

1 *The Israeli Security Establishment on the Two-State Solution*

The two-state solution – the creation of a Palestinian state that would live side-by-side with Israel in peace – has been the paradigm for resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict since the late 1990s and the preferred solution for senior veterans of the security establishment. A Palestinian state is imperative “if we want a Jewish, democratic, secure, and legitimate Israel,” says Maj.-Gen. (Ret.) Amos Yadlin, a former head of Military Intelligence who, from 2011 to 2021, served as Executive Director of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), the prestigious Tel Aviv–based think tank.¹ Yadlin’s pithy statement epitomizes the commonly held and oft-repeated view heard from members of the Israeli security community. Indeed, their support for Palestinian statehood is based on their dual commitment to maintaining a democratic and Jewish Israel.

Some security officials are driven by the moral imperative of ending the decades-long occupation, which, in the words of former Shin Bet Chief Carmi Gillon, is “the mother of all evils.”² A high-ranking general interviewed for this book emphasized that “ending control over the lives of 2.4 million Palestinians in the West Bank” was not only a practical imperative for Israel but a moral one too.³ “Jewish values, as I see them, don’t go with inequality,” notes a former Mossad chief, another interviewee for this project.⁴ For pragmatic reasons or moral ones – or both – the Israeli security community has been at the

¹ Trudy Rubin, “Bold Proposals for the Middle East,” *The Mercury News*, February 8, 2013, accessed at www.mercurynews.com/2013/02/08/trudy-rubin-bold-proposals-for-the-middle-east/, September 23, 2022.

² Ravit Hecht, “The Palestinians Got Screwed. They Are Now a Non-Issue Around the World,” *Haaretz*, July 5, 2020, accessed at www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-the-palestinians-got-screwed-they-are-now-a-non-issue-1.8968748, September 23, 2022.

³ Personal interview with a senior general still in uniform, Washington, D.C., September 25, 2017.

⁴ Personal interview with a former head of the Mossad, Herzliya, July 5, 2017.

vanguard of supporting peace diplomacy with the Palestinians since the late 1980s and, in the absence of negotiations in recent years, advocating steps to keep the two-state solution alive.

1.1 The 1967 War, the West Bank, and Eshkol's Dilemma

The two-state solution has its origins in the idea of partition, which had been the preferred blueprint for Zionists intent on building a Jewish state in Mandatory Palestine. However, the rejection of the 1937 British and 1947 United Nations partition plans by the Arab leadership in Palestine had removed that option from the table. The idea of partitioning Israel into two states took on a new life, however, following Israel's capture of the Palestinian territories as a consequence of the 1967 Arab–Israeli War. Israel's territory increased threefold, with the Sinai, Gaza Strip, West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Golan Heights no longer in Arab hands. The question of the future of these territories and the fate of their inhabitants preoccupied the government of Levi Eshkol, which was interested in transforming Israel's astounding military victory into a diplomatic one. Even before the war was over, Prime Minister Eshkol called for “changing the nature of Israeli–Arab relations as they have existed since 1948” while forming a plan aimed at “achieving permanent peace and border security.”⁵ Not long after the war, in a January 1968 meeting with President Lyndon Johnson, Eshkol told his American host that “the Six-Day War may have possibly, for the first time, stirred in the Middle East the beginnings of a process leading to peace.”⁶

That the West Bank and Gaza Strip were populated by Palestinians was not lost on either the civilian or military leadership. The demographic question now loomed larger than ever before. Prior to the 1967 war, there were approximately 860,000 Palestinians in the West Bank.⁷ Although the war produced an additional 200,000–250,000 Palestinian refugees, according to Israeli estimates, the remaining

⁵ Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year That Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2007): 359.

⁶ Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002): 317.

⁷ Shaul Arieli, *Messianism Meets Reality: The Israeli Settlement Project in Judea and Samaria – Vision or Illusion, 1967–2016*, Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF) Report, November 2017, 12.

Palestinians in these territories would now be ruled by Israel.⁸ When IDF Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin asked “how do we control a million Arabs?” in a meeting with senior officers, the response he got from a staff officer was “one million, two hundred and fifty thousand.”⁹ “Crush me with a mortar,” Eshkol told his cabinet, “and I wouldn’t know how to swallow another million Arabs in this country. By doing so we would liquidate ourselves.”¹⁰

As the cabinet pondered the future of these territories, Eshkol heard starkly different opinions from his ministers. On the eve of the 1967 war, Eshkol established a “national unity government” by bringing in the hawkish Rafi faction, whose charismatic ex-general, Moshe Dayan, was appointed defense minister, and naming the longtime opposition leader Menachem Begin and his colleague Yosef Sapir as ministers without portfolio. Dayan was one of the cabinet’s hawks who opposed ceding territory to the Palestinians. At the same time, however, he was concerned about the prospect of absorbing so many Palestinians into Israel. “If it turns out that there’s no possibility of granting self-government, and I have to choose between them belonging to Jordan – with the exception of Jerusalem – or becoming Israeli citizens, I’d prefer that they belong to Jordan,” he said.¹¹

Begin never hid his Greater Israel ideology, which envisioned territorial control over both sides of the Jordan River, comporting to ancient Israel’s biblical dimensions. He and the other followers of Revisionist Zionism surely understood that their dream would never likely become a reality, yet for them partitioning the relatively tiny sliver of land that became the modern State of Israel was out of the question. Although it would be Begin who would ultimately take the decision to return the Sinai peninsula in exchange for peace with Egypt, the notion of parting with the biblically significant West Bank, which was finally in Israel’s hands, was a nonstarter. “Will we be the ones to divide the land of Israel for the first time since the destruction [of the Second Temple]?” he asked dramatically, invoking the Bible.¹² “We send our sons to war

⁸ Segev, 1967, 410. ⁹ Shlaim, “Israel,” 46.

¹⁰ Avi Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry: Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinians in the Aftermath of the June 1967 War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012): 232.

¹¹ Segev, 1967, 503–504; Shlomo Gazit, *Trapped Fools: Thirty Years of Israeli Policy in the Territories* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003): 144.

¹² Segev, 1967, 550.

so that there will be yet another Arab state, or so that parts of Eretz Israel will be given to an Arab state, so that we'll create an enclave within Eretz Israel from which they can shoot at Tel Aviv? For this we went to war?" he asked with his typical rhetorical flourish.¹³

The doves in the cabinet, by contrast, warned against holding on to the territories. Foreign Minister Abba Eban spoke out against ruling over another people:

We are sitting here with two populations, one of them endowed with all the civil rights and the other denied all rights. This is a picture of two classes of citizens that is hard to defend, even in the special context of Jewish history. The world will side with a liberation movement of that one and a half million surrounded by several tens of millions.¹⁴

Education Minister Zalman Aran said, "I'm telling you plainly that we don't need the West Bank. It will do us more harm than good," predicting that "we will choke on it."¹⁵ "A state with forty percent Arabs is not a Jewish state," he said.¹⁶ Minister of Justice Ya'acov Shimshon Shapira pointed out that if Israel held on to the West Bank and Jews became a minority, "then we're finished with the whole Zionist enterprise and we'll be a ghetto here."¹⁷ He further argued that in the age of decolonization, the West Bank could not be turned "into a colony of the State of Israel."¹⁸ Police Minister Eliyahu Sasson suggested appointing a special ministerial committee that would explore variant forms of a Palestinian state.¹⁹ Leftwing Knesset members outside the government chimed in, with MK Moshe Sneh (Israel Communist Party) urging his old friend Eshkol to establish a Palestinian state in the Palestinian territories, while firebrand MK Uri Avnery became the first Israeli politician to publicly call on the government to do so.²⁰

These voices were drowned, however, by the pressure groups, such as "The Movement for the Territorial Unity of the Homeland," which placed large ads in the nation's newspapers proclaiming that "not an

¹³ Segev, 1967, 504.

¹⁴ Ofer Aderet, "Israeli Cabinet Minutes from Six-Day War: From Fear to Euphoria to Arrogance," *Haaretz*, May 18, 2017, accessed at www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium.MAGAZINE-if-it-were-up-to-us-wed-send-all-the-arabs-out-to-brazil-1.5473677, September 23, 2022.

¹⁵ Segev, 1967, 502. ¹⁶ Segev, 1967, 550. ¹⁷ Segev, 1967, 503.

¹⁸ Segev, 1967, 502–503. ¹⁹ Gazit, *Trapped Fools*, 146–47.

