Meretz and Moledet (and to a lesser degree, the NRP), the size of these groups are diminishing, the importance of ideology continues to decline. (The support for the non-ideological Third Way party, and for Yisrael B'aliyah also underlines this trend.)

Rather, the continuing terrorism and the dissatisfaction of Jewish swing voters with the negotiation process as conducted by the incumbent government were deciding determinants in this election campaign. These concerns overwhelmed the negative impact of the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin on Netanyahu and the Israeli right, Netanyahu's perceived inexperience and the questions regarding his personal life, the disunity in the Likud-Gesher-Zomet "alliance", and the economic successes of the Labor government.

After the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin, public opinion polls showed that Shimon Peres held a lead of between 25 and 30%, and over the next two months, the head of the Labor Party maintained a 10 to 15% lead over Netanyahu. Although the differences were less dramatic, the same trends were seen in polls regarding party preferences, with the Labor/Meretz coalition holding a substantial advantage over the right-wing parties.

However, this situation changed dramatically after four brutal terrorist bombings at the end of February and beginning of March 1996. Immediately after, polls showed that Netanyahu and Likud had closed the gap, and in some cases, were marginally ahead. As will be seen below, this wave of terrorism led to intense public criticism of the Oslo accords, of Arafat's continued anti-Israeli rhetoric and his failure to take action against the Islamic extremists, such as Hamas, and of the ineffectiveness of the government's responses. At the same time, Netanyahu's actions and statements during

this period were designed to present the image of a responsible statesman, and the head of the Likud emerged as a credible national leader.

Between early March, following the suicide bombing at the Dizengoff Center in Tel Aviv, and the elections on May 29, the polls did not change significantly. Netanyahu and Peres continued to be essentially even (the differences in the polls were within sampling errors). Peres attempted to regain his earlier lead by emphasizing security issues. He delayed the Israeli redeployment from Hebron until after the elections, and, in late April, launched a major military campaign in response to rocket attacks on Northern Israel ("Grapes of Wrath"). However, these actions appeared to be a case of "too little, too late", and had no apparent impact on the elections. The same is true for the ambiguity of the Palestinian National Authority, with respect to changing the Palestinian Charter and the increasingly visible support for Peres from President Clinton and the US government. In the debate between the two major candidates for Prime Minister two days before the polling, Netanyahu emphasized the theme of security, and this exchange solidified Netanyahu's small overall lead (and the 11% margin among Jewish voters).

Other factors, such as the Haredi vote, which went overwhelmingly to Netanyahu, balancing the Arab vote for Peres, and the support Netanyahu received from immigrant groups (65%) and from Jews from Arab states, clearly influenced the outcome. However, polls indicate that structural factors would not have been enough to elect Netanyahu before the wave of terrorist bombings, even allowing for significant inaccuracy in the polling data and voter responses.

The campaign was also affected by other aspects of the Middle East negotiations, including the lack of visible progress in discussions with Syria, and the Egyptian government's growing hostility to cooperation with Israel, despite the 1979 Peace Treaty. In contrast, closer relations with Jordan, Oman, Qatar, Morocco and Tunisia served to offset these negative developments, at least in part. The differing scenarios for the next four years, particularly with respect to Syria, were of importance in voter perceptions. Widespread concerns over evidence that Peres and the Labor Party were preparing for a major agreement with Damascus, which would have included Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights, played a role in the elections. In response to these concerns, Peres extended Rabin's previous commitment to a national referendum on any agreement with Syria.

For his part, Netanyahu was confronted with the need to appeal to the non-ideological centrist swing voters who had supported Rabin in 1992, but were dissatisfied with the results and concerned about the security implications. Polls showed that the majority of Israelis were in favor of maintaining the negotiation process and opposed to reversing the results of the Oslo agreements. To appeal to them, Netanyahu sought to

reduce the role of ideology in his campaign speeches and appearances, and to emphasize pragmatism and a commitment to a continuation of the negotiations. Despite the ideological opposition of some members, the Likud platform accepted the Oslo agreements, and the party slogan was "peace with security". The Likud leadership did not call for a return of the Israeli military to Gaza or to the large Palestinian cities that had been incorporated in the second (interim) agreement. Netanyahu also met with King Hussein and Crown Prince Hassan of Jordan, and pledged to meet with Palestinian officials (despite his very harsh criticism of Rabin and Peres for meeting with Arafat in 1993). In the very close race that developed after the suicide bombings, the two candidates for Prime Minister sought to obtain the support of the swing or undecided voters in the center of the Israeli political spectrum, whose view of the negotiation process was largely determined by the impact of this process on perceptions of personal security.

Prelude: The Negotiation Process and Israeli Politics -1992 to 1996

The period between 1992 and 1996 was marked by fundamental changes in the political structure of the Middle East. The series of agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, beginning with the 1993 Declarations of Principles, (the Oslo accord), as well as the 1994 Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty, and the establishment of trade and low-level diplomatic relations with a number of North African and Gulf States, all were at the center of these changes. The formula of "land for peace" was the agreed basis for developing what Shimon Peres envisioned as "The New Middle East". This process began with Israel military withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho in 1994, and a number of other cities in the Judea and Samaria regions of the West Bank (under the interim agreement of September 1995), and transfer of control to a Palestinian National Authority headed by PLO leader Yasser Arafat. In addition, negotiations with Syria had begun, with the goal of reaching an agreement which would involve Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights and some degree of "normalization" in relations between Jerusalem and Damascus.

In the 1992 elections, the future of relations between Israel and its neighbors (the Palestinians and the Arab states) was the subject of intense debate and a significant (but not deciding) factor. The narrow majority that allowed the Labor Party and Meretz to form a government under the leadership of Yitzhak Rabin was, in part, a reflection of the perceived failures of the Shamir government to take advantage of the openings presented by the 1991 Gulf War and the negotiations that began after the Madrid conference. The lack of movement in these negotiations, and the continued conflict with the US government over what was seen by the Bush administration as Israeli intransigence with respect to both the Palestinians (which were represented in the Jordanian delegation), and the Syrians, led some centrist voters in Israel to support the Labor party in 1992. Rabin, who had defeated Peres in the leadership contest in

the Labor Party, presented himself as a pragmatic security oriented leader ("bitchonist") who would be willing to take prudent risks, but not to the degree that endangered Israeli security. Although favoring autonomy for the Palestinians, Rabin did not discuss negotiations with the PLO and Arafat.

After the elections, Rabin pledged a breakthrough in negotiations within one year. His first approach was towards the Syrians, which he viewed as the primary threat to Israeli security, following the 1979 Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, and therefore as the key to regional stability. This assessment was shared by a number of Israeli decision makers, including IDF Chief of Staff, Ehud Barak. However, despite significant changes in the Israeli negotiating team and the positions that were presented in the talks in Washington, the Syrian government failed to respond.

