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Michael D'Abramo  
*Seton Hall University*

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# **Diversionsary Behavior, Terrorism, and the Conduct of Israeli Foreign Policy**

by

Michael D'Abramo

John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations

Master's Thesis

Advisor: Professor Ann Murphy

Reader: Professor Cynthia Horne

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DIVERSIONARY BEHAVIOR, TERRORISM, AND THE CONDUCT OF  
ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY

by

Michael D'Abramo

John C. Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations  
Seton Hall University

Date Approved: May 3, 2005

Advisor:

ANN MARIE MURPHY Ann Marie Murphy

Reader:

CYNTHIA HORNE - Cynthia M. Horne

## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to determine whether Israeli leaders engage in diversionary behavior, or use of force against Palestinian militants, just prior to an election in order to increase public support, divert attention from domestic problems, and influence electoral gains. The paper analyzes five separate Israeli administrations since the initiation of the peace process in the early 1990s. This study examines the foreign policy decisions made by each leader with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with special attention paid to those periods just before a leader's re-election. This study seeks to expand upon the existing literature on diversionary behavior by incorporating a conflict that is neither purely intra or interstate in nature. It is also hoped that this study will provide insight not only into the future conduct of Israeli foreign policy behavior, but also additional states involved in similar conflicts that intersect domestic political turmoil and terrorism.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to begin by thanking Professor Ann Murphy for the time she devoted to this project. Her door was always open, her criticism was always helpful, and this study would not be what it is without her guidance. I am also grateful for the assistance provided by Professor Cynthia Horne. Over the past two years, she has continuously forced me to challenge the foundations of my intellect and has only served to increase my curiosity of the fundamental mechanics of international relations.

This study is also indebted to the many friends and acquaintances I have had the pleasure of getting to know at the Whitehead School of Diplomacy and International Relations. The constant academic debating has made this graduate experience truly worthwhile.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents Bruce and Maureen for their tireless support, patience, and direction. This study would not have been possible without you.

## *Introduction*

The following study is an examination of the relationship between Israeli diversionary uses of force and Palestinian terrorism. This paper seeks to answer whether Israeli leaders engage in diversionary behavior, or use force against Palestinian militants, just prior to an election in order to increase public support, divert attention from domestic problems, and influence electoral gains. The use of diversionary force by Israel and the use of terrorism by Palestinian militant groups each seek to influence public opinion, which in turn influences the character of Israeli foreign policy. A study of the intersection between diversionary behavior and terrorism has both policy and academic relevant implications. Much of the literature concerning diversionary force is drawn from interstate conflicts. The Israeli case is exceptional in that it involves a conflict that is not necessarily intra or interstate in nature. It is useful in that it may shed light on similar conflicts involving terrorism such as Sri Lanka and Chechnya. An examination of Israeli diversionary behavior is also relevant due to the changed dynamics of the conflict. With the passing of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and the recent Palestinian elections, the Israeli decision to pull out of Gaza, and renewed US interest in the conflict, this study will provide insight into future Israeli behavior during the run-up to the 2007 Israeli elections and beyond.

The evidence indicates that although most Israeli responses to Palestinian terrorism follow a strategy of tit-for-tat, there have been instances in which Israeli leaders have altered their policies prior to an election, using force to increase public support and create a diversionary effect. The paper analyzes five separate Israeli administrations since the initiation of the peace process in the early 1990s. The paper will follow the foreign policy decisions made by each

leader with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with special attention paid to those periods just before a leader's re-election.

According to the diversionary theory of war, a leader will engage in external military conflict overseas in order to divert attention away from domestic problems and create a temporary increase in public support for that leader. According to this hypothesis, leaders are aware that constituencies become more cohesive during times of conflict with out-groups. The purpose of diversionary behavior is to influence public opinion. By engaging in the use of force against an out-group, a leader will enjoy a boost in approval rating. The increase in approval rating, in turn, helps a leader to maintain his or her political strength. Special attention is placed on the time period just before an election, as this is the most likely time that a leader would seek to alter public opinion and increase electoral fortunes.

Terrorism, on the other hand, is used by sub-state actors, but also seeks to influence public opinion. For the purposes of this study, terrorism will be defined as: the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or intimidate governments or societies as to the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological.<sup>1</sup>

The structure of this study will begin with a review of the literature concerning diversionary war theory. It will then provide background on the theory and concepts associated with the phenomenon of terrorism. The review will illustrate how public opinion is the ultimate target of both leaders and terrorists, and how both apply to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The study will then provide an historical background concerning the history of the conflict and its root causes. This study will then provide historical background on the history of the peace process since 1993 and analyze the intersection of diversionary behavior, terrorism, and the conduct of Israeli foreign policy.