²⁰ Amnon Barzilai, "A Brief History of the Missed Opportunity," *Haaretz*, June 5, 2002, accessed at www.haaretz.com/1.5162716, September 23, 2022.

inch of our newly won territory shall be relinquished.”²¹ Israel’s victory was seen in messianic terms by large swaths of society. Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook of the Mercaz Harav yeshiva and Rabbi Shlomo Goren, the chief rabbi of the IDF, forbade the division of the land. Israel’s conquest of the territories was “the determination of divine politics, which no earthly politics can rival,” Kook declared.²² They were joined not only by other religious figures, such as Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim, but also by prominent secular writers on the left including S. Y. Agnon, Natan Alterman, Uri Zvi Greenberg, Haim Gouri, Moshe Shamir, and Haim Hazaz. “Greater Eretz Israel is now in the hands of the Jewish people,” they jointly declared.²³ Even the intellectuals turned messianic, temporarily abandoning their traditional role of evaluating the world from a distance in empirical terms.²⁴ As Michael Keren notes,

[T]he victory was described [by the intellectuals] as a ‘miracle,’ the occupied lands were described as ‘holy,’ and the soldiers became those who fulfilled a transhistorical mission. The most common expression after the victory was the biblical verse ‘We were like unto them that dream’ (Psalms 126:1). Biblical verses seemed more appropriate to describe the new, transcendental reality than common language seemed. One intellectual, for instance, expressed his desire to scream publicly: ‘Arise O Lord, and let thy enemies be scattered’. (Numbers 10:35)²⁵

The sense of euphoria pervading Israeli society was palpable. Israelis perceived that, overnight, their country was transformed from a vulnerable, besieged country into an invincible regional power. Eshkol himself was caught up in the euphoric fervor, saying that “what the army has done up to now is a miracle on top of a miracle.”²⁶ Journalist David Remnick precisely captures the postwar atmosphere in Israel:

...the national poet, Natan Alterman, was accurate in declaring, ‘The people are drunk with joy.’ A photograph of a weeping IDF soldier at the Western Wall was published all over the world and seemed to embody the new conflation, for many Israelis, of the state and the sacred, the military and the messianic. The song ‘Jerusalem of Gold’ displaced, for a time, the traditional

²¹ David Kimche and Dan Bawly, *The Sandstorm: The Arab–Israeli War of June 1967: Prelude and Aftermath* (New York: Stein and Day, 1968): 213.

²² Segev, 1967, 547. ²³ Segev, 1967, 545–46.

²⁴ Michael Keren, *The Pen and the Sword: Israeli Intellectuals and the Making of the Nation-State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989): 71–76.

²⁵ Keren, *The Pen and the Sword*, 72. ²⁶ Segev, 1967, 545–46.

anthem 'Hatikvah.' In the daily *Ma'ariv*, the journalist Gabriel Tzifroni described the 'liberation' of the capital in terms rarely used in traditional news reporting: 'The Messiah came to Jerusalem yesterday – he was tired and gray, and he rode in on a tank.'²⁷

Yeshayahu Leibowitz, an Orthodox Jewish scholar and public intellectual, was a rare exception among prominent Israeli figures in opposing the messianic zeal, urging Israel's leadership to instead embrace "a new partition" that would preserve Israel as the Jewish state. In contrast to the majority of the Israelis who "were overcome by the intoxication of national pride, military arrogance, and fantasies of the glory of messianic deliverance," he expressed the concern that the great victory of 1967 would turn out to have been "the event initiating a process of decline and fall of the state of Israel," he would later write.²⁸ This was not merely a retrospective look. While the nation rejoiced euphorically in the immediate aftermath of the war, Leibowitz warned: "If we swallow even a small amount of what we have conquered, we will become far weaker. Another million Arabs will undermine all the foundations of our existence."²⁹ Over a decade later, following the Camp David Accords, which led to the Egypt–Israel Peace Treaty, Leibowitz emphasized that reconciliation with the Arab world necessitated ending Israeli rule over the Palestinians by partitioning the land, which he considered "an inescapable historical necessity."³⁰ An "unpartitioned Eretz-Israel," he wrote, would also be internally unstable even if the Arabs did not become the majority because "its problems, needs, and functions will no longer be those of the Jewish people in Israel and abroad, but those arising from the specific tasks of government and administration of this strange system of political domination" while contending with the national antagonism between Israelis and Palestinians, made more intense with "the passionate hatred evoked by the rule of one people by the other."³¹

²⁷ David Remnick, "The Seventh Day," *The New Yorker*, May 28, 2007, accessed at www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/05/28/the-seventh-day, September 23, 2022.

²⁸ Yeshayahu Leibowitz, "A Jewish State or an Unpartitioned Eretz-Israel," in *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, ed. Eliezer Goldman (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1992): 233.

²⁹ Barzilai, "A Brief History of the Missed Opportunity."

³⁰ Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 235–36.

³¹ Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, 234.

1.1.1 Early Support in the Security Establishment for a Palestinian State

The notion that Israel should work toward the establishment of a Palestinian state in at least parts of the occupied territories enjoyed greater support in the military than it did among the politicians. In contrast to elected officials, who had to contend with domestic politics, the security establishment focused on Israel's strategic position. Eshkol was as hesitant to make a decision on the fate of the newly acquired territories as he was with his decision to go to war. The bulk of advice to create a Palestinian state came from the military. Rabin advised Eshkol to accept a demilitarized Palestinian state in the West Bank that would be connected to Israel via the Jordan River, which would serve as Israel's security border.³² Rabin's successor, Haim Bar-Lev, expressed a minority view among the generals in supporting a treaty with Jordan's King Hussein rather than trying to reach a settlement with the Palestinians.³³ Armored Corps Gen. Yisrael Tal, the IDF's Supplies Chief Mati Peled, Deputy Head of Military Operations Rehavam Ze'evi, and the head of the IDF Intelligence branch assessment department Shlomo Gazit were among the numerous IDF officials who supported, in one form or another, the creation of a Palestinian state.³⁴

Even before the 1967 War was over, various diplomatic proposals from the IDF and intelligence services began to make their way to the government. On June 9, the IDF intelligence branch proposed a set of guidelines for Israel's policy. Gazit writes:

[O]ur proposal was based on the assumption that Israel would exploit the military developments to establish a new relationship with its Arab neighbors. The goal was a formal and comprehensive peace with all the Arab States, based on a nearly full withdrawal to the 4 June lines or, at the very least, stabilizing a *de-facto* Israeli-Arab co-existence, while finding agreed solutions to the main problems that separated the parties.³⁵

The plan included the establishment of a demilitarized but independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with border modifications reflecting the changes in the two decades prior to the war.

³² Gazit, *Trapped Fools*, 544; Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 187.

³³ Gazit, *Trapped Fools*, 544.

³⁴ Barzilai, "A Brief History of the Missed Opportunity."

³⁵ Gazit, *Trapped Fools*, 142.

Additional proposals for ceding West Bank territory to the Palestinians were submitted by a number of generals and officers serving in specialized units. Col. Yuval Ne'eman, who served in the General Staff as a special aide for intelligence and special liaison, proposed a Palestinian state linked to Israel by a federation.³⁶ Maj.-Gen. Rechavam Ze'evi put forward his own plan, whereby Israel would seek to reach an agreement with an alternative Arab leadership that Israel would help to create in light of the rejectionist mood of the current leaders of the region.³⁷ Ze'evi envisioned a Palestinian state in parts of the West Bank and even had a name in mind for this new state: Ishma'el, Abraham's first son from whom the Arab nations descended.³⁸

The Mossad and the Shin Bet likewise recommended that the Eshkol government consider the creation of a Palestinian state. In the midst of the war, Eshkol's top aide, Ya'acov Herzog, met with senior Shin Bet officials who favored the establishment of a Palestinian state in the East Bank and in parts of the West Bank, save for those parts they deemed vital for border security.³⁹ Mossad Chief Meir Amit recommended the formation of a working group to consider the possibility of establishing a Palestinian state.⁴⁰ Lt. Col. David Kimche, a Mossad official who was stationed in the IDF's Military Intelligence political department, met with Palestinians in the West Bank who urged Israel to take advantage of its favorable situation and establish a Palestinian state. Kimche subsequently was sent by the Military Intelligence chief to the West Bank to survey political trends among the local leadership and concluded that there was an opportunity to establish "an autonomous Palestinian state with close ties with Israel, defended by the Israeli army."⁴¹ He and three associates produced a document that called for Israel to demonstrate "magnanimity and boldness" in establishing a demilitarized Palestinian state based on the 1947 partition borders with modifications. Israel would annex some territories, such as East Jerusalem, while Palestinians would receive a "submunicipality" in the Old City as well as some Arab villages that had been a part of the State of Israel.⁴² "I wrote a

³⁶ Gazit, *Trapped Fools*, 142–43. ³⁷ Gazit, *Trapped Fools*, 145.