The focus then shifted to the Palestinian track. In contrast to the Shamir government, Rabin and Foreign Minister Peres, agreed to separate Palestinian and Jordanian delegations in the bilateral talks. However, progress was slow in these formal meetings as well, and it appeared that the year would pass without significant change in positions. In contrast to the policies under the previous government, which classified Arafat and the PLO as terrorists with whom any discussions were illegal, the new government authorized and encouraged contact and meetings.

During the spring and early summer of 1993, one of the many informal or track-two channels that had been used for off-the-record exchanges between Palestinian and Israeli academics and leaders assumed greater importance. Talks taking place in Oslo and sponsored by the Norwegian government intensified, and Palestinian and Israeli leaders became closely involved. In August 1993, a preliminary agreement had been drafted, consisting of mutual recognition and a Declaration of Principles, which included the outline for a three stage process leading to a permanent status agreement within five years.

This marked a fundamental change in relations between Israel and the Palestinians. In September, Rabin and Arafat participated in a signing ceremony on the White House lawn, that was climaxed by a handshake between the two leaders, (albeit, with clear discomfort on the part of Rabin). In May 1994, after 9 months of further negotiations and periodic crises, agreement on the first stage of the process was reached, and in June 1994, Israel withdrew from most of Gaza as well as Jericho. Shortly thereafter, Arafat returned triumphantly to Gaza, and the Palestinian National Authority began to function. Negotiations also began on the second, or interim stage, and in September 1995, after another series of crises and reconciliations, agreement was reached on the extension of Israeli withdrawal and autonomy for Palestinian cities. The agreement also specified details for elections under the PNA, and the creation of a legislative

body. The election, held in January 1996, formally confirmed Yasser Arafat as head of the PNA.

Within Israel, this period was marked by increasing political support for the negotiation process and the agreements. This support continued steadily, despite periodic crises, waves of terrorist attacks, and occasional statements by Arafat and other PLO leaders calling for a "jihad" to establish Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state, or to the "liberation" of all Palestinian or Arab lands. The peace treaty with Jordan, signed along the border in October 1994, and witnessed by President Clinton and other leaders, enhanced the standing and credibility of the process among Israeli voters.

These events created a sense that the long siege, that began even prior to 1948 was over, and Israel was no longer "a small isolated state surrounded by enemies". However, public opinion polls still showed a high degree of skepticism. In January 1996, over 60% of Israelis agreed with the statement that "most Palestinians have not come to terms with the existence of Israel and would destroy it if they could." Full approval of the autonomy process increased from 6% to close to between 20 and 30%, but was still short of a majority.

In response, the opposition parties, led by Likud and Netanyahu, were divided and had difficulty responding to these major diplomatic successes. They argued on both ideological and pragmatic lines, predicting that the agreements would create a major security threat to Israel. They also accused Rabin of violating his 1992 campaign pledges. The initial reports of efforts to reach an agreement with Syria, and discussion of withdrawal from the Golan Heights led to public movements designed to block this process. The internal conflict was fueled by highly visible speculation and leaks in the press regarding the first settlements in the Golan that would be transferred to Syria. Large numbers of Israelis placed banners on their houses and stickers on their cars declaring opposition to withdrawal from the Golan. As a result of these pressures (which also come from some members of his own coalition), Rabin was pressed to pledge to hold a referendum on any agreement with Syria.

Terrorism continued, with periodic drive-by attacks against Israelis in Judea and Samaria, and in Gaza. In February 1994, Baruch Goldstein entered the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron and killed 29 Palestinians in February 1994. In the summer of 1994, a series of suicide bombings in Afula and Hadera, which killed 70 Israelis and injured many more, increased the focus on terrorism. In October, the kidnapping and killing of Nahshon Wachsmann, who was killed when an IDF rescue attempt failed, had a traumatic impact in Israel (over 50,000 people took part in a prayer vigil at the Western Wall) and forced Rabin to warn Arafat that the peace process was in danger. A few days later, a suicide bombing in a Tel Aviv bus took a heavy toll.

These attacks, the speeches by Arafat and other Palestinian leaders indicating support for terror and referred to the Islamic fundamentalist suicide bombers affiliated with Hamas as "martyrs", and the absence of visible action by the Palestinian authority eroded domestic support in Israel for the negotiation process. Opposition leaders such as Netanyahu, Benyamin Begin, Ariel Sharon, and David Levy claimed that instead of receiving peace in exchange for land, this process was leading to increased terror. They pointed to terrorist cells operating in Gaza, in the area under Palestinian control, and the failure to end their operation. The opposition demanded that the release of Palestinian prisoners (terrorists and members of the supporting network) be halted, and charged the government with turning responsibility for Israeli security over to the PLO.

In addition, Netanyahu and other critics called attention to what they termed the government's passivity in the face of the Palestinian Authority's violations of the 1994 agreement, including the lack of response to Israeli requests to extradite terrorists who participated in recent attacks against Israel. Continued attacks against Israeli forces and civilians from Southern Lebanon, conducted by Hizbollah, which, like Hamas, is a fundamentalist organization, were linked by Likud leaders to the continued Palestinian terrorism.

On January 22 1995, a Hamas suicide bombing at the Beit Leid junction killed 21 Israelis. This marked a major turning point in public perceptions of the peace process. President Weizman called for suspending the talks with the Palestinians, stating "we signed an agreement with Yasser Arafat as the leader of the Palestinians, now we should suspend the talks, not stop them, and tell Arafat to make more of an effort." Large demonstrations opposing government policy took place in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and Netanyahu declared "The government's present so-called peace policy has reached a disastrous dead end". The Rabin government responded by closing access to Israel for Palestinians, (approximately 100,000 Palestinian workers were employed in Israel, and this was the primary source of income for residents of Gaza, Judea and Samaria), suspending the release of prisoners, and halting preparations for the opening of the Gaza-Jericho transportation corridor through Israel. In a somber address to the nation, Rabin also acknowledged the possibility of a more permanent separation, in response to increased public support for such policies. Peres reportedly told Arafat that Israel is getting close to its "limit of patience" and demanded that Arafat take action against Hamas.

Although a period of relative calm stopped this erosion in public support, in August 1995, a bus bombing in Jerusalem that killed 5 and wounded 100 led to another round of demonstrations and response by the government, including closure and renewed discussion of separation. However, the negotiations for the second interim stage of the Oslo process resumed after a few days, and on September 28, this agreement was

finally signed. Once again, there was an elaborate signing ceremony in Washington, with the participation of Rabin, Arafat, and numerous heads of state. A few days later, another very large demonstration took place in Jerusalem in opposition to the policies of the Rabin government. Likud leaders addressed the rally, calling for the reversal of these policies. Netanyahu declared that "The Zionist public in Israel has not approved Oslo 2." (However, when the crowd chanted "Rabin is a traitor", Netanyahu signaled disapproval.)