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<sup>1</sup> David Whittaker. *The Terrorism Reader*. London: Routledge, 2003

## *Literature Review*

Previous literature concerning diversionary uses of force is primarily focused on interstate conflict. Remaining within the parameters of the theory, this study will examine the case of Israel, an in group, and its history with Palestinian terrorist groups, an out group. This paper will examine whether Israeli uses of force against Palestinian militant groups are determined by diversionary behavior on the part of Israeli leaders, or by a simple strategy of tit-for-tat in response to terrorism.

A heated debate has focused the attention of the academic world about the effects and mechanisms associated with diversionary war theory. Many studies examine the relationship between presidential election cycles and the conduct of foreign policy, with special emphasis on the use of military power. Uses of force against an out group helps to solidify cohesion within an in group and creates an important rally around the flag effect.

Concerning the rally effect, William Baker and John Oneal note that “It is commonly believed that in times of major international events or crises, [the public] sets aside its disagreements with the incumbent president’s policies or performance in office to present a unified front to the international community.”<sup>2</sup> Leaders with low public opinion ratings will be tempted to engage in external uses of military force. According to Derouen, “Because of the positive political benefits said to accrue from force, leaders may also use the tactic to improve electoral fortunes.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> William Baker and John Oneal, “Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?: The Nature and Origins of the “Rally ‘Round the Flag” Effect”, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, (October 2001) 45, no. 5, 664

<sup>3</sup> Karl Derouen Jr., “Presidents and the Diversionary Use of Force”, *International Studies Quarterly* 44, Issue 2 (June 2000) 318



In his article “The Guns of November”, Richard Stoll examines US foreign relations from 1947-1982. According to Stoll, leaders seeking re-election will use foreign policy options, such as the use of force, to increase their chances of winning. For the most part, foreign policy issues are less important to the public than domestic issues. As such, leaders will generally refrain from using force during peacetime elections and more likely to use force when foreign or defense policy is more important to the public. When foreign or defense policy is important and a leader is suffering from low public opinion, a leader will use force in order to create a “rally” effect in order to increase his/her chances of winning an election.<sup>4</sup>

A rally event is a consequence of diversionary behavior. John Mueller provides us with means to conceptualize a rally event. According to Mueller, a rally event must relate to international relations, directly involve a state and its president, and is “specific, dramatic, and sharply focused.” The public will support the president because they fear that not doing so will hurt the president and the country’s chances of succeeding. Mueller adds that “Such events confront the nation as a whole, are salient to the public, and gain attention and interest.”<sup>5</sup>

For the purposes of this study, Israel is considered an “in group”, and Palestinians are considered an “out group”. If we apply Stoll’s logic to the Israeli case, we would maintain that leaders will be more apt to use force when the Palestinian situation is more salient to the Israeli people. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict will become more salient to the Israeli public as the number or intensity of terrorist attacks increases.

As an act of political violence, terrorism goes beyond the act of violence itself. Terrorism seeks to influence public opinion in the pursuit of some stated goal or to change a government’s existing policy. Through the killing of both soldiers and non-combatants, terrorist

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Stoll, “The Guns of November”, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 28 (June 1984) 233

<sup>5</sup> George C. Edwards III, “Who Rallies? The Anatomy of a Rally Event”, *The Journal of Politics*, 59, no. 1 (Feb. 1997) 201

groups use irregular forces to create fear and insecurity within the general populace and government. Terrorism seeks to manipulate public opinion against the ruling leadership, forcing it to change policies the terrorist group finds offensive.

Should a leader choose to retaliate, he/she is seeking to 1) reduce insecurity felt by the public by being “tough” on terror and/or 2) address the wishes of hard-line political elements within the government. Should a leader choose to engage the group, he/she is seeking to 1) increase long term security goals at the expense of short term political capital and/or 2) address the wishes of soft-liner political elements within the government.

Terrorism is a form of asymmetric warfare, by which a weaker opponent attacks the institutions and sense of security offered by the state. As is often the case, visibility and recognition are extremely important. Spectacular and heinous attacks attract media attention to the group and its cause, thus serving to influence the Israeli public’s sense of insecurity and its stance on the government’s policies.