³⁸ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 41. ³⁹ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 40.

⁴⁰ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 40–41.

⁴¹ Kimche and Bawly, *The Sandstorm*, 222. ⁴² Segev, 1967, 513.

paper of which I am immensely proud, because I was just a kid, saying that we have to meet with the Palestinians and agree to establish an independent entity, which would be closely allied to Israel," he would recall years later.⁴³

1.1.2 *Eshkol's Decision Not to Decide*

None of these plans was adopted or even seriously considered by the Eshkol government. The security establishment's various proposals for Palestinian statehood were based on the idea that Israel should capitalize on the strategic advantages the war gave to Israel by resolving the Palestinian issue – even in the absence of a shift in attitudes by the leadership of neighboring Arab states. This idea, however, was far from mainstream in political circles. The political establishment did not even acknowledge the existence of the Palestinian people. Some cabinet members promoted, instead, the idea of a “Jordanian option,” which entailed the return of the West Bank (though not necessarily all of it) to Jordan's King Hussein.⁴⁴ The government ministers were mostly opposed to a Palestinian state.⁴⁵ Yigal Allon, a former general who served as Minister of Labor in Eshkol's government, preferred “an independent Arab state” to the Jordanian option.⁴⁶ A second version of what became known as the “Allon Plan” substituted Jordan for the Palestinians as Israel's negotiating partner and envisioned the partition of the West Bank with Israel retaining control of the Jordan Valley and Jordan gaining control of populated Palestinian parts of the West Bank.⁴⁷

Despite Eshkol's initial inclination to support the establishment of a Palestinian state immediately after the 1967 war, he had changed his mind by the end of that fateful year, now offering merely “some sort of autonomy” in the populated parts of the West Bank.⁴⁸ He rejected, therefore, the recommendations of the security establishment to work toward the creation of a Palestinian state,

⁴³ Personal interview with David Kimche, Tel Aviv, November 8, 2006. This interview was conducted for a previous project.

⁴⁴ Gazit, *Trapped Fools*, 154–57. ⁴⁵ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 188.

⁴⁶ Arieli, *Messianism Meets Reality*, 14.

⁴⁷ “Allon Plan (1967),” *The Israeli–Palestinian Conflict: An Interactive Database*, ECF, accessed at <https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/148>, September 23, 2022.

⁴⁸ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 218.

notwithstanding the personal appeal by Tzvi Tzur, Dayan's senior assistant in the defense ministry and himself a former IDF Chief of Staff, who urged Eshkol to support Rabin's position, but to no avail.⁴⁹ Nor was Eshkol eager to negotiate with Jordan despite King Hussein's overtures to Israel.⁵⁰

Although many options were open, neither Eshkol nor Dayan saw any urgency in parting with the newly conquered territories. "We are awaiting the Arabs' phone call," the latter remarked. "We ourselves won't make a move. We are quite happy with the current situation. If anything bothers the Arabs, they know where to find us," Dayan said.⁵¹

Territorial expansion, however, was not what this war had been about for the Israeli government. Eshkol was not eyeing annexation. Weeks before the fighting erupted, he incorrectly predicted that there would be no war, telling members of the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that "we do not want from any of our neighbors anything, except the status quo."⁵² After the war, he was at a quandary about what to do with the West Bank and Gaza Strip. "We won the war and received a nice dowry of territory, but it came with a bride whom we don't like," Eshkol said, referring to the Palestinians.⁵³ In light of the conflicting advice he received from those with whom he had consulted, a split cabinet, and Eshkol himself torn about what to do, his indecision was tantamount to a decision not to decide.⁵⁴ The government's "do nothing" policy in effect left the initiative to the Arabs.⁵⁵ Eshkol also understood the political risks he faced were he to launch a diplomatic initiative with the Palestinians. The Israeli public deeply distrusted the Arab world, with 71 percent opposing relinquishing the West Bank within the framework of a peace agreement.⁵⁶ Moreover, Eshkol was overshadowed by his charismatic defense minister who was widely seen as the hero of Israel's "miraculous" victory. "If I reach out a hand, and no hand is returned in peace, then Abu Jildah [his nickname for Dayan] and the terrorist [his nickname for Begin] will give me a *petsale*

⁴⁹ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 186–87.

⁵⁰ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 190–92, 219–26.

⁵¹ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 43.

⁵² Shlaim, "Israel: Poor Little Samson," 25–26.

⁵³ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 39. ⁵⁴ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 44.

⁵⁵ Kimche and Bawly, *The Sandstorm*, 214. ⁵⁶ Segev, 1967, 551.

[Yiddish: a slap] that will knock me off my chair. And who'll replace me? You already know," he confided to a friend.⁵⁷ The domestic constraints Eshkol believed he faced stymied any bold moves the prime minister had earlier considered.

1.2 The Ex-Generals Urge Israel–PLO Talks

1.2.1 A Former General Advocates Peace Talks with the PLO

A decade later, Yehoshafat Harkabi, a retired major-general and a former head of the IDF's Military Intelligence Directorate, abandoned his own hardline positions by advocating talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), dismantling the settlements, and establishing a Palestinian state based on Israel's pre-1967 borders.⁵⁸ Acknowledging that there would be serious security problems with which Israel would need to contend if the West Bank were no longer under Israeli control, he concluded that "our choice is not between good and bad, but between bad and worse."⁵⁹ Israel's withdrawal from the West Bank would need to be "made contingent upon provisos that will give some satisfaction to Israel's security demands," he argued, but it was delusional to think that the Arabs would give up their claim of sovereignty simply because Israel was not going to proclaim its sovereignty in the West Bank.⁶⁰ Harkabi's views had not moderated because he had warmed up to the PLO (which he detested) or due to moral indignation with the occupation. As he explained to an interviewer, "I'm not motivated so much by ethical considerations, but by considerations of realism."⁶¹ It was in Israel's national interest to negotiate peace with the PLO, he had concluded, and "the longer an accommodation is postponed, the worse off Israel will be."⁶² Harkabi warned that "the demographic trend will work against us" and that

⁵⁷ Raz, *The Bride and the Dowry*, 48.

⁵⁸ Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Arab Strategies and Israel's Response* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

⁵⁹ Yehoshafat Harkabi, "Striving to Attain the Possible," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 29, no. 30 (Année 1984): 171.

⁶⁰ Harkabi, "Striving to Attain the Possible," 171–72.

⁶¹ E. A. Wayne, "An Israeli warns of 'Sampson complex,'" *The Christian Science Monitor*, April 18, 1988, accessed at www.csmonitor.com/1988/0418/ahark.html, September 23, 2022.

⁶² Wayne, "An Israeli warns of 'Sampson complex.'"

“a binational state would be a very uneasy state.”⁶³ He rejected the idea advanced by Begin and others on the right that Jewish immigration to Israel would offset the growth of the Palestinian population within the post-1967 borders. In his book *Israel’s Fateful Hour*, he writes:

Some Israelis believe that annexation will bring about a new flourishing of Zionism and awaken a fresh wave of Jewish immigration to offset the increase in the Arab population. But increased Jewish immigration would not affect the presence of a large Arab population, even if its relative proportion in the country was thereby decreased. Nor is there any reason to assume that Jewish immigration will increase. Jews may be attracted to a *Jewish* state, but not to a country with a mixed and unsettled population. No preaching about their obligation to move to Israel will help. Jews will prefer to continue to live with their peaceable Christian neighbors in America or Europe rather than to live alongside an angry Muslim population.⁶⁴

Harkabi drew these conclusions a decade before the first Palestinian Intifada and more than two decades before the two-state solution emerged as the mainstream approach to resolving the conflict. In a postscript to this book, he notes that the July 1988 decision by Jordan’s King Hussein to sever his country’s administrative ties to the West Bank only reinforced his argument that Israel needed to negotiate directly with the PLO over establishing a Palestinian state. The Likud’s conclusion that, since the West Bank was no longer Jordanian but Israeli “only demonstrates how urgent it is to dispose of the Likud ideology altogether, root and branch,” he wrote.⁶⁵

1.2.2 *The Oslo Process*

It took another former general, Yitzhak Rabin, to adopt Harkabi’s call for engaging the PLO. The former IDF chief was the minister of defense during the first Intifada, an event Israel’s decision-makers neither anticipated nor knew how to address. His tough military

⁶³ Yehoshafat Harkabi and Salim Tamari, “Yehoshafat Harkabi: Choosing between Bad and Worse,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16, no. 3 (Spring 1987): 46–47.

⁶⁴ Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Israel’s Fateful Hour* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988): 50.