These large rallies opposing government policy were an indication of a change in public opinion. In January 1995, following the Beit Leid attack, polls showed Rabin trailing Netanyahu by a narrow margin. Continued terrorism, including the August attack in Jerusalem reinforced this trend. However, in the aftermath of the assassination of Yitzchak Rabin on November 4, Netanyahu's standing plunged. In February, when Peres decided to hold early elections, the Prime Minister maintained a substantial lead over Netanyahu.

In a campaign speech delivered on February 12, Peres boasted of the government's achievements, declaring "No other government has a record in four years, except for that of the early years of the state." He described the peace with the Palestinians as "flourishing, unlike those in Ireland and Bosnia". Within two weeks, his vision of a New Middle East had been torn apart by another and more deadly series of suicide bombings. On February 25, two terrorist blasts took place; one in a bus in Jerusalem, killing 25 and wounding 50, and another at the Ashkelon junction in which two were killed and 34 wounded. One week later, another Jerusalem bus bombing killed 18, and the next day, a similar bombing in Tel Aviv took a similar toll.

As a result of these bombings (which had been planned to take place on a single day) support for the peace process was dramatically reversed. Polls showed that before the bombings, a substantial majority of Israelis felt that personal security had been enhanced by the process, but after these events, only 16.5% thought security had improved, while over 51% felt less secure. 63% supported suspension of negotiations with the Palestinians. This was translated into electoral terms, and Peres lost his substantial lead (10 to 15 percent) over Netanyahu in Israeli polls. In a series of public addresses to the nation, Peres was shaken and had difficulty responding to reporters' questions and in providing responses. The government imposed a closure on Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, and around Jerusalem, and demanded that Arafat "take decisive steps in order to block the activities of the Hamas and Islamic Jihad." Peres also announced a postponement of the IDF redeployment (withdrawal) from Hebron, scheduled for March 28.

This wave of bombings and Arafat's failure to prevent it placed the Prime Minister and the Labor party on the defensive. In interviews, Peres was asked repeatedly to

justify his policies in the wake of the suicide bombings. As both Prime Minister and Defense Minister, but without Rabin's military record to justify maintaining both portfolios, he was particularly vulnerable to criticism in the area of security failures. Issues of Peres' age and allegations of depression were also published. (Polls did not show a significant decrease in the support for the Labor Party, which maintained a steady level of the equivalent of 40 to 43 seats, reflecting the fact that the primary impact was on support for Peres and Netanyahu).

Although Arafat and the PNA began to take action against Hamas and terrorist groups, the Palestinian leader also continued to undermine Peres, repeating claims that the wave of terror was caused by an unholy conspiracy of Israeli "fanatics" who are members of a shadowy group of ex-IDF people, called "OAS," and Moslem extremists were behind the suicide bombings. The newly elected Palestinian Council members condemned the closure imposed by Israel without condemning the bombings which provoked it. Arafat failed to order the capture of "the engineer" (Yehya Ayash), who had planned many of the bus bombings in 1994 and 1995, and was living openly in Gaza. When Ayash was finally killed in an operation generally attributed to Israeli security, Arafat praised the Hamas terrorist as "a holy shahid" (martyr) and praised Dalal Al Mograbi, who was responsible for a series of terrorist attacks in the 1970s. Arafat also referred to an earlier terrorist as "the commander, the star, who established the first Palestinian republic in a bus"

In the wake of the national emergency triggered by this wave of terrorism, Netanyahu's image changed radically, from fiery opposition leader to statesman and potential leader. He told Likud activists to refrain from holding demonstrations for the two days of national mourning. After the first double bombing, Netanyahu called for unity and said "We won't enter into a political battle on a day like today. This is a day for uniting the ranks and that's how we will act"

Netanyahu also addressed a special session of the Knesset, which was broadcast live on radio and television. In this speech, he spelled out the central themes of his campaign. "In recent years we hoped and wished that perhaps the hatred of our enemies against us had reached an end. ... We are all partners in this hope for peace. And so we also hoped that our generosity and open arms would silence, and not by a little, the lust for murder of those from among our neighbors who seek our lives. But to my sorrow it becomes clear to us again and again, and each time in a more painful way, that our generosity is interpreted as weakness and our open arms are seen as surrender. And instead of reducing the terror, the terror increases; and instead of bringing us closer to peace and tranquillity, we don't have peace and we don't have tranquillity." In these reports, journalists gave prominence to the Likud's "restrained response" (In contrast, Tsomet leader Rafael Eitan said the attacks "proved that Prime Minister Shimon Peres does not know how to fight this murderous terror and is

leading the country to an impossible and false peace with terrorists, with encouragement from Meretz.")

Another step in Netanyahu's transformation from a radical opposition leader to responsible statesman and potential prime minister took place when Netanyahu and Peres were briefed together by the heads of the Israeli security system on March 3. He also released a five point program, including a halt to all talks with the Palestinians until it acts concretely to eliminate the terrorist infrastructure, a complete closure until this infrastructure is eliminated, complete freedom of action for the IDF and the security forces, and "the eradication of all centers of activity" of the PLO and Hamas in Jerusalem and its environs.

Peres and the Labor Party also lost credibility during this crucial period as a result of what was seen as an effort to manipulate the state-owned media for partisan purposes. After the Dizengoff bombing, the Palestinian police arrested Mohammed Abu Warda, who was charged with recruiting some of the bombers for Hamas. He was held in Jericho and from there, was interviewed by Israeli state television. Abu Warda claimed that Hamas had conducted this wave of attacks in order to help the Likud gain power in order to block the peace process. On the evening news, Peres was shown listening to the interview and nodding. He then said he wasn't surprised. "I had known this all along, but I did not want to fan the flames ... now the picture is complete." This appeared to be the result of collusion between Arafat and Peres. MK Binyamin Begin came to the television studio during the broadcast and denounced the episode as a cynical attempt to manipulate the Israeli public and place the blame for terrorism on the Likud. Other Likud leaders called Abu Warda's statement a "counterfeit confession" made under torture and threats.

In contrast, Netanyahu took the high ground, saying he is "willing to overlook and forgive Peres." In attempting to draw a contrast with his own actions, Netanyahu suggested that "In these days of flared tempers, Peres should have exercised leadership and sought to calm the storm. I hope he will take his words back and not repeat this failure in the future, though I am sure that Arafat will repeat his attempts to interfere crudely in our political process."

Thus, the combination of terrorism, the perceived weakness of the government's responses, the increased criticism of the peace process and the failure of Arafat to act to end terror, Netanyahu's "statesmanlike" policies and public appearances, and the Abu Warda affair served to change the relationship between the main candidates for Prime Minister. These events led to the disappearance of Peres' 15 point lead in the polls, and this lead never returned.

Impact Of Terror on Poll Results (Prime Minister)

Dahaf Poll published in Yediot Ahronot, Feb. 26, 1996,

If elections were held today:

- Peres 48%
- Netanyahu 46%
- Undecided 6%

If elections were held today for personal election of the Prime Minister, and Shimon Peres and Binyamin Netanyahu were the candidates, who would you vote for?