Terrorist organizations come in various shapes and sizes. According to terrorism expert Eqbal Ahmad, there are five sources of terrorism – state, religion, protest/revolution, crime and pathology. Only the first three have political motivation.”<sup>6</sup>

Revolutionary terrorists often view their victims as unfortunate victims of war, and view indiscriminate killing as counterproductive and potentially immoral. Other terrorist groups with unlimited aims, such as religious groups, according to Kellman, are more dedicated to spreading panic. He notes that *panic spreaders*, “tend to have a political ideology only in the anarchic or mystical sense that the modern era is corrupt, excessively regimented, or lavishly materialistic, and they have scant interest either in building a mass movement or negotiating with the

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<sup>6</sup> Eqbal Ahmad, “Comprehending Terror”, *MERIP Middle East Report*, (May – June 1986) no. 140, 3

established power structure.” Such terrorist groups seek to, “fracture social bonds by perpetrating a sense of random and perpetual danger.” He adds that for those groups, “motivated by a distorted sense of religious faith, inflating the death toll increases fears of a disintegrating social order.”<sup>7</sup>

The terrorist groups associated with the Palestinian conflict largely fall into the protest/revolution and religion categories. The Palestinian secular-nationalist groups have expressed limited goals involving policy changes and the establishment of a Palestinian homeland. Because of this, it is possible that some groups will respond positively to Israeli policies of engagement. The Islamist Palestinian groups have unlimited aims (i.e. the total destruction of Israel) and are far less likely to ever engage in the peace process. With this in mind, it is possible that Israeli leaders respond differently to secular-nationalist and religious Palestinian groups. This study will also assess the conflict’s history to determine whether there is any truth to this assumption.

*Hypotheses and Variables:*

A) Strength of leader at beginning of term

Separated into two categories: *weak* and *strong*. To be measured as the number of seats held in the Knesset. In order to establish a majority in the Israeli Knesset, a coalition must possess 60 or more seats out of a total of 120 seats. However, a coalition can bring in the support of Knesset Members from outside of the coalition in order to establish a majority. A weak coalition will be

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<sup>7</sup> Barry Kellman, *The American Journal of International Law* 94 no. 2, (Apr. 2000) 435

defined as one with 60 or fewer seats, and a strong coalition will be defined as one with 61 or more seats.

B) Strength of leader 6-9 months before re-election

To be measured in terms of public support for governmental performance.

C) Character of Israeli foreign policy

Separated into two categories; *support for retaliation* (use of diplomatic or military punitive measures) and *support for engagement* (negotiation).

D) Public preferences

To be measured in terms of Israeli support or opposition to government's policy in the Palestinian territories.

E) Consistency of policy outcome to leader's policy preferences during re-election.

To be measured as to whether the leader's policy choice (engagement/retaliation) runs parallel to his policy preferences.

*Election timing*

Defined in terms of 6 – 9 months prior to an election

Hypotheses

- 1) If Israel has a weak leader, a public with symmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is consistent with the leader's preference, then the policy outcome may or may not be a diversion.
- 2) If Israel has a strong leader, a public with symmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is consistent with the leader's preference, then the policy outcome is not a diversion.

- 3) If Israel has a weak leader, a public with asymmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is consistent with the leader's preference, then the policy outcome is not a diversion.
- 4) If Israel has a weak leader, a public with asymmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is inconsistent with the leader's preference, then the policy outcome is a diversion.
- 5) If Israel has a strong leader, a public with asymmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is consistent with the leader's preference, then the policy is not a diversion.
- 6) If Israel has a strong leader, a public with asymmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is inconsistent with the leader's preference, then the policy may or may not be a diversion.

#### *History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the Causes of Palestinian Violence*

In the ashes of the second world war, the soon to be formed state of Israel engaged in a bloody and asymmetric war of resistance against its British colonial master. The Jewish Israeli resistance drove out the British presence, and with the support of the United States, declared its independence on May 14, 1948. Less than 24 hours after the declaration, the countries of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq invaded the newly sovereign state of Israel, beginning what would become known as the Israeli war of independence. The war played out over the course of 15 months. Despite their significant military disadvantage, the poorly equipped Israeli Defense

Forces (IDF) managed to expel the Arab armies from Israel. The Israeli victory was largely dependent upon US financial, diplomatic, and especially military support.

Israel started conducting negotiations with each of the Arab countries in 1949, except for Iraq, which refused to engage in negotiations with Israel. Through these negotiations, a series of armistice agreements were signed. According to these agreements, the Galilee (northern Israel) and the Negev (southern Israel) were placed under Israeli sovereignty. The West Bank was placed under Jordanian control, and the Gaza Strip was placed under the control of Egypt. Finally, administration over the holy city of Jerusalem (sacred to both Jews and Muslims) was divided, with Jordan administering the eastern section and the Old City, and Israel administering the western section. Please see Map 1 below for a clear picture of Israel's 1949 borders.