⁶⁵ Harkabi, *Israel’s Fateful Hour*, xxiv.

tactics proved ineffective at quelling it. Israel had plenty of experience defeating Arab armies on the battlefield, but how could it end an uprising of Palestinian teens and young adults, armed only with stones and the occasional Molotov cocktail, short of committing a massacre? It was a challenge Israel had never faced. Rabin became convinced that Israel could not continue to rule over the Palestinians indefinitely and that Israel's conflict with them could only be resolved via diplomatic means.⁶⁶

In 1988, while the Intifada was raging, a group of ex-generals formed the Council for Peace and Security (today, the Peace and Security Association, or PSA), an organization that urged the hard-line Israeli government headed by Yitzhak Shamir to negotiate with the PLO. Led by Maj.-Gen. (Ret.) Aharon Yariv, a former head of Military Intelligence who had been serving as head of INSS (then, the Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies), the organization included not only former generals, but also former senior officers of the Mossad and Shin Bet and retired high-ranking Police officials. PSA placed full-page ads in newspapers, declaring that Israel's security depended upon its armed forces and not upon retaining political control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.⁶⁷ PSA joined dozens of other civil society peace advocacy groups that emerged since the right's rise to power in 1977. PSA's stance was in line with the views of the majority of the public. A late-December 1988 opinion poll published in the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* showed that 54 percent of Israelis favored dialogue with the PLO; only 44 percent backed the hardline position of Shamir's government.⁶⁸

This was not the first time veterans of Israel's security establishment became involved in civil society organizations on the question of war and peace. A decade before PSA's formation, a group of hundreds of reserve officers and IDF soldiers founded Peace Now, with the aim of pushing the Begin government to pursue peace with Egypt's Anwar Sadat in the wake of Sadat's dramatic peace overture: his November 1977 visit to Israel, where he spoke before the

⁶⁶ Guy Ziv, *Why Hawks Become Doves: Shimon Peres and Foreign Policy Change in Israel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2014): 102.

⁶⁷ Jonathan Marcus, "The Politics of Israel's Security," *International Affairs* 65, no. 2 (Spring, 1989): 235.

⁶⁸ Richard Owen, "Arens Attacks PLO as Poll Shows Most Israelis Favor Talks," *The Times* (London), December 24, 1988.

Knesset. Whereas Peace Now has focused on grassroots mobilization in support of peace and human rights, the ex-generals' PSA has emphasized peace diplomacy for the sake of Israeli security. The latter organization aims to ensure that Israel remains the national home for the Jewish people while preserving its democratic character – goals that the members believe necessitate Israel's relinquishment of the West Bank.⁶⁹ “The aspiration for two countries not only fulfills the Zionist need for a state with a solid Jewish majority but also solves the security problem,” according to Shaul Givoli, a former Police major-general and PSA director.⁷⁰ Maj.-Gen. (Ret.) Nathan Sharony, a successor to Givoli, emphasized an oft-heard concern from the security community; namely, that Israel is “running out of time” if it wishes to remain a Jewish state.⁷¹

When Rabin challenged Shamir in the June 1992 elections, he pledged to end the Intifada by concluding an autonomy agreement with the Palestinians within the first six to nine months of assuming office. Rabin went on to win this historic election, forming the first Labor-led government in fifteen years. Beyond the chorus of voices from the retired senior security officials, who were pushing for a change in policy, the then-IDF leadership itself played a significant role in Rabin's decision to change Israel's policy. Throughout the Intifada, the top brass prodded the government to pursue peace diplomacy with the PLO. As Yoram Peri has shown, the IDF was instrumental in pushing the Rabin government into the negotiating process with the PLO because its senior echelon had concluded that the occupation – with all the resources and energies necessary to maintain it – had become a significant burden for the military.⁷² As an IDF veteran himself, Rabin trusted military men, preferring to work with them over politicians.⁷³ Although Rabin did not report

⁶⁹ Peace and Security Association, www.peace-security.org.il/page/80/About-The-Organization.aspx.

⁷⁰ Shaul Givoli, “The Road to Israelistie,” *Haaretz*, May 14, 2009, accessed at www.haaretz.com/1.5052493, September 23, 2022.

⁷¹ Natasha Mozgovaya, “Former Israeli Diplomats in Washington: 1967 Borders Are Defensible,” *Haaretz*, July 25, 2011, accessed at www.haaretz.com/1.5034612, September 23, 2022.

⁷² Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, 31–32.

⁷³ Kobi Michael, “The Dilemma Behind the Classical Dilemma of Civil-Military Relations: The ‘Discourse Space’ Model and the Israeli Case during the Oslo Process,” *Armed Forces and Society* 33, no. 4 (July 2007): 536.

the existence of the clandestine talks in Oslo to then-IDF Chief of Staff Ehud Barak, his negotiating team following the September 13, 1993 agreement was led by Deputy Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, with other generals leading the military and civilian affairs subcommittees.⁷⁴ Military officers, who spoke the same conceptual language and could thus better understand one another, were brought into cabinet meetings.⁷⁵

Aside from the Intifada, the geopolitical shifts in the late 1980s and early 1990s – specifically, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Persian Gulf War of 1990–91 – had significantly weakened the PLO, drying up its funding sources and opening up strategic opportunities for Israel.⁷⁶ The IDF top brass, as well as Defense Minister Rabin, were convinced that Israel needed to exploit these opportunities via diplomatic means. Although Rabin had long supported territorial compromise, he was slow to accept the idea of engaging the PLO, which he – like so many Israelis – had always viewed as a terrorist organization rather than a potential partner for peace. Only after experiencing many months of deadlock in the Washington talks, which had excluded the PLO, did Rabin reluctantly agree to give his foreign minister, Shimon Peres, the green light to engage in backchannel talks with the PLO, which led, in turn, to the Oslo Accords.⁷⁷ Trusting the military men more than politicians, Rabin made it a point to involve senior IDF officials in the negotiations with the Palestinians, particularly after the initial Oslo Accord had been reached and signed on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993.⁷⁸ The Oslo process did not produce a final peace agreement, but it effectively stopped the Intifada; led to mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO; gave the Palestinians self-rule in parts of the occupied territories; instituted security coordination that would save countless lives; and ushered in a new (albeit short-lived) era of hope. As early as 1976, Rabin had warned of apartheid if Israel continued to rule over the Palestinians, referring to West Bank

⁷⁴ Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, 63–65.

⁷⁵ Michael, “The Dilemma Behind the Classical Dilemma of Civil-Military Relations,” 539.

⁷⁶ Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, 33–36; Philip Mattar, “The PLO and the Gulf Crisis,” *Middle East Journal* 48, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 31–46.

⁷⁷ Ziv, *Why Hawks Become Doves*, 99–100, 112.

⁷⁸ Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, 60, 64–65, 69–70.

settlements as “a cancer.”⁷⁹ Two decades later, the Intifada served as a painful reminder to him that the occupation was burdensome on Israel, that resistance could not be put down by military means.

1.3 A Near Consensus

In the aftermath of the second Palestinian Intifada in the early 2000s, Israelis’ sharp turn to the right, the dramatic growth of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and collapsed peace negotiations, a resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is not on the horizon. Still, there is a near-consensus in the Israeli security community that pursuing the two-state solution – or, at minimum, keeping the prospects for such a solution alive – is a vital national interest. A recent study, based on public statements by former IDF top brass and retired Mossad and Shin Bet intelligence chiefs and their deputies since January 2001, finds that 85 percent of them favor the creation of a Palestinian state; only 11 percent do not.⁸⁰ Since this study tested for explicit two-state support and did not code more vaguely worded formulations like “separation from the Palestinians” as supportive, this is a conservative estimate.

The actual percentage of retired senior officials who support the establishment of a separate Palestinian state is also likely higher given that ex-security establishment figures who seek public life are often disinclined to speak out on this issue because doing so could be politically perilous given the nationalist zeitgeist in Israel. Expressing a position identified as “leftist” can be the death knell for a career in politics in Israel today.⁸¹ Even those former security officials who do not harbor a desire to enter the political arena are often reluctant to join nonpartisan organizations and movements that support a Palestinian state because they fear a backlash in light of contemporary trends in Israeli society.⁸² Not surprisingly, the centrist Blue and White list, which prominently featured three former IDF Chiefs of Staff in top

⁷⁹ Ofer Aderet, “Rabin in 1976 Interview: Settlements Are a Cancer,” *Haaretz*, September 26, 2015, accessed at www.haaretz.com/.premium-rabin-in-1976-settlements-are-a-cancer-1.5402552, September 23, 2022.

⁸⁰ Shaver and Ziv, “A Near-consensus,” 115–38.

⁸¹ Personal interview with Brig.-Gen. (Ret.) Ilan Paz, Moshav Kerem Maharal, June 14, 2016.