	(1995)		(1996)						
	Nov. 7/8	Dec. 5/6	Jan. 2/3	Jan. 30/31	Feb. 7/8	Feb. 13/14	Feb. 20/21	Feb. 27/28*	Mar. 5/6
Shimon Peres	54%	46%	50%	46%	51%	50%	50%	48%	46%
Binyamin Netanyahu	23%	28%	29%	30%	36%	37%	36%	48%	49%
Did not decide	12%	16%	12%	11%	5%	7%	8%	4%	5%
Won't vote	10%	1%	9%	13%	8%	6%	6%	+	+

+ Included in "Did not decide"

* After Jerusalem bus bombing

Poll Data on Party Preference

If there were elections for the Knesset today, which party would you vote for?
(number of mandates)

	(1995)			(1996)					
	13 th Knesset	Nov. 7/8	Dec. 5/6	Jan. 2/3	Jan. 30/31	Feb. 6/7	Feb. 20/21	Feb. 27/28	Mar. 5/6
Labor	44	46	44	44	44	45	45	40	43
Likud	32	30	31	31-32	29	36	35	40	43
Tzomet	8	6	5-6	6	5	*	*	*	*
Meretz	12	8	8-9	7-8	7	8	7	7	5
Moledet	3	2	3	2	-	1-2	1-2	2	2
NRP (Mafdal)	6	6	6	6	7	6-7	6	6	5
Torah Party	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Shas	6	5	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
Arabs/ Communists	5	6	6	6	7	7++	7	7	7
Gesher	-	2	2	3	4	3	2-3	3	%
Third Way	-	3	4	3	4	2	4	4	3
Israel B'Aliya	-	2	3	3	3	3	4	3	4
Shulamit Aloni	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	

* Survey presented "Likud Tzomet Bloc" - results appear in Likud figure.

% Levy Party added to Likud

++ Includes Ahmed Tibi

The Dahaf Institute survey was carried out for "Yediot Ahronot" on Tuesday and Wednesday (7 October/8 November) within days of the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin OBM and covered 501 interviewees and on Tuesday and Wednesday 5-6 December and covered 512 and Tuesday and Wednesday 2-3 January 1996 and covered 515, and Tuesday and Wednesday 30/31 January 1996 and covered 517, and Tuesday and Wednesday 6/7 February 1996 when details of the Likud/Tzomet bloc were not yet finalized and covered 508, and on 13/14 February and covered 505 and 20/21 February and covered 508 and on 27/28 February and covered 501 and on 5/6 March and covered 504 from a representative sample of the adult population in the country. The standard error is +/- 4 percentage points. (Published in "Yediot Ahronot" on November 10 and December 8 1995 and January 5, February 2, February 9, February 16, and February 23, March 1 and March 8, 1996)

While the wave of terrorism triggered a basic change in public perceptions and had a major role in determining the results of the elections, other issues related to the negotiation process between Israel and the Palestinians were also of importance. These issues included the final status issues, such as Jerusalem, Jewish settlements, boundaries, the prospects of a Palestinian state, and the question of the Palestinian Covenant.

JERUSALEM

The Likud's official election campaign opened on February 18 (before the wave of suicide bombings) with a publicity barrage focused on Jerusalem. A series of advertisements in the major media charged that if they were reelected, the Labor/Meretz coalition and Peres would "divide and give away Jerusalem". Although

Peres and other Labor party officials denied the charge, they were immediately placed on the defensive, and the charge was credible enough to require a response, and an official cabinet statement. (Labor Party Secretary-General Nissim Zvilli proposed a signed agreement to keep the Jerusalem issue out of the election campaign, and Netanyahu and Jerusalem Mayor and Likud MK Olmert dismissed the idea as "ridiculous".) The status of Jerusalem is a major issue for a majority of Israelis, which oppose any division of transfer of sovereignty from Israeli hands.

In the 1993 DOP (Oslo agreement), Israel and the Palestinians agreed to postpone discussion of this divisive issue until the permanent status talks. Since after the signing ceremony in Washington, however, Arafat spoke continuously about the goal of establishing a Palestinian state, with Jerusalem as its capital. In numerous public appearances, Arafat pledged to create a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, to which Peres responded by saying that Arafat is entitled to his dream.

The Palestinians also established a number of institutions in East Jerusalem, including a quasi-Foreign Ministry operating out of the Orient House. Palestinian security forces were also active in Jerusalem. The Israeli right saw these activities as violations of the Oslo accords, and while government officials such as Police Minister Moshe Shahal agreed, they did not take action, and the Likud charged that Labor's policies tacitly encouraged the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem.

Peres, like Rabin before him, pledged to keep Jerusalem undivided and under Israeli sovereignty, and denied reports that secret talks were already being held on this issue. In campaign speeches, he declared "Like a solid rock, we will stand firm on a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel." Similarly, Barak stated that in the final status talks, "our position will be that greater Jerusalem should remain undivided under our sovereignty, the eternal capital of Israel.

However, Rafael Eitan charged that secret negotiations on the "division of Jerusalem" were being held, and this "shows lack of honesty and demonstrates deceit, just as the Labor Party decided that the consensus on the Golan Heights issue in the last elections meant the subject could be taken off the agenda, only to later agree to give the Golan Heights to Syria with nothing in return."

Although vigorously denied by Peres and Labor, reports of secret "track two" negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian representatives on the final status issues, including Jerusalem, were published a few days later. These talks involved Yossi Beilin and Abu Mazan, as well as Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundak, who were centrally involved in the initial Oslo agreements. (Jordan also claimed the major role in East Jerusalem, and the link to the city was part of the Hashemite claim to legitimacy. These talks disturbed the Jordanian government, which remained formally

neutral during the campaign. Informally, King Hussein and Crown Prince Hassan provided some assistance for Netanyahu, meeting with him and his advisors during the campaign, thereby providing the Likud candidate with a basis for claiming to have good relations among Arab states.)

As Likud strategists recognized, Israeli public opinion strongly opposed any change in the status of Jerusalem. The systematic pillaging and deliberate destruction of the Jewish quarter that took place during the Jordanian/Palestinian occupation between 1948-1967 remained a major factor in public opposition to compromises on Jerusalem. Polls showed that 68% of Israelis supported moves to close official Palestinian offices, including the Orient House, operating in Jerusalem.

Although the impact of the Jerusalem issue in the campaign is difficult to measure, the centrality of this issue hurt Peres and Labor, and the revelations over the secret talks further damaged their credibility. In addition, this exchange was indicative of the public disquiet regarding the final status issues, such as borders, a Palestinian state, and future boundaries, and the difficulties and controversies with respect to relations with the PNA and with Arafat

The Present and the future in the Territories - Preferred and Likely Solutions.