The peace brokered through the armistice agreements would be short lived. By 1951, all Israeli and Israeli bound shipping was blocked from passing through the Egyptian Suez Canal and the blockade of Israeli ships along the Straits of Tiran was tightened. Please see Map 2 below for a clear picture of the Straits of Tiran. In October 1956, the countries of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan signed a tripartite military alliance. In an attempt to re-gain influence within the region, the countries of Britain and France gave their blessing to an Egyptian attack on Israel, thus beginning the eight day long Sinai military campaign. By the time the smoke cleared, Israeli soldiers had seized the Gaza Strip and the entire Sinai peninsula. In response to the crisis, a UN Emergency Force was stationed along the Israeli-Egyptian border. Israeli and Egyptian diplomats began negotiations, which led to an Israeli commitment to withdraw from Gaza and the Sinai in stages (between November 1956 – March 1957) and an Egyptian commitment to open up the Straits of Tiran.

Tensions began to flare once again along the Israeli borders in 1967. Before the outbreak of the 1967 Six Day War, Arab terrorist activity against Israel culminating from the Egyptian and Jordanian borders increased, Syria was engaging in an artillery bombing campaign against Israeli agricultural settlements in northern Galilee, and there were significant Arab military build-ups along the Israeli border. In May 1967, Egypt amassed a large number of troops into the Sinai, demanded the withdrawal of UN peacekeeping forces, re-introduced a blockade on the Straits of Tiran, and signed a military alliance with Jordan. On June 5, 1967, Israel launched an attack against Egypt, and followed up with counterattacks against Jordanian troops in the east and Syrian troops within the Golan Heights. After six days of war, Israel retained control over the Gaza Strip (Egyptian), the West Bank (Jordanian), and the Golan Heights (Syrian). It is also worth noting that Israel pushed Jordanian forces out of east Jerusalem, now possessing full control over the holy city.

Israel has continued to occupy the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and east Jerusalem to this day. Many Palestinians residing within these areas have called for the removal of Israeli troops and the establishment of a Palestinian state comprised of the West Bank and Gaza, with east Jerusalem as the state's capital. Some Palestinian groups, such as Hamas and Hizballah, have called upon the total destruction of Israel. Yet two things are clear. The changes in territorial control after the 1967 war has been both at the heart of the peace process as well as the wellspring of Palestinian terrorist violence. Please see map 3 for a clear picture of Israel's borders after the 1967 war.

Only five years after the Six Day War Egypt and Syria invaded Israel on Yom Kippur in 1973. Egyptian troops crossed into the Sinai and Syrian troops tried to re-capture the Golan Heights. This time, Israel would push Egyptian forces past the Suez Canal and Syrian troops to

within twenty miles of Damascus. After two years of bitter negotiations, the countries of Israel, Egypt, and Syria signed disengagement agreements that committed Israel to withdrawing from portions of the newly captured territory.

Israel has also had territorial disputes with Lebanon. In an attempt to root out Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) forces in southern Lebanon, Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982. The PLO was forced to move to Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, where it remained until the signing of the first Oslo Accord in 1993. Israeli forces would remain in southern Lebanon for eighteen years, until Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak unilaterally withdrew due to pressures from the peace process and Hizballah forces.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Palestinian movement*

While the state of Israel fought to defend its territorial integrity during this period, the Palestinian movement began to take on a life of its own. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was officially established in 1964, later to be headed by Yasser Arafat in 1969. The goal of the PLO has been to establish a sovereign Palestinian homeland. Since then, the PLO has been the dominant political force behind the Palestinian movement.

The PLO is an umbrella organization composed of a number of political factions and guerilla groups. Unlike the Islamist groups, the PLO group is secular-nationalist. The largest faction is Arafat's own Fatah group, which is a political movement created by Arafat in the 1950s. Fatah is the dominant faction within the PLO, but also has ties to secular militant groups such as Force 17, Tanzim, and the Al Aqsa Brigades. In 1974, the PLO was declared by the Arab states to be the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

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<sup>8</sup> *The State of Israel*, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Accessed 35 March 2005. Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa>. Internet.



The PLO was initially based in Jordan, until it was kicked out in 1970 for attempting to overthrow the government. From Jordan, the group moved to Lebanon, but was then removed during the Israeli invasion in 1982. From 1982 until 1993, the PLO resided in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia. Upon the signing of the first Oslo Accord in 1993 and the subsequent establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA), most of the PLO moved to the West Bank town of Ramallah.