⁸² Personal interview with Brig.-Gen. (Ret.) Gadi Zohar, Tel Aviv, June 19, 2016.

spots, studiously avoided the two-state solution as a campaign theme in all three rounds of the 2019–20 national elections. This “generals’ party” downplayed the Israeli–Palestinian issue and ultimately splintered when two of the ex-IDF chiefs – Lt.-Gen. (Ret.) Benny Gantz and Lt.-Gen. (Ret.) Gabi Ashkenazi – joined a short-lived Netanyahu-led government following the March 2020 elections – remaining coy on their positions concerning the future of the occupied territories.

Prior to these elections, two prominent retired security figures, Maj.-Gen. (Ret.) Yoav Gallant and former Shin Bet head Avi Dichter, joined the right-wing Likud party despite having previously endorsed the two-state solution.⁸³ Neither shared the Likud party’s right-wing ideology. Gallant had, in the past, openly opposed Likud’s policy of constructing settlements deep in the heart of the West Bank. “There is no logic in settling amongst densely populated Palestinian areas – this is an error in my eyes,” he said in 2015, adding that Israel “must give the Palestinians a contiguous territory that will enable them to live their lives as an independent entity, while continuing our settlement construction in the large settlement blocs.”⁸⁴ Since joining Likud, Gallant and Dichter have also largely avoided discussing the Palestinian issue outside of the context of addressing incidents of terrorism and rocket attacks from Gaza. Likewise, in the 2021 and 2022 elections, Gantz’s party – renamed the National Unity Party in 2022, adding ex-IDF Chief Lt.-Gen. (Ret.) Gadi Eisenkot to its slate that year – remained deliberately vague on the Palestinian question during these election campaigns and beyond.

Even among veterans of the security establishment who oppose the two-state solution, only a small minority supports any version of the

⁸³ Avi Dichter, “The Regional Approach Might Get Us There Faster,” *The Jerusalem Post*, June 9, 2009, accessed at www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/The-regional-approach-might-get-us-there-faster, September 23, 2022; Barak Ravid, “Israeli Policy Is Not to Build in West Bank Settlements, Housing Minister Says,” *Haaretz*, May 28, 2016, accessed at www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-housing-minister-israeli-policy-is-not-to-build-in-west-bank-1.5388672, September 23, 2022; and “Just One in Five Israeli Ministers Openly Back Two-state Solution,” *Middle East Monitor*, June 28, 2016, accessed at www.middleeastmonitor.com/20160628-just-one-in-five-israeli-ministers-openly-back-two-state-solution/, September 23, 2022.

⁸⁴ Tova Dvorin, “Top Kulanu Candidate: Settlements an ‘Error,’” *Arutz Sheva*, February 3, 2015, accessed at www.israelnationalnews.com/news/190854, May 7, 2023.

so-called “one-state solution,” which is increasingly touted as an alternative. Advocates of annexation within the security community, such as Brig.-Gen. (Ret.) Gal Hirsch and Maj.-Gen. (Ret.) Gershon Hacoheh, make up a minuscule proportion of two-state opponents.⁸⁵ Hacoheh is one of a small group of ex-generals who have joined *Habithonistim*, an ideologically right-wing organization formed in 2020 that bills itself as a security-oriented movement of ex-IDF officials. *Habithonistim* supports annexation of the West Bank and the Jordan Valley and the notion of “peace for peace” rather than land-for-peace.⁸⁶ Yet it has managed to attract only a tiny fraction of senior veterans of the security establishment. Its roster includes mostly right-wing ideologues, such as the conservative columnist Caroline Glick (who has the rank of captain).

Of the roughly 11 percent of those senior retired security officials who oppose creating an independent Palestinian state in the aforementioned study, the majority do so not for ideological reasons but because they are skeptical that such a state would be viable and able to live side-by-side in peace with Israel. Doubts about the desire and/or capability of Israel’s Palestinian peace partner to reach a deal fuel skepticism among those who do not necessarily oppose a Palestinian state in principle but will not support it until such time as they feel an appropriate Palestinian leadership has emerged. Most of these two-state skeptics among former security officials, however, do not wish to see a single binational state, nor do they desire to rule over the Palestinians indefinitely. In other words, they are not satisfied with the two-state paradigm, the one-state idea, or the status quo. Safeguarding Israel’s security while working toward a future in which it does not exert control over the Palestinians is the primary objective of most two-state skeptics in the security community.⁸⁷

Former IDF Chief of Staff Lt.-Gen. (Ret.) Moshe Yaalon, who served as Netanyahu’s defense minister from 2013 to 2016, is a rare

⁸⁵ Alan Rosenbaum, “Gal Hirsch – A Different Kind of General,” *The Jerusalem Post*, March 28, 2019, accessed at www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Gal-Hirsch-A-different-kind-of-general-584993, September 23, 2022; Gershon Hacoheh, “Annexation Is in Israel’s National Interest,” *Israel Hayom*, May 22, 2019, accessed at www.israelhayom.com/opinions/annexation-is-in-israels-national-interest/, September 23, 2022.

⁸⁶ *Habithonistim*, accessed <https://idsf.org.il/en/>, September 23, 2022.

⁸⁷ Personal interview with Brig.-Gen. (Ret.) Assaf Orion, Washington, D.C., December 26, 2018.

exception among living ex-IDF chiefs – and in the minority of top senior security establishment officials, more generally – in opposing Palestinian statehood. Yet Yaalon has stressed that large-scale annexation – the core element of the political right’s agenda – would be a “grave mistake” that would undermine “Israel’s unshakable commitment to the preservation of the country’s Jewish and democratic character.”⁸⁸ Maj.-Gen. (Ret.) Giora Eiland, a former national security adviser to Prime Minister Sharon, opposes the two-state solution for a different reason: He believes that the political risks that both sides would need to take to reach a deal are not realistic given what he sees as the large, unbridgeable gaps between the two sides. Instead, he has proposed two alternatives: a return to the Jordanian confederation option or a “regional solution” that would entail a multilateral land swap involving Egypt, Israel, and the Palestinian territories.⁸⁹ Maj.-Gen. (Ret.) Yaakov Amidror, a former national security adviser to Netanyahu, does not support the two-state solution at this time due to what he sees as the problematic nature of the Palestinian leadership, but he wants to keep it alive because he regards demography as the biggest threat to the Jewish state. He has supported, therefore, the construction of settlements within the “blocs,” which most Israelis consider to be part of Israel even within the context of a peace deal, but not outside of them.⁹⁰

Many observers have raised the question of whether the two-state solution is still viable given the dramatic growth of the settlements and outposts throughout the West Bank, establishing “facts on the ground,” which would make the creation of a contiguous Palestinian state difficult,

⁸⁸ Moshe Yaalon, “How to Build Middle East Peace: Why Bottom-Up Is Better Than Top-Down,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 96, Issue 1 (January/February 2017): 73–84, accessed at www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/israel/2016-12-12/how-build-middle-east-peace, September 23, 2022.

⁸⁹ Giora Eiland, “Rethinking the Two-State Solution,” The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus #88 (September 17, 2008). www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/rethinking-two-state-solution-1, September 23, 2022; personal interview with Gen. (Ret.) Giora Eiland, Ra’anana, July 3, 2017.

⁹⁰ Personal interview with Maj.-Gen. (Ret.) Yaakov Amidror, Ra’anana, June 16, 2016; Dov Lieber, “Stop Building in Settlements Outside Blocs, Ex-Netanyahu Security Aide Says,” *The Times of Israel*, June 27, 2017, accessed at www.timesofisrael.com/stop-building-in-settlement-outside-blocs-ex-netanyahu-security-aide-says/, September 23, 2022.

if not impossible, to achieve. In recent years, the settler population has grown at a far higher rate than the country as a whole, numbering about a half-million.⁹¹ Many scholars and commentators have concluded, therefore, that the two-state solution is dead.⁹² To former Israeli security officials, the two-state solution may be difficult to achieve, but it is premature to write its obituary. In August 2021, *Foreign Affairs* asked a broad pool of experts whether they thought that the two-state solution was still viable. The participants with a senior background in the Israeli security establishment – Brig.-Gen. (Ret.) Shlomo Brom; Brig.-Gen. (Ret.) Udi Dekel; Brig.-Gen. (Ret.) Assaf Orion; and Sima Shine, a former head of the research and evaluation division of the Mossad – all disagreed with the statement that “the two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is no longer viable.”⁹³ As a whole, the Israeli security community views the two-state solution as a question of political will, rather than a structural impossibility.⁹⁴

In short, the vast majority of retired high-level security officials support the two-state solution, even if it is not a realistic option in the near term. With few exceptions, even veterans of Israel’s security establishment who do not count themselves as supporters do not want to close the door to a future Palestinian state or confederation arrangement with Jordan and oppose, therefore, annexation of the West Bank. There is thus a near-consensus in the security community for creating a Palestinian state and an even broader consensus against a one-state scenario that would compromise Israel’s Jewish and/or democratic character.