Respondents were asked what solution for the territories they preferred; the results were:

- | | |
|---|-----|
| • Annexation and transfer | 9% |
| • Annexation, no transfer, no full rights for Arabs | 11% |
| • Annexation, no transfer, full rights for Arabs | 4% |
| • Autonomy | 28% |
| • Return most of the territories to Jordan in peace agreement | 4% |
| • Jordanian-Palestinian confederation | 22% |
| • Palestinian state in territories as part of peace treaty | 22% |

Source: Asher Arian, *Israeli Security opinion*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies Tel Aviv University February 1996, pg. 16; based on polls conducted in January, February and March 1996

Territories to be Returned in the Permanent Agreement

	Western Samaria	Jordan Valley	Gush Etzion	East Jerusalem
1994	30%	18%	14%	10%
1995	30%	19%	18%	9%
1996	38%	20%	20%	12%

Source: Asher Arian, *Israeli Security Opinion*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies Tel Aviv University, February 1996, Pg. 21

Support for discussing...in Talks with Palestinians

	1990	1993	1994	1995	1996
An independent Palestinian state	26%	30%	41%	44%	48%
A Palestinian state in some of the area with acceptable security arrangements for Israel	not asked	45%	51%	50%	53%
A Jordanian-Palestinian confederation	34%	48%	57%	58%	66%
Removing Jewish settlements	32%	43%	50%	45%	49%
East Jerusalem	13%	17%	14%	15%	17%
The right of return	9%	12%	14%	12%	11%

Source: Asher Arian, *Israeli Security Opinion*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies Tel Aviv University, February 1996, pg. 21

RELATIONS WITH ARAFAT AND THE PNA

The handshake on the White House lawn between Rabin and Arafat, and continuing meetings were condemned by opposition leaders, and early in the campaign, Netanyahu declared that he would "not meet or deal with Arafat." MK Moshe Katsav proclaimed that the Likud has "no intention of recognizing the Oslo accords, and will at any price prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state." He declared that "The Likud continues to see the agreements as a historic mistake liable to endanger the existence of the state." (The head of research in military intelligence, Brig. Gen. Amidror told a Knesset committee that "Arafat is not assimilating in Palestinian

society the concept of peace, nor is he inculcating the understanding that the most that the Palestinians can strive for is the 1967 borders. This policy leaves within the public consciousness the principle of stages.")

As the election drew closer and the gap between the candidates remained very small, Netanyahu changed his position, declaring that his government would hold talks with the Palestinian Authority "but only if it fulfills all of its undertakings, something which it is not doing now." These requirements included "the handing over to Israel of terrorist murderers, the ending of anti-Israel incitement, the destruction of terror bases and terror infrastructure and the amendment of the Palestinian Covenant which continues to call for Israel's annihilation."

In the move towards the center, Netanyahu declared that he "will continue the peace process, but this with the utmost care and caution." Israel, he stated, "must pursue a peace that will be borne of might and which will safeguard Israel's security and most vital interests." He also shifted his stance on the Oslo agreements, noting that "We are inheriting a reality which none of us wanted, but with which we shall have to cope. We are like the businessman who takes over a business with debts and entanglements. ... We strenuously and justly oppose the Oslo accords, but they created a situation which we will have to face to prevent it from getting worse." Netanyahu claimed to have links with moderate Arab leaders, and his spokesman claimed that the pen used to sign the new agreement with Rafael Eitan of Tzomet "would be the same pen that he uses to sign future treaties with Arab states".

Peres firmly rejected the criticism and referred to Arafat as a partner in the peace process. However, Arafat's statements and actions (or inaction, as noted above), did not provide much support to the Labor Party's campaign. Other Labor leaders were more blunt, with Housing Minister Ben-Eliezer declaring that "Those who put all their trust in Arafat and thought that he could guaranty our security were mistaken."

The question of the PLO Covenant also became a major campaign issue. The 1995 Interim agreement ("Oslo 2") included a Palestinian commitment to formally repeal those sections of the charter (or covenant) calling for Israel's destruction, within two months of elections for the Palestinian National Council. These elections took place in late January, and for many weeks, Arafat made no move to convene the PNC or change the covenant. This inaction was seen as an effort to "pressure Israel and to extort more concessions." Rabin declared that amendment of the covenant was a requirement for continued Israeli withdrawal, and Peres repeated this pledge shortly after Rabin's assassination. As the weeks passed without action, Labor Party leaders warned that if Labor comes to the elections without action on this issue, "We are liable to pay a high price in the elections. ... The public will be astonished, and rightly so, that the covenant wasn't canceled" Similarly, Barak declared that Arafat "has to

live up to his commitment, to forcefully combat terror and nullify the Palestinian covenant in a straightforward manner. If the Palestinian Authority fails to deliver on these promises, then I see no way to proceed with the permanent status negotiations as planned. There are no compromises here. No "ifs," "ands" or 'buts'." In April, the PNC finally met and took action on the covenant, but its meaning was ambiguous. While Labor leaders such as Peres and Barak hailed what they called the decision to delete the sections of the covenant that call for the destruction of Israel, opposition leaders argued that the PNC had only created a committee to study the issues, and that in the absence of specific language deleting the individual paragraphs of the covenant, nothing had really changed. Professor Yehoshua Porat, who is considered to be an authority on Palestinian society and politics, and a member of the Meretz leadership, publicly supported the latter interpretation, and severely criticized the Labor and Meretz leadership for claiming that the covenant had been changed. This incident did not increase the credibility of Labor's policies. (As of Oct. 1996, this committee had not met.)

In debating their respective platforms, there were divisions in both major parties regarding relations with the Palestinians. In the latter stages of the campaign, Netanyahu and most other Likud leaders favored a practical or pragmatic approach, and acceptance of the need to negotiate with the PNA. (Some Likud leaders, such as Roni Milo and Ehud Olmert had taken this position much earlier.) This position was also endorsed, if somewhat reluctantly, by the NRP. However, there was also significant opposition, particularly from MK Ze'ev Begin and Ariel Sharon. In response to the changing positions in the Likud, Sharon wrote that "If the Likud accepts the Oslo pact, it no longer has a right to exist."

The Labor Party was divided on the issue of a Palestinian State and the future of Jewish settlements in the final status negotiations. In its 1992 platform, Labor included a statement opposing the establishment of a Palestinian state, and both Peres and Barak favored maintaining this position. In campaign appearances, Peres clearly stated his preference for a "Jordanian-Palestinian solution", and declared that the Jordan River is Israel's security border. "We want peace without unnecessary risks, and no foreign army will cross the Jordan River." Barak stated that "We will not go back to the 1967 borders, most Israeli settlements will remain under Israeli control and no army other than the IDF will be deployed between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River." In contrast, others Labor leaders, such as Zvilli and Beilin sought to delete this provision from the platform. (Meretz explicitly called for the creation of a Palestinian state in its platform.)