The PLO is the only group with the political legitimacy to broker a peace deal with Israel. However, the group has ties to secular militant groups, such as the Al Aqsa Brigades (formed during the second intifada) that have committed some of the worst terrorist attacks in Israel. In addition, because the group was located overseas during the first intifada, many Palestinians, especially those sympathetic to Hamas and Islamic Jihad that fought in the intifada, see PLO officials as outsiders. As such, there are serious tensions between the secular-nationalist groups and the Islamists.<sup>9</sup>

Among the most militant secular groups linked to Yasser Arafat's Fatah organization are Fatah Tanzim and the Martyrs of Al Aqsa Brigades. Both were established much later, with Tanzim created in 1995, and Al Aqsa created at the height of the second intifada in 2002. Fatah Tanzim is the armed wing of former PA Chairman Yasser Arafat. It serves as a counterweight to other Palestinian terrorist groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The group serves as an unofficial Palestinian army that engages Israeli soldiers without officially breaking signed agreements. The Martyrs of Al Aqsa Brigade belongs under Arafat's Fatah organization, and its infrastructure, funds, leadership, and operatives are drawn from the Fatah Tanzim.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Battle for the Holy Land*, PBS online, Accessed 2 April 2005. Available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/holy/combatants/palestinians.html>. Internet.

<sup>10</sup> *Hizballah*, International Center for Counterterrorism, Accessed 1 March 2005. Available at <http://www.ict.org.il/>. Internet.

In addition to Tanzim and Al Aqsa, Arafat possessed his own security force known as Force 17. The group was established in the 1970s and was directly responsible to Arafat. Israel has claimed that Force 17 has conducted attacks on Israel during the second intifada, which has resulted in Israeli counter-strikes. As such, we can assume that those attacks presented later in this study associated with Force 17 were certainly known about by Arafat and possibly planned by him. Because the PLO is the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people engaged in the peace process, we can conclude that such attacks are especially deleterious for the peace process and those Israeli political parties pressing for a policy of engagement.<sup>11</sup>

The Shiite militant group Hizballah was formed in June of 1982 as a reaction to the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon. As a Shiite group, Hizballah is supported by Iran, which uses the group as a proxy agent against Israel. The goal of Hizballah is to drive out Israeli influence and to establish an independent, Islamic state in Lebanon. The group's ideology infers that the injustice done to the Shi'a Muslims is the result of other's actions. According to terrorism expert David Whittaker, "Like Leninist thought, Hizballah believes that justice and equality can be achieved through human efforts, through a revolutionary process. Hizballah represents a revolutionary version of Shiite Islam."<sup>12</sup> The rigidity of the group's ideology makes it an unlikely candidate for political engagement. Also complicating any policy of engagement is the fact that Hizballah, rather than being a single cohesive organization, is actually an umbrella organization of various Shiite groups committed to a Khomeinistic ideology.

In the group's early years, Hizballah conducted a series of high profile attacks against Israeli targets and American and Multinational forces in Lebanon. A primary modus operandi of

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<sup>11</sup> "Battle for the Holy Land", *PBS*,  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/holy/combatants/palestinians.html>

<sup>12</sup> David Whittaker. *The Terrorism Reader*. London: Routledge, 2003

the group for many years has been the taking of hostages. By the early 1990s, however, the lethality of the group increased tremendously. Responding to the outbreak of the Palestinian intifada that lasted roughly from 1988 – 1991, Hizballah attacks became more numerous and increasingly complicated. Hizballah is notorious for firing Katyusha style rockets across the border into northern Israeli settlements, as well as using explosives and small arms. In 1990, Hizballah conducted only 19 attacks, compared to 52 in 1991, 63 in 1992, 158 in 1993, and 344 in 1994.<sup>13</sup>

After many years of frustration with Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinian people revolted in what would become the first Palestinian intifada. In 1987, a car accident involving an Israeli car hitting a Palestinian car sparked violence in the streets of the occupied territories. The incident started a wave of violent rioting and stone throwing at Israeli soldiers. The intifada lasted through the 1991 Gulf War. At this time, then PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat lost much of his support from his main backers, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, due to his support for Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. Negotiations were held in Madrid after the Gulf War in order to bring an end to the Palestinian uprising.

Another Islamist group, Hamas, originated from Gaza, and began operations during the late stages of the first intifada (1988 – 1991). The group played a major role in the violence, attacking both Israelis and Palestinians. During the course of the intifada, the group expanded into the West Bank and soon became the dominant militant Palestinian group in the Palestinian territories. The group is presently responsible for a relative majority of the attacks against Israelis during the second intifada that began in 2000, and is second in power only to former Palestinian Chairman Arafat's Al Fatah. Hamas has called for the complete destruction of Israel,