⁹¹ Joseph Krauss, “Report: Israeli Settler Population Surged during Trump Era,” *AP*, January 27, 2021, accessed at <https://apnews.com/article/race-and-ethnicity-israel-coronavirus-pandemic-west-bank-jerusalem-c43de2ad0da01ef3d9b174691290338d>, July 24, 2022.

⁹² Peter Beinart, “I No Longer Believe in a Jewish State,” *The New York Times*, July 8, 2020, accessed at www.nytimes.com/2020/07/08/opinion/israel-annexation-two-state-solution.html, July 24, 2022; Peter Beinart, “Yavne: A Jewish Case for Equality in Israel–Palestine,” *Jewish Currents*, July 7, 2020, accessed at <https://jewishcurrents.org/yavne-a-jewish-case-for-equality-in-israel-palestine/>, July 24, 2022; Ian S. Lustick, *Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

⁹³ “Is the Two-State Solution Still Viable? Foreign Affairs Asks the Experts,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 24, 2021, accessed at www.foreignaffairs.com/ask-the-experts/2021-08-24/two-state-solution-still-viable, July 20, 2022.

⁹⁴ Personal interviews with Brig.-Gen. (Ret.) Shlomo Brom, Tel Aviv, December 30, 2015 and Col. (Ret.) Shaul Arieli, Tel Aviv, June 16, 2019.

1.4 Israeli Prime Ministers on a Palestinian State: From Opposition to Acceptance

The notion of an independent Palestinian state was not seriously countenanced by mainstream politicians until the late 1990s. Golda Meir, who served as prime minister from 1969 to 1974, did not even recognize the existence of a Palestinian nation.⁹⁵ Meir's opposition to a Palestinian state was shared by her Labor Party colleagues including Rabin and Peres, her immediate successors as leaders of the then-dominant center-left party. Peres, then regarded as a hawk, was not at odds with the rest of his party when it came to his opposition to a Palestinian state, which he believed would lead to disastrous results for Israel including deeper Soviet encroachment in the region and more terrorism.⁹⁶ Throughout the 1980s, the party's platform supported negotiations with a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, while rejecting "the establishment of an additional separate state in the territory between Israel and Jordan."⁹⁷

The right-wing Herut (later Likud) party, which until the May 1977 elections served in the opposition, had fervently opposed territorial compromise in the West Bank and Gaza, let alone the creation of a Palestinian state there. Begin, its longtime leader, said that the establishment of such a state would represent "a mortal danger" to Israel.⁹⁸ Shamir, his successor, likewise suggested that a Palestinian state would endanger the existence of Israel.⁹⁹ Benjamin Netanyahu, who replaced Shamir as Likud party leader, was also a fervent opponent of a Palestinian state, as will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Ariel Sharon, a cofounder of Likud, argued in his autobiography (first published in 1989) that Jordan was the Palestinian state and that "the establishment of a second Palestinian state on the West Bank" would place Israel in great danger.¹⁰⁰ Ehud Olmert, another longtime Likud politician who would eventually succeed Sharon as

⁹⁵ Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994): 444.

⁹⁶ Ziv, *Why Hawks Become Doves*, 75–76.

⁹⁷ Ziv, *Why Hawks Become Doves*, 77.

⁹⁸ Ziv, *Why Hawks Become Doves*, 76.

⁹⁹ Haim Misgav, *Conversations with Yitzhak Shamir*, translated (from Hebrew) by David Aisner (New York: Talpiot Press, 2000): 72 and 78.

¹⁰⁰ Ariel Sharon, *Warrior* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001): 545 and 553.

prime minister, was so fervently opposed to the notion of territorial compromise that, as a young MK, he rejected the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt despite the fact that it was negotiated by Begin, his party leader and the prime minister. When the first Intifada broke out, he warned that if there were to be a Palestinian state, the Intifada would be started in Israel by a small minority of Arabs disloyal to Israel.¹⁰¹

During the heyday of the peace process in the mid-1990s, however, Labor politicians who had previously opposed the idea of an independent Palestinian state began to embrace it. Although Rabin never publicly endorsed Palestinian statehood, his biographer and several of his associates have argued that it was clear to him that the logical extension of the Oslo process was a Palestinian state.¹⁰² Rabin was assassinated by a right-wing, religious fanatic on November 4, 1995, replaced by Peres, his foreign minister. Although Peres, too, had refrained from publicly endorsing a Palestinian state, he finally did so in 1997, following Netanyahu's victory in the 1996 national elections. Barak, the former IDF chief who entered politics and took over the Labor party following Peres's defeat, accepted it as well.¹⁰³ Labor subsequently adopted the platform plan recognizing the Palestinian people's right to self-determination in a state with limited sovereignty.¹⁰⁴

By the turn of the century, support for a Palestinian state had become mainstream in Israel. A 2001 Gallup poll found that 61 percent of the Israeli public favored the creation of a Palestinian state.¹⁰⁵ Even prominent Likud politicians, including Sharon and Olmert, changed their hard-held beliefs on this issue. Sharon declared his support for a Palestinian state as the leader of Likud despite having won a landslide victory over Barak in February 2001. Both he and Olmert,

¹⁰¹ Marda Dunsky, "Standing on the Green Line," *The Jerusalem Post*, June 23, 1989.

¹⁰² Dan Kurzman, *Soldier of Peace: The Life of Yitzhak Rabin* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998): 24 and 473; Ziv, *Why Hawks Become Doves*, 103–104.

¹⁰³ Eldad Beck, "Barak Conditionally Supports Palestinian State," *The Jerusalem Post*, January 26, 1997.

¹⁰⁴ Sarah Honig, "Labor Plank Supports Palestinian State," *The Jerusalem Post*, May 15, 1997.

¹⁰⁵ Mark Lavie, "Survey: 61% of Israelis in Favor of Palestinian State," *AP*, October 19, 2001; Asher Arian, *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security 2003*, Memorandum No. 67, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies.

who would succeed him as the nation's premier, had undergone an evolution in their thinking on this issue, mirroring the broader trend in Israeli society.¹⁰⁶

Netanyahu was the last holdout. His first election, six months after Rabin's assassination, marked the beginning of the end of the Oslo peace process. He reluctantly carried out Israel's obligations in the Oslo agreements. He signed the Hebron Protocol, which initiated an Israeli withdrawal from 80 percent of Hebron, and he agreed to withdraw Israeli troops from an additional 13 percent of the West Bank when he signed the Wye River Memorandum. At the same time, Netanyahu did not hide his disdain for the Oslo process, which began showing signs of wear and tear under his leadership. However, it was during the short-lived era of Barak, Netanyahu's former commander and successor as prime minister, that the peace talks collapsed.

In July 2000, Barak convinced President Bill Clinton to convene a summit at Camp David, where he and Arafat failed to reach a deal after fourteen days of difficult negotiations. Barak offered unprecedented concessions, agreeing to part with more than 90 percent of the West Bank and 100 percent of the Gaza Strip; dismantle most of the settlements; divide Jerusalem by offering the Palestinians sovereignty over the Muslim and Christian quarters of the Old City and custodianship – albeit not sovereignty – over the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. These compromises fell short of Arafat's demands, however, and the summit ended in bitter disappointment. A mutual blame-game ensued. Adding to the tense atmosphere created in the wake of the failed summit was then-opposition leader Sharon's provocative visit to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, which sparked the second Intifada, known as the al-Aqsa Intifada.

In December, President Clinton unveiled his vision of the two-state solution. His "parameters" outlined a vision of a Palestinian state that would comprise 94–96 percent of the West Bank, with border modifications giving the Palestinians the equivalent of 1–3 percent in Israeli territory. The "Clinton Parameters" also addressed the other core issues of the conflict including security arrangements, the status of settlements – 80 percent of the Israeli settlers would be able to live

¹⁰⁶ Guy Ziv, "Simple vs. Complex Learning Revisited: Israeli Prime Ministers and the Question of a Palestinian State," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 9, no. 2 (April 2013): 203–22.

in three settlement blocs – and of Jerusalem, and the fate of Palestinian refugees.¹⁰⁷ Barak accepted the Clinton Parameters with reservations. The Taba summit, which took place on January 21–27, 2001, was a last ditch effort to bridge the gaps between each side. Despite progress, the negotiators ran out of time. Clinton was no longer president while Israeli elections on February 6 led to the election of Sharon.