The issue of settlements created a similar conflict. Barak favored an explicit statement pledging the retention of the vast majority of Israeli settlements, including in the Jordan Valley north of Jericho. Beilin supported a policy in which most of the settlers

remain under Israeli sovereignty, and in which Israel would not act to dismantle those settlements under Palestinian control in the final status arrangements. In the end, the Labor party platform did not change significantly with respect to these issues, but the debate and the public differences provided the public with indications of the divisions within both parties on these final status issues.

SYRIA, LEBANON, AND TERRORISM

In the 1992 election campaign, Rabin had declared that the Golan Heights are vital to Israeli security and would not be subject to negotiations, at least in the period of this government. However, shortly after the elections, his views changed, and an agreement with Syria was seen as the key to Israeli security and the avoidance of war. (Barak, who was the IDF Chief of Staff, shared this assessment.) This change led to the charges that the government and Rabin lacked a mandate for withdrawal, and triggered a large-scale public relations campaign. Public opinion polls also showed general opposition to a full withdrawal from the Golan. Support for full withdrawal ranged from 24% to 32%, at the highest (after the assassination of Rabin and the beginning of the Wye Plantation talks), with opponents ranging from 45% to 55% (from 35% to 42% were opposed to any withdrawal.) As a result of demands from his coalition partners, particularly Shas, Rabin pledged to hold a referendum if an agreement was reached with Syria involving territorial withdrawal from the Golan.

Poll Data On Golan and Syria:

Support for withdrawal from the Golan	December 95	January 96
Support full withdrawal	23.9 %	18.3%
Partial withdrawal	41.2%	37.7%
Oppose any withdrawal	30.0%	41.7%

The survey of 505 adult Israeli Jews was performed by "Modiin Ezrachi" on behalf on the Steinmetz Center for Peace Studies at Tel Aviv University at the end of December and January. The error is +/- 4%. ("Haaretz" 5 February, 1996)

Throughout the campaign, relations with Syria, the future of the Golan, security arrangements, normalization, and the continued low-level warfare in Southern Lebanon were important political issues. In 1995, Israeli and Syrian military delegations met for the first time, but little progress was reported. In a number of public appearances, Assad did not indicate any interest in normalization with Israel, and these appearances had the effect of increasing public opposition to an agreement with Syria, and to the sense that Assad was not prepared to make peace, even in return for complete Israeli withdrawal from the Golan. Rabin and Peres indicated that they would be willing to withdraw to the international border, and Assad demanded a

return to the June 4 1967 lines (including the territory that Syria had captured in 1948), as well as access to the Kinneret. (According to some reports, Rabin had told Clinton that Israel would be willing to withdraw from the entire Golan, but that this position was kept hidden from everyone else in the Israeli government, including Foreign Minister Peres. Peres reportedly discovered this after Rabin was assassinated.)

After Rabin's assassination, Peres increased the emphasis on the Syrian track, and direct negotiations at the Wye Plantation in the US began. According to the available evidence, Peres sought and expected some dramatic shift in the Syrian position, and perhaps a meeting with Assad, before the elections, then scheduled for October. Military plans for separation of forces and demilitarization were presented to the Syrians. Peres spoke of his vision of a link between peace with Syria and Israeli security, declaring that 10 hotels on the Golan will provide more security than 10 bunkers. (In a rare public clash between the military and political leadership, Peres' view was rejected by the head of Army Intelligence Research, Brig. General Ya'acov Amidror, who stated, "I don't accept this. A hotel is important as long as there is no war, but when the other side decides to go to war, the bunkers will decide more than the hotels...")

In late January, after second round of Wye Plantation talks, Peres reportedly hoped for a breakthrough and a meeting with Assad, which Peres and Labor concluded would give them an overwhelming victory in the elections. However, after Christopher visited the region, including Damascus, in February, and failed to bring word of a change in the Syrian position, hopes for a meeting between Peres and Assad, and for rapid progress vanished. Peres then decided to advance the elections from October to May.

At this stage, Peres and the Labor leadership recognized that in the absence of a dramatic breakthrough before the elections, a significant portion of the Israeli public would be wary of providing him and Labor an ambiguous mandate to negotiate an agreement with Syria after the elections. Party Secretary Zvilli stated that "If we don't separate the Golan Heights from the elections we will lose the support also of our traditional voters, who support us on everything else but the Golan question." Thus, in the effort to reduce this vulnerability, and following Rabin's example, Peres also pledged to hold a referendum on any agreement with Syria after the elections.

Syria was also perceived as closely linked to events in Lebanon, and the continuing attacks on Northern Israel and on the Israeli outposts in Southern Lebanon. In 1995, these attacks had increased by over 50%, and the situation there was a source of tension and conflict. After a series of Hizbollah attacks on Israeli soldiers in the security zone, the IDF began to counterattack against Hizbollah positions in villages

in the zone, which led Hizbollah to launch Katyusha rocket attacks against civilian targets in northern Israel. (These actions were violations of the oral agreement reached between Israel, Syria and the US at the end of Operation Accountability in 1994.)

At this stage, Peres a large-scale counterattack against Hizbollah forces and bases. Military sources claimed that the planning for the operation (dubbed Grapes of Wrath) had been completed many months earlier, but for political reasons, had not been implemented. It is possible that this operation would have taken place earlier in the absence of the election campaign, but it is also possible that the campaign had an impact on the timing. Under attack for failing to respond to Hamas terror, Peres and his government would have lost even more credibility had they failed to act after Katyushas were fired at Israeli towns and settlements. However, this operation was ended abruptly after an Israeli unit responded to a Hizbollah rocket attack launched near a UN position at Kfar Kana. In this counterattack, over 100 refugees taking shelter in the camp were killed, leading to international pressure on Israel to end its operation. A hurried verbal agreement (similar to the one in 1994, but with the creation of a monitoring group) ended the fighting, and allowed Peres to leave for a trip to Washington. This rapid end to the operation did not increase support for Peres or Labor in the polls, and, if anything, reinforced the image of Peres as militarily indecisive and unable to maintain security for Israeli civilians.

RELATIONS WITH EGYPT

Under the Labor-led government, the peace process was consistently linked to the promise that it would lead to the end of Israel's international and regional isolation. Rabin and Peres invested a great deal of time and effort in establishing relations with Arab states, from North Africa to the Gulf. In the 1992 elections, the Labor leadership claimed that the peace process would end Israel's exclusion and the hostility of neighboring states.

They made considerable progress towards this goal, but links were still fragile. Jordan was the only other Arab state to establish full diplomatic relations (after Egypt had done so in 1979). While a few other states opened small interests sections and trade bureaus, they avoided more formal ties. However, this did not prevent Peres from declaring that if he was elected, "Israel would achieve a comprehensive peace with all Arab countries in the next four years. ... We will make real peace with all the Arab countries in the coming four years."