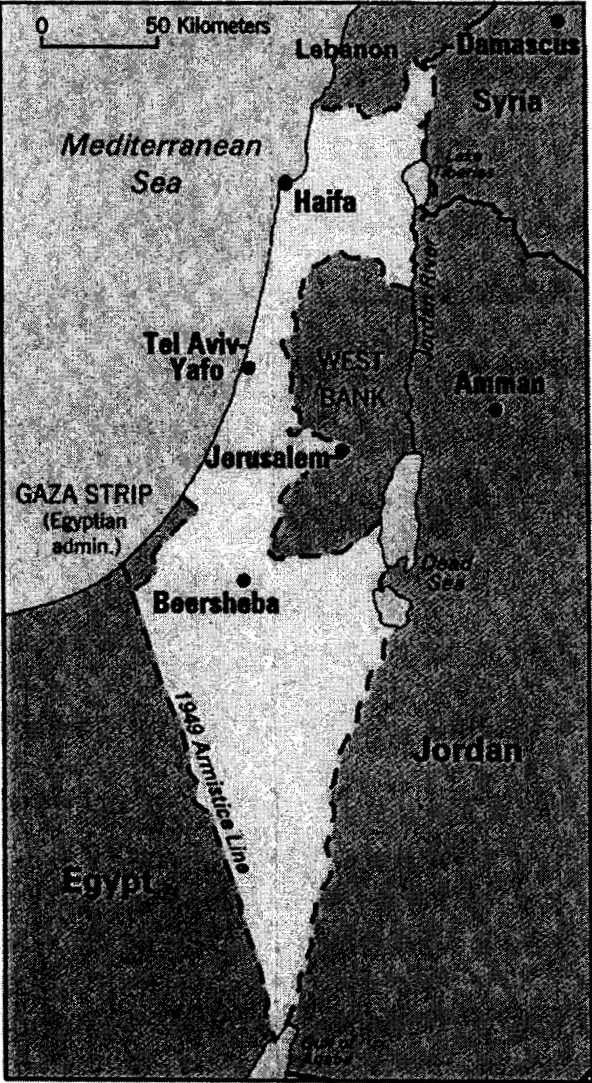
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<sup>13</sup> *Hizballah*, International Center for Counterterrorism, Accessed 1 March 2005. Available at <http://www.ict.org.il/Internet>.

and does not engage in the peace process. In fact, it could be considered a threat to secular nationalist Palestinians such as Palestine's official representative body, the Palestinian Authority. As such, Israeli engagement with the PA does not necessarily extend to over groups such as Hamas.

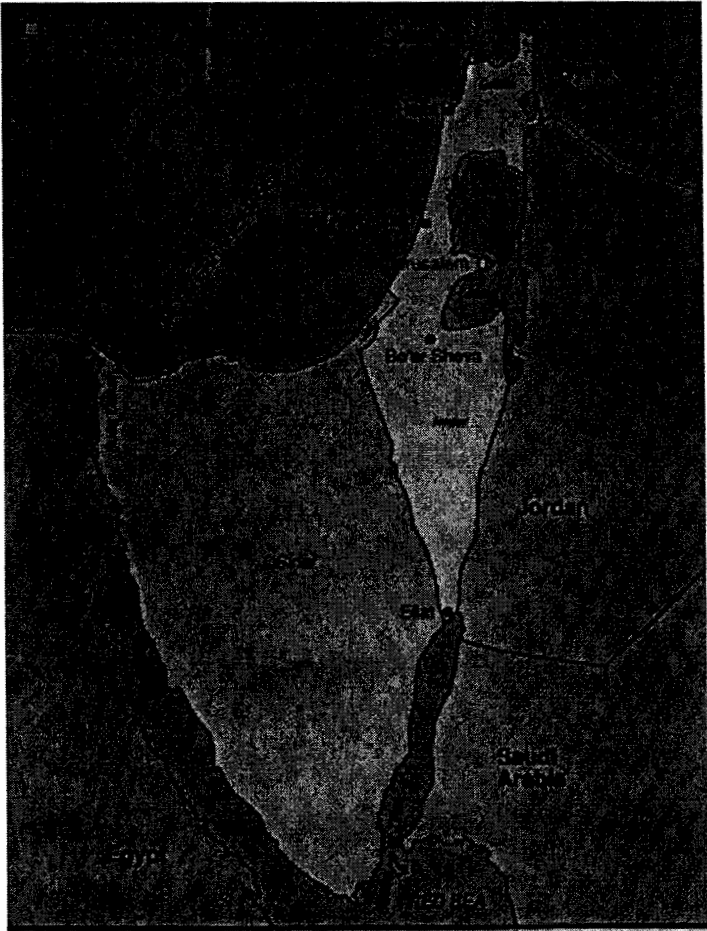
The preceding history provides a backdrop to the beginning of the peace process. What follows is a case study of five Israeli administrations between 1992 to present day and their responses to domestic political pressure and Palestinian terrorism.

Map 1: Israeli borders (1949 – 1967)<sup>14</sup>



<sup>14</sup> *Israel 1949-1967*, GlobalSecurity.org. Accessed 3 March 2005. Available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/israel/images/israel05.jpg>. Internet.