1.4.1 *The Ex-Shin Bet Chiefs Speak Out*

The Sharon era was marked by unilateralism in the absence of a peace process. Sharon responded aggressively to the violent attacks that characterized the second Intifada, imposing curfews and financial sanctions on the Palestinian Authority; setting up roadblocks; constructing a security barrier; and pursuing targeted assassinations aimed at thwarting terrorism.¹⁰⁸ In September 2002, as the Sharon government was confronting increased violence, former Shin Bet chief and commander of Israel's Navy, Ami Ayalon, held a joint press conference with Sari Nusseibeh in which they unveiled "The People's Voice," a blueprint for peace. The two men noted their intention to collect Israeli and Palestinian signatures to help leaders conduct negotiations toward the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the pre-1967 borders, with 1:1 territorial modifications in accordance with the vital needs of both sides.¹⁰⁹ Ayalon was the latest high-profile ex-senior security official joining Israeli civil society to lend his voice toward peace diplomacy with the Palestinians. Asher Susser notes that Ayalon and Nusseibeh succeeded where everyone else had failed by covering all the critical issues concerning the two-state solution – permanent borders; Jerusalem ("an open city, the capital of two states"); and the refugee issue, whereby Palestinian refugees "will return only to the State of Palestine" while Jews "will return only to the State of Israel."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Clinton Parameters: <https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/165>.

¹⁰⁸ "The al-Aqsa Intifada," *Ynet News*, March 19, 2009, accessed at www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3689276,00.html, September 23, 2022.

¹⁰⁹ "Ayalon, ex-PLO Official Nusseibeh Launch Joint Peace Drive," *Haaretz* Service and *Itim*, June 25, 2003, accessed at www.haaretz.com/1.5485750, September 23, 2022.

¹¹⁰ Asher Susser, *Israel, Jordan, and Palestine: The Two-State Imperative* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2012): 60.

In June 2003, shortly after Sharon's reelection, Bush formally unveiled his "Road Map for Peace in the Middle East."¹¹¹ Sharon's cabinet endorsed Bush's plan – albeit with a list of reservations the White House assured would be addressed.¹¹² Sharon thus officially became the first Israeli prime minister to consent to the establishment of a Palestinian state.¹¹³ Arafat, however, remained a *persona non grata* for the Israelis with the peace process at a standstill. That November, Israel's then-largest circulation daily, *Yedioth Ahronoth*, published a joint interview with Ayalon and three other former Shin Bet chiefs – Carmi Gillon, Yaakov Peri, and Avraham Shalom – who warned that Israel was in grave danger.¹¹⁴ Sharon's government, they said, was focused on military solutions alone, but what Israel urgently needed was a political solution to its conflict with the Palestinians. They called on the government to withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, even at the risk of clashing with some of the settlers.¹¹⁵ Six years later, Ayalon would team up with former Israeli peace negotiator Gilead Sher to co-found Blue White Future (BWF), an organization that advocates Israeli unilateral steps, such as facilitating the relocation of Jewish settlers in the West Bank, in order to keep the two-state solution alive even during a prolonged impasse with the Palestinians.

On December 18, Sharon, in a historic address at the Herzliya Conference, announced his unilateral disengagement plan, which

¹¹¹ "President Discusses Roadmap for Peace in the Middle East," *The White House*, March 14, 2003, accessed at <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030314-4.html>, May 3, 2023.

¹¹² John Ward Anderson, "Sharon Accepts 'Road Map' Following U.S. Assurances," *The Washington Post*, May 24, 2003, accessed at www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2003/05/24/sharon-accepts-road-map-following-us-assurances/108ac464-4f81-4775-94e3-377b80a87af7/, September 23, 2022.

¹¹³ Uri Dan, *Ariel Sharon: An Intimate Portrait* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006): 220.

¹¹⁴ Greg Myre, "4 Israeli Ex-Security Chiefs Denounce Sharon's Hard Line," *The New York Times*, November 15, 2003, accessed at www.nytimes.com/2003/11/15/world/4-israeli-ex-security-chiefs-denounce-sharon-s-hard-line.html, September 23, 2022.

¹¹⁵ Jason Keyser, "Ex-Israel Security Chiefs Push for Truce," *AP*, November 14, 2003, accessed at <https://apnews.com/article/9d8ed587c0af2b5d652f0d6e688bc765>, September 23, 2022; Mitch Ginsburg, "How I Persuaded Six Intelligence Chiefs to Pour Out Their Hearts," *The Times of Israel*, January 11, 2013, accessed at www.timesofisrael.com/how-i-persuaded-six-intelligence-chiefs-to-pour-out-their-hearts/, September 23, 2022.

would include “the redeployment of IDF forces along new security lines and a change in the deployment of settlements, which will reduce as much as possible the number of Israelis located in the heart of the Palestinian population.” The end goal, he emphasized, would be the establishment of “a democratic Palestinian state with territorial contiguity in Judea and Samaria and economic viability, which would conduct normal relations of tranquility, security and peace with Israel.”¹¹⁶

In June 2004, the Sharon government approved a plan to pull out unilaterally from the Gaza Strip. In a letter to President Bush, Sharon explained his rationale:

Having reached the conclusion that, for the time being, there exists no Palestinian partner with whom to advance peacefully toward a settlement and since the current impasse is unhelpful to the achievement of our shared goals, I have decided to initiate a process of gradual disengagement with the hope of reducing friction between Israelis and Palestinians. The Disengagement Plan is designed to improve security for Israel and stabilize our political and economic situation. It will enable us to deploy our forces more effectively until such time that conditions in the Palestinian Authority allow for the full implementation of the Roadmap to resume.¹¹⁷

Dov “Dubi” Weissglas, Sharon’s Chief of Staff, would later compare the Gaza disengagement to “formaldehyde,” because it proved useful in deflecting international criticism and thus enabled Sharon to freeze the peace process.¹¹⁸ Yet Weissglas also told Dror Moreh, a documentary filmmaker whose first film was on Sharon, that the *Yedioth* interview had had an important impact on the premier, who knew and respected these spymasters and concluded, therefore, that he needed to change course.¹¹⁹ In 2012, the four ex-Shin Bet directors would be joined by two others in Moreh’s second documentary,

¹¹⁶ “Address by PM Ariel Sharon at the Fourth Herzliya Conference Announcing the Disengagement Plan,” December 18, 2003, accessed at https://ecf.org.il/media_items/718, September 24, 2022.

¹¹⁷ “Exchange of Letters between President Bush and Prime Minister Sharon,” USIP, April 14, 2004, accessed at www.usip.org/sites/default/files/Peace%20Puzzle/15_Exchange%20of%20Letters%20Between%20President%20Bush%20and%20Prime%20Minister%20Sharon.pdf, September 24, 2022.

¹¹⁸ Ari Shavit, “The Big Freeze,” *Haaretz*, October 7, 2004, accessed at www.haaretz.com/1.4710587, September 24, 2022.

¹¹⁹ Ginsburg, “How I Persuaded Six Intelligence Chiefs to Pour Out Their Hearts.”

The Gatekeepers, which received international critical acclaim and was nominated by the Oscars. In Moreh's film, the former spymasters spoke honestly and bluntly about their experiences in fighting terrorism. "After retiring from this job, you become a bit of a leftist," says Yaakov Peri, who ran the security service from 1988 to 1994.

Addressing the Knesset on October 25, 2004, Sharon reiterated that Arafat was no peace partner. Yet, he made it clear that his plan to pull out of Gaza was not his end game, but merely a necessary interim step:

The Disengagement Plan does not replace negotiations and is not meant to permanently freeze the situation which will be created. It is an essential and necessary step in a situation which currently does not enable genuine negotiations for peace. However, everything remains open for a future agreement, which will hopefully be achieved when this murderous terror ends, and our neighbors will realize that they cannot triumph over us in this land.¹²⁰

Arafat died on November 11, just two weeks after Sharon's speech. According to the then-IDF head of Strategic Planning, Brig.-Gen. (Ret.) Udi Dekel, Sharon was not interested in negotiating with Arafat's successor, Mahmoud Abbas, because he thought it would take three years and thus preferred to stick with his unilateral plans.¹²¹

In August 2005, the government instructed the army to end its military occupation of the Gaza Strip. Israel dismantled all the settlements in Gaza, as well as four settlements in the northern West Bank, relocating and compensating the affected settlers. By September 12, there were neither any settlers nor soldiers who remained in Gaza. In November, Sharon bolted the Likud party he co-founded with Menachem Begin in 1973, forming the centrist Kadima party, which brought about a short-lived realignment of the Israeli party system. Moderates from Likud and Labor joined Kadima to promote the two-state solution. Olmert, who had served as Sharon's deputy and the government's point person for marketing the disengagement plan to

¹²⁰ "Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's Address to the Knesset – The Vote on the Disengagement Plan," MFA, October 25, 2004, accessed at www.gov.il/en/departments/news/prime-minister-ariel-sharon-s-address-to-the-knesset-the-vote-on-the-disengagement-plan-25-oct-2004, September 24, 2022.