At the same time, in the context of relations with Syria and the Palestinians, and public support for the peace process, the deterioration of relations with Egypt undermined the campaign of Peres and the Left. Despite expectations after the 1979 Peace Treaty, Egyptian policy towards Israel remained quite cold. In the 1992 election

campaign, Rabin and Peres blamed the policies of the Likud, and the absence of progress in the peace process for this "Cold Peace". They declared that with a Labor government committed to agreements with the Palestinians, and developing agreements with other Arab states, relations with Egypt would warm considerably.

However, this did not occur, and there was little visible change in relations with Egypt. Despite numerous visits by Rabin to Egypt, and a visit by President Weizman in December 1994, President Mubarak did not pay a return visit to Israel. The Egyptian government continued to place bureaucratic obstacles in the way of visits by Egyptian citizens to Israel, and the government controlled press maintained its campaign of hostility, blaming Israel for everything from AIDS to poison candy and chewing gum, as well as earthquakes, and other natural disasters. The Egyptian leadership made no move to change this atmosphere of hostility towards Israel.

In 1994, Egypt began to block agreements, particularly regarding confidence building measures, in the multilateral talks, and increased policy coordination with Syria. Cairo vetoed proposals to establish regional organizations, and in the Casablanca and Amman economic summits, sought to prevent commercial cooperation between Israeli and Arab firms. Mubarak and his Foreign Minister, Amre Mousa, embarked on an international campaign designed to isolate Israel on the nuclear issues, and to press for the dismantling of the ambiguous nuclear deterrent capability. Israeli Foreign Ministry assessments included reference to the possibility of renewed warfare with Egypt, albeit not in the near future, and the Egyptian press responded in kind. Such policies and statements led Ze'ev Schiff, widely regarded as Israel's leading military affairs analyst, to write that Egypt "has come to the conclusion that it must do everything it can to weaken Israel's military strength; to make Israel's entrance into the Middle East contingent on its agreeing to give up various elements of its strength there." Egypt also used the nuclear issue as a means of returning to the center of the negotiation process, which was dominated by the other Arab parties and Israel.

The Cold Peace with Egypt reduced the credibility of Peres' and Labor party's efforts to present the peace process as triumphant, and provided support for the opposition's assertion that the process was being pursued without sufficient regard for Israeli interests. While perhaps not a major factor in determining the outcome of the elections, the continued hostility in relations with the first Arab state to sign a peace agreement with Israel did not increase public confidence in this process.

THE US ROLE

In the 1992 election campaign, the Bush administration (which had a relatively cold and conflictual relationship with the Shamir government), visibly supported Rabin and Peres. Following the elections, the links between the Rabin and Clinton

governments were very close -- perhaps the most cooperative in the history of relations between Washington and Jerusalem. The level of coordination regarding the peace process was high, and while there may have been differences on tactics, the US could not have hoped for a better relationship. This relationship extended to the personal level, and President Clinton came to Israel and delivered moving speeches to the Knesset in 1994, on the occasion of the signing of the Jordan-Israel Peace Treaty, and led the foreign leaders at the funeral for Prime Minister Rabin in November 1995.

In contrast to Rabin, who had a strong affinity for the US, Peres was more European oriented and the closeness of both personal and political relations between the two governments was reduced to some degree. Journalists reported American "impatience" with the unrealistic visions and emphasis Peres placed on intangibles, such as transportation links between Israel and Syria, in contrast to Rabin's more concrete security-oriented approach.

However, in the election campaign, the US government conveyed the impression that it favored Peres and the Labor-led coalition over Netanyahu and the Likud. Peres came to Washington twice in this six month period; the first time one month after the assassination, where he was welcomed in the White House and addressed the Congress, and then in May, a few weeks before the elections. The photo-opportunities in the White House and with American leaders highlighted American support for Peres.

Following the Hamas terror campaign in February and March, the US quickly organized the summit meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh, which took place on March 13. President Clinton also paid another emotional visit to Israel. This was seen by many Israeli analysts as a blatant attempt to assist Peres (Clinton had a very short and perfunctory meeting with Netanyahu), but in the absence of any impact, and the failure to implement the decision to create a special coordination body, including Egypt and other Arab states, the political role of the summit was minimal. Indeed, some critics in Israel argued that the international extravaganza was worse than nothing, because it allowed the leaders to create the impression of fighting terror, without substantive responses. Netanyahu, however, maintained his statesman-like posture, and after the short meeting the Clinton, called the summit "a boost for Israel and as an effort in the war against terrorism"

THE AFTERMATH

Foreign policy, the negotiation process, and, in particular, the expectations that were not fulfilled, have had an increasing impact on the campaign and outcome of the elections. This was the case in 1992, when the failure of the Shamir government to

demonstrate progress in this process contributed to its defeat, as well as in 1996, when the failure of Arafat to prevent terrorism contributed to the defeat of Labor and Peres.

After the elections, the campaign and its results determine Israeli policies and the course of regional relations. Rabin's victory in 1992 led to a major change in Israeli policy, and the Oslo process would have been unthinkable if Shamir and Likud would have formed the next government.

Similarly, the 1996 elections brought about an immediate change in Israeli policy. The negotiators of the Oslo agreements and the group that conducted the discussions with Syria were suddenly replaced by decision-makers that are collectively more skeptical and less enthusiastic about this process.

Netanyahu's move towards the center was a combination of electoral tactics and overall political philosophy. Tactically, the pragmatic approach to the peace process was necessary to win the election. Philosophically, Netanyahu appears to be ideologically more flexible than many of his colleagues in the Likud and the Israeli Right. As a result of this division, the new government lacked unity on central issues. Immediately after the elections, Netanyahu and his foreign policy advisors indicated that they favored a relatively pragmatic approach and sought to maintain the frameworks developed with the Palestinians and Jordan, and to continue discussions with Syria. At the same time, many members of the Likud leadership, including ministers Benjamin Zeev Begin and Ariel Sharon, and MK Uzi Landau, the head of the Defense Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense, held more ideological positions. (Foreign Minister David Levy is primarily motivated by personal political interests, and it is difficult to discern a consistent approach to foreign policy. However, during and after the elections, Levy was politically aligned with Sharon.)

The clash between these positions manifested itself very quickly. The ideological wing called for suspension of IDF redeployment in Hebron (delayed by Peres after the suicide bombings), opposed further withdrawals from villages in Area B, as called for in the 1995 Interim Agreement, supported increased settlement activity, and objected to any contacts with Arafat and the PNA. In the first seven months after the elections, there was no clear majority in the cabinet for proceeding with redeployment in Hebron.

However, Netanyahu recognized that his election victory, and ability to govern and be reelected depended on maintaining a pragmatic middle ground. After three months of consultations, and discussions between Abu Mazen and Dr. Dore Gold, Netanyahu's security advisor, Netanyahu met with Arafat, and the links between Israel and the PNA resumed. (Levy and Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai also met with Arafat). During this period, Arafat and the PNA controlled Hamas and blocked most efforts to

conduct terrorist attacks, and Netanyahu emphasized the link between the continuation of this policy and cooperation with the PNA. The right wing of the Likud attacked the meeting between Netanyahu and Arafat, accusing the Prime Minister of betraying the Likud ideology. However, no minister resigned.