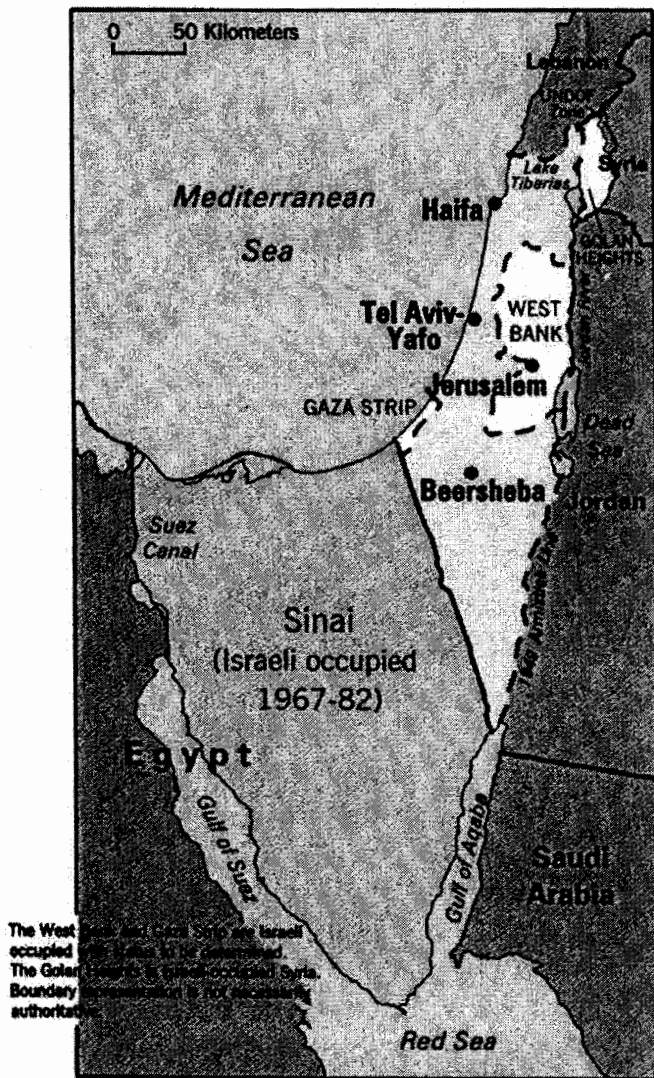
Map 2: The Straits of Tiran<sup>15</sup>



**The Sinai Campaign, 1956**

<sup>15</sup> *The Sinai Campaign*, United Jerusalem.com, Accessed 10 May 2005. Available at <http://www.unitedjerusalem.com/Graphics/Maps/1956SinaiWar.asp>. Internet.

Map 3: Borders of Israel and occupied territories after 1967 war to present day (Green Line)<sup>16</sup>



<sup>16</sup> *Israel and Occupied Territories Since June 1967*, GlobalSecurity.org, Accessed 4 March 2005. Available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/israel/images/israel06.jpg>. Internet.

## **The government of Yitzhak Rabin (1992 – 1995)**

In the wake of the first intifada, the 25<sup>th</sup> Israeli government was formed by Yitzhak Rabin on July 13, 1992. Rabin led a coalition composed of Labor, Meretz, Shas (left the government in 1993), and Yi'ud (joined the government in 1995). After Labor, the most influential of these coalition partners were Meretz, a secular left wing group, and Shas, the centrist ultra-Orthodox Sephardic party. Yitzhak Rabin came to power over Yitzhak Shamir in a potent victory. The Shamir government, which had presided over the first Palestinian uprising (1988 – 1991), or intifada, was no longer politically viable. The election of Rabin came as a rebuff by the Israeli electorate to Shamir's policies of territorial expansion. The bulk of Israeli society now sided with Rabin's policy of compromise.<sup>17</sup>

The most powerful parties within the coalition supported a policy of engagement with the Palestinians. As the chart below illustrates, the three parties dedicated to the peace process controlled 62 out of the 120 seats in the Israeli Knesset. The Yi'ud party, a right wing group more dedicated to retaliation, only possessed one seat, which it eventually lost after the group no longer needed it to hold the coalition together. Upon the outset of Rabin's tenure in office, his coalition was strong.