¹²¹ Dekel, interview. Dekel notes that despite the lack of political coordination, there had been ongoing security coordination in the field.

the public, was among the prominent politicians to join Sharon's new party. He took over Kadima following Sharon's massive and incapacitating stroke on January 4, 2006.

1.4.2 *The Olmert–Abbas Talks*

Like Sharon, Olmert had evolved from a hardliner to a moderate on the question of a Palestinian state. Olmert's change was arguably even more profound than Sharon's turnabout on this issue given that he was widely perceived as more of an ideologue than Sharon. By the early 2000s, he had come to fully and unequivocally embrace the two-state solution, influenced in part by his left-wing family.¹²² His Kadima slate easily sailed to victory in the March 2006 elections.

The Bush administration, now in its second term, attempted to revive the peace process, thereby convening a summit in Annapolis, Maryland, to which both Olmert and Abbas were invited. The summit, held on November 27, 2007, restated "the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security." Abbas and Olmert committed themselves to meet on a biweekly basis in order "to conclude a peace treaty resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues." It was only after Olmert had been out of office that it was revealed that the two men had secretly met thirty-six times following the summit.¹²³ In fact, the two men had come closer to a deal than at any other point in Israeli–Palestinian peace negotiations. It was a meeting on September 16, 2008 that was of particular significance. According to Olmert, he proposed that Jerusalem's Old City would be placed under international control and that Israel retain 6.3 percent of the territory – enabling Israel to incorporate the settlement blocs – and compensate the Palestinians with Israeli territory equivalent to 5.8 percent of the West Bank, as well as a link to the Gaza Strip.¹²⁴ Abbas has not denied Olmert's account but said that Olmert showed him the proposed map in a take-it-or-leave-it

¹²² Ziv, "Simple vs. Complex Learning Revisited," 213.

¹²³ Avi Isacharoff, "Revealed: Olmert's 2008 Peace Offer to Palestinians," *The Jerusalem Post*, May 24, 2013, accessed at www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Details-of-Olmerts-peace-offer-to-Palestinians-exposed-314261, September 24, 2022.

¹²⁴ Josef Federman, "Abbas Admits He Rejected 2008 Peace Offer from Olmert," *The Times of Israel*, November 19, 2015, accessed at www.timesofisrael.com/abbas-admits-he-rejected-2008-peace-offer-from-olmert/, September 24, 2022.

manner without enabling him to study it. Abbas never gave a response, perhaps because he concluded that Olmert was damaged goods in the wake of his legal problems – Bush writes in his memoirs that he did not want to sign a deal with a prime minister who was about to leave office – or possibly in the hopes that Bush’s successor would provide a more favorable negotiating environment for him.¹²⁵ Abbas reportedly would later express regret, in private meetings, that he did not positively respond to Olmert’s Proposal.¹²⁶

1.4.3 *The Return of Netanyahu*

After a three-year hiatus from politics following his defeat by Barak in the May 1999 elections, Netanyahu returned to the political arena in 2002 as finance minister in Sharon’s government. He returned to the helm of Likud after Sharon’s formation of the Kadima party, but he performed disastrously in the 2006 elections: Likud won a paltry twelve Knesset seats. Netanyahu redeemed himself seven years later, when, after the February 2009 elections, he had rehabilitated Likud and formed his second government. By then, each premier who had served between Netanyahu’s first and second terms – Barak, Sharon, and Olmert – had publicly endorsed the idea of a Palestinian state. Netanyahu’s refusal to support it threatened to erode Israel’s standing with President Obama, who emphasized the two-state solution in their first face-to-face meeting on May 18 in the White House.¹²⁷ One month following his Washington trip, Netanyahu delivered a historic speech at Bar-Ilan University. For the first time, he publicly stated his support for “a demilitarized Palestinian state side by side with the Jewish state.”¹²⁸ As close associates of Netanyahu pointed out at the

¹²⁵ Isacharoff, “Revealed”; George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010): 409–10.

¹²⁶ Udi Dekel and Lia Moran-Gilad, “The Annapolis Process: A Missed Opportunity for a Two-State Solution?” Memorandum no. 212, The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) (May 4, 2021): 90.

¹²⁷ “Obama, Netanyahu Discuss U.S.–Israel Disagreements,” CNN, May 18, 2009, accessed at www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/05/18/mideast.obama.netanyahu/index.html, September 24, 2022.

¹²⁸ “Full Text of Netanyahu’s Foreign Policy Speech at Bar Ilan,” *Haaretz*, June 14, 2009, accessed at www.haaretz.com/2009-06-14/ty-article/full-text-of-netanyahus-foreign-policy-speech-at-bar-ilan/0000017f-f587-d5bd-a17f-f7bfffbae0000, September 24, 2022.

time, his about-face was a tactical maneuver aimed at preventing further tensions with the Obama administration, rather than a sincere embrace of this solution.¹²⁹ Indeed, in the ensuing years, he has all but disavowed his endorsement of a Palestinian state. The backsliding in the peace process during Netanyahu's tenure and his effective abandonment of the two-state solution has generated unparalleled activity in the community of veterans of the Israeli security establishment, with retired generals and former intelligence officials publicly opposing Netanyahu's agenda. Many of them have done so via civil society organizations; others have tried to defeat him in the political arena. The security community's contentious relationship with Netanyahu is a theme explored in Chapters 2 and 3.

1.5 Conclusion

Since the turn of the century, the two-state paradigm, which has its origins in the idea of partitioning Mandatory Palestine into two states, has been the preferred solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict by the Israeli national security community. As this chapter has shown, the IDF and the Mossad weighed in on the creation of a Palestinian state even before the 1967 War was over, offering various proposals that were ultimately dismissed by Prime Minister Eshkol. It was the military that first identified the long-term problem of holding onto the West Bank and Gaza, territories Israel had captured from Jordan and Egypt, respectively, and the implications of ruling over another people indefinitely. The civilian leadership was constrained by domestic political considerations – rival politicians, national-religious pressure groups, and public opinion – which the leadership of the IDF and the intelligence agencies did not need to take into account.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, successive Israeli governments outright rejected negotiations with the PLO given its terrorist activities; not even the Labor Party politicians, who favored territorial compromise, supported the idea of a PLO state, preferring instead to negotiate peace with the Kingdom of Jordan. In the late 1980s and

¹²⁹ Ziv, *Why Hawks Become Doves*, 125–26; Ziv, “Simple vs. Complex Learning Revisited,” 214–17; Amit Segal, “Netanyahu's Father Reveals the Secret” [in Hebrew], *N12*, July 9, 2009, accessed at www.mako.co.il/news-military/politics/Article-77cd5b4ae4b5221006.htm, September 24, 2022.

early 1990s, a period of tumultuous change around the world, the IDF top brass began advocating negotiations with a weakened and more restrained PLO. The return of Labor's Yitzhak Rabin, following his victory in the 1992 elections, coincided with greater influence for the generals. Rabin, himself a former general who led the IDF during the 1967 War, trusted the generals over the politicians and had come to share the army top brass's conclusion that the Palestinian Intifada could not be put down by force; Israel, rather, needed to pursue the path of diplomacy with the Palestinians. He saw to it that the military leadership was involved in the peace process, including them in the negotiations that took place following the Oslo signing ceremony on September 13, 1993.

With the onset of a second, more violent Intifada, retired Israeli security officials have made repeated public appeals to their government to pursue peace talks and refrain from taking unilateral measures that would destroy the prospects for a negotiated two-state solution. At the height of the second Intifada, the retired heads of the Shin Bet urged Prime Minister Sharon to embrace a political solution rather than rely on military means alone to quell the violence.

Israeli governments have varied in their commitment to pursuing a deal with the Palestinians based on the two-state solution, in contrast to the security community, which has been consistent in viewing the resolution of the Palestinian issue as a national priority. Driven by their desire to preserve Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, the vast majority of senior retired IDF generals and former heads of the Mossad and Shin Bet intelligence agencies thus support the two-state solution. Although the ex-generals who have gone into politics have tended to be more nuanced about their positions on this issue in recent years, in the light of prevailing attitudes, most of them have steered away from right-wing parties that reject the two-state solution. The security community's differences with Netanyahu over his handling of the Palestinian issue has been a major factor in its contentious relationship with him, a theme explored in Chapters 2 and 3.