In late September, following a decision by the government to open the exit to an ancient tunnel in the Old City of Jerusalem, relations with the PNA exploded in violent attacks on Israeli military checkpoints and positions in which 15 Israeli soldiers were killed by Palestinian police gunfire, and many more wounded. Although the conflict over Jerusalem provided the "match" that ignited the protests, this violence was seen as the result of the perceived lack of movement in Hebron and in the overall framework of the Oslo process. As a result, Netanyahu and Arafat met in Washington, and, under the direction of the Clinton administration, intense negotiations over security arrangements in Hebron began. However, the negotiations dragged on for many months, and tension continued.

This incident heightened the conflict within the Likud. Begin and Landau argued that the involvement of the Palestinian para-military forces in the violence provided incontrovertible proof that the Middle East peace process, as defined in the Oslo framework, would not provide Israel with security. At the same time, Netanyahu sought to avoid a clash with the US and agreed to proceed with redeployment in Hebron, albeit with stronger security measures than had been envisioned.

Nevertheless, the internal divisions within the government and the party threaten to create an impasse in decision-making. If Netanyahu is unable to resist demands and pressures to greatly expand and accelerate Jewish settlement activity, particularly in the smaller settlements close to areas under PNA control, this could also lead to clashes within Israel and with the US government.

Shortly after the elections, Netanyahu met with Egyptian president Mubarak and King Hussein of Jordan, thereby creating the appearance of continuity. However, Egypt hosted a summit meeting of Arab League members, in which many participants called for a slowdown in creating diplomatic and commercial links with Israel. Relations with Egypt, which had been strained under the previous government, grew worse, with threats of conflict and reports that Egypt would provide Syria with a "safety net" in the event of war with Israel. In November, the Egyptian government arrested an Israeli citizen on espionage charges.

The new government in Israel and the Hashemite regime shared interests in containing the extent of Palestinian autonomy and blocking a Palestinian state, and Palestinian control over section of Jerusalem. During the campaign, King Hussein carefully avoided indicating any support for Peres, and Jordanian officials met with Netanyahu

on a number of occasions. However, after the elections, the Jordanians did not want to be seen as cooperating too closely with Netanyahu, while on the Syrian front, Netanyahu rejected Syrian demands that negotiations resume at the point that they had been suspended under the previous government. Netanyahu refused to recognize a non-binding "non-paper" presented by the previous government, which reportedly included conditions under which Israel would withdraw from the entire Golan Heights. He also called for negotiations on Lebanon first, prior to discussions of the future of the Golan. Syria rejected these policies, and began to move some military forces from the Beirut area to the Golan sector, in what was interpreted as a threat to attack the Golan if the Syrian demands were rejected.

Perhaps most importantly, in his first months in office, Netanyahu sought to create close links with the US government. He went to Washington twice in a period of ten weeks, meeting with the President, Secretary of State, Congressional leaders, and Jewish groups. Although relations appeared to be quite cordial, differences over the Hebron agreement, the implementation of the interim agreement with the Palestinians concerning further Israeli redeployment, and Jewish settlements threatened to create friction between Israel and the US.

This government, like all others, will be judged by its achievements and failures during its entire term in office. If Palestinian terrorism resumes, if conflicts with Egypt and Syria lead to military clashes that weaken Israel, or diplomatic conflict resumes between Jerusalem and Washington, the middle-ground or swing voters who supported Netanyahu and the Likud in 1996 are like to swing back to Labor and the Left in the next election. Security and foreign policy issues, the decisions of the Israeli government in this area, and the actions and responses from the Arab world (and, to a lesser degree, the US) will continue to play a major role in determining the outcome of Israeli elections.

In a broader sense, it is increasingly apparent that over the past decade, the role of foreign policy in Israeli domestic politics and as a determining factor in elections has increased steadily. A detailed analysis of this trend and the factors that explain it is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, a preliminary analysis suggests a number of factors. For the first time in many years, and some might argue, for the first time since 1948, there are choices to be made between fundamentally different options with respect to war and peace. This process began in the late 1980s, with the secret meetings between Peres and King Hussein, and the proposal to convene an international conference. This proposal was rejected by Shamir, and the debate over this issue had an impact, albeit limited, in the 1988 elections.

The development of options and choices, and the public debate over these options increased between 1988 and 1992, with the changes brought by the Gulf War and the

Madrid Conference. Thus, the 1992 elections provided a stronger contrast between two opposing perspectives. Between 1992 and 1996, the Labor Party had the opportunity to implement its policies, and the 1996 elections provided a referendum on its successes and failures.

This theory suggests that the role of foreign policy and the critical questions of war and peace will continue to dominate Israeli domestic politics as long as choices continue to exist. In contrast, a sudden change in the policies of the Arab states, and the end to the perception among at least some significant portion of the Israeli public that progress and peace is possible, will relegate the debate and the role of this issue in domestic politics to a secondary or tertiary factor, as was the case during most of the period from 1948 to 1988.

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64David Rudge, "Peres: No Settlements Will Be Sacrificed For Peace", Jerusalem Post, February 23 1996

65 Ze'ev Shiff, Haaretz 9 February, 1996

66Gerald M Steinberg, "A Nation that Dwells Alone? Foreign Policy in the 1992 Elections", Israel at the Polls: 1992, edited by Daniel Elazar and Shmuel Sandler, Rowman and Littlefield, 1995; See also James A. Baker III, The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War and Peace, 1989-1992, with Thomas M. DeFrank, (NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995)

67Steve Rodan, "Washington Growing Impatient With Peres", Jerusalem Post, February 5, 1996.

68Elyakim Ha'etzni, "Peres's Extravaganza", Jerusalem Post, March 11, 1996.

69 For the most comprehensive view of Netanyahu's political philosophy and ideology prior to the election, see Benjamin Netanyahu, A Place Among the Nations: Israel and the World, (New York: Bantam Books, 1993)

70 Both the Shamir and Peres governments had considered opening the back-end of the 2000 year-old tunnel, which reached into the Moslem Quarter of Jerusalem, but decided against it for fear of provoking violent Palestinian reactions. Netanyahu's decision to proceed with the tunnel opening may be seen as an expression of ideology, but the government was clearly unprepared for the impact and extent of opposition. Thus, although the motivation may have been, in part, ideological, and part political (responding to pressures from Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert and other constituencies in the government), it is doubtful that Netanyahu would have taken this decision had the result been correctly assessed.

71 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 pp. 172-192
72 Gerald M Steinberg, "A Nation that Dwells Alone? Foreign Policy in the 1992
Elections", Israel at the Polls: 1992, edited by Daniel Elazar and Shmuel Sandler,
Rowman and Littlefield, 1995