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<sup>17</sup> Ahron Bregman, *A History of Israel*. New York: Palgrave, 2003



Israel's 25<sup>th</sup> government: Rabin's Coalition<sup>18</sup>

Party	Description	Political alignment	Votes in percentage	Number of seats	Number of seats before next election	Seats lost/gained
Labor	Israel's main liberal party. Supports diplomatic approach to the conflict, and establishment of a Palestinian state.	Left	34.7	44	41	-3
Meretz	Founded in 1992. Advocates finding a diplomatic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the establishment of a Palestinian homeland roughly based on the 1967 borders.	Left	9.6	12	12	0
Shas	An ultra-Orthodox party committed to the interests of Israel's Sephardic community formed in 1984. Advocates territorial compromise with Palestinians.	Center	4.9	6	5	-1
Yi'ud	A breakaway group from Tzomet, an Israeli nationalist party. Formed after elections for 13th Knesset	Right	N/A	0	1	0

Measurement of Rabin's leadership

Character of policy at beginning of term	<b>Engagement</b>
Strength of leader at beginning of term	<b>Strong</b>
Strength of leader 6-9 months before re-election	<b>Weak</b>

<sup>18</sup> *Factional Makeup of the 13<sup>th</sup> Knesset*, Israel Knesset, Accessed 7 April 2005. Available at [http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng\\_hist\\_all.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng_hist_all.htm). Internet.

Public preferences	<b>Asymmetric</b>
Consistency of policy outcome to leader's policy preferences during re-election	<b>Consistent</b>

Initially in 1992, Labor received 34.7% of the electoral vote and 44 seats in parliament; Meretz received 9.6% of the electoral vote and 12 seats in parliament; Shas received 4.9 % of the electoral vote and 6 seats; and Yi-ud received 0% initially but gained a seat later in 1995. The coalition received support from 62 coalition MKs and 5 additional MKs from outside the coalition when it was initially formed. After Shas and Yi'ud entered later, the number of MKs supporting the coalition dropped to 58 coalition MKs (lower than a simple majority on its own) and 5 additional MKs outside the coalition. The 25<sup>th</sup> government would later turn into a transition government upon the assassination of Rabin in 1995.

As successor to Yitzhak Shamir, Rabin proved to be a far more capable and experienced leader. Realizing that he would need the support of the military to make progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Rabin held on to the title of Defense Minister concurrently with his new position as head of the Israeli state. Due to domestic political pressure, Rabin was coerced into making Shimon Peres, a long time adversary, his Foreign Minister. However, Rabin deliberately kept his new foreign minister in check by requiring that all bilateral talks during the peace process would be conducted by him. Tiring of a standstill on the peace talks conducted through Washington, Rabin decided to pursue the unofficial negotiations (until then unbeknownst to him) going on between senior PLO officials and two Israeli academics in Oslo, Norway.

Rabin presided over one of the most significant episodes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On September 13, 1993, the Declaration of Principles, otherwise known as Oslo I, was signed, establishing mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO and an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. The treaty paved the way for future discussions concerning the formation of a Palestinian homeland and an end to the violence.

One year after Rabin's election, the Israeli public's attitude toward the government's policy in the Palestinian territories turned more hard-line. In an opinion poll conducted by the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies for 1993, their findings show that 10% of Israelis felt the policy was too harsh, 31% felt it was correct, and 59% felt it was too soft. For additional polling data concerning Israeli opinion on government policy in the territories, please see graph 1 at the bottom of this paper.

Israelis began to tire of the political stalemate between both sides, while others were upset by his recognition of the PLO and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority through the Oslo Accord. The drop in public opinion illustrates a weakening of Rabin's political strength. Ten days after the signing of Oslo, a motion of no-confidence in Rabin's government was brought before the Knesset. According to the record, 61 MK voted against the motion, 50 in favor, eight abstained and one was absent, leaving Rabin's government in place.

Though politically hurt, Rabin continued to engage in the peace process. He signed Oslo II in Taba on September 27, 1995. Under Oslo II, Israel agreed to withdraw from the West Bank and elections were to be held for a Palestinian Authority. Please see Map 4 for a clear picture of how territory was ceded to the Palestinians.

Many Israelis felt that these concessions went too far. Of those Israelis polled by the Jaffee Center's survey in 1995, 7% felt the government's policy in the Palestinian territories was

too harsh, 30% felt it was correct, and 63% felt it was too soft. A separate poll conducted by the Jaffe Center for 1995 found that 37% of the Israeli public rated overall government performance as poor, 34% as not good, and 34% as good. For additional polling data on Israeli opinion on governmental performance, please see graph 2 below.

The Israeli public clearly was not fully on board Rabin's policy, nor was it happy with his government's overall performance.<sup>19</sup> In response, a wave of demonstrations began, some of them violent, against Rabin's government and its policy. Following the signing of Oslo II, the number of Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad attacks increased. This fact was not lost on the government's opposition, who repeatedly brought up the issue in the Knesset. The coalition government formed by Rabin faced pressure within its own ranks as well. As the Labor party pushed for a peaceful settlement with Syria over the Golan Heights, two Labor Knesset members (MKs) left the party and formed the Third Way party. Rabin's political strength was eroding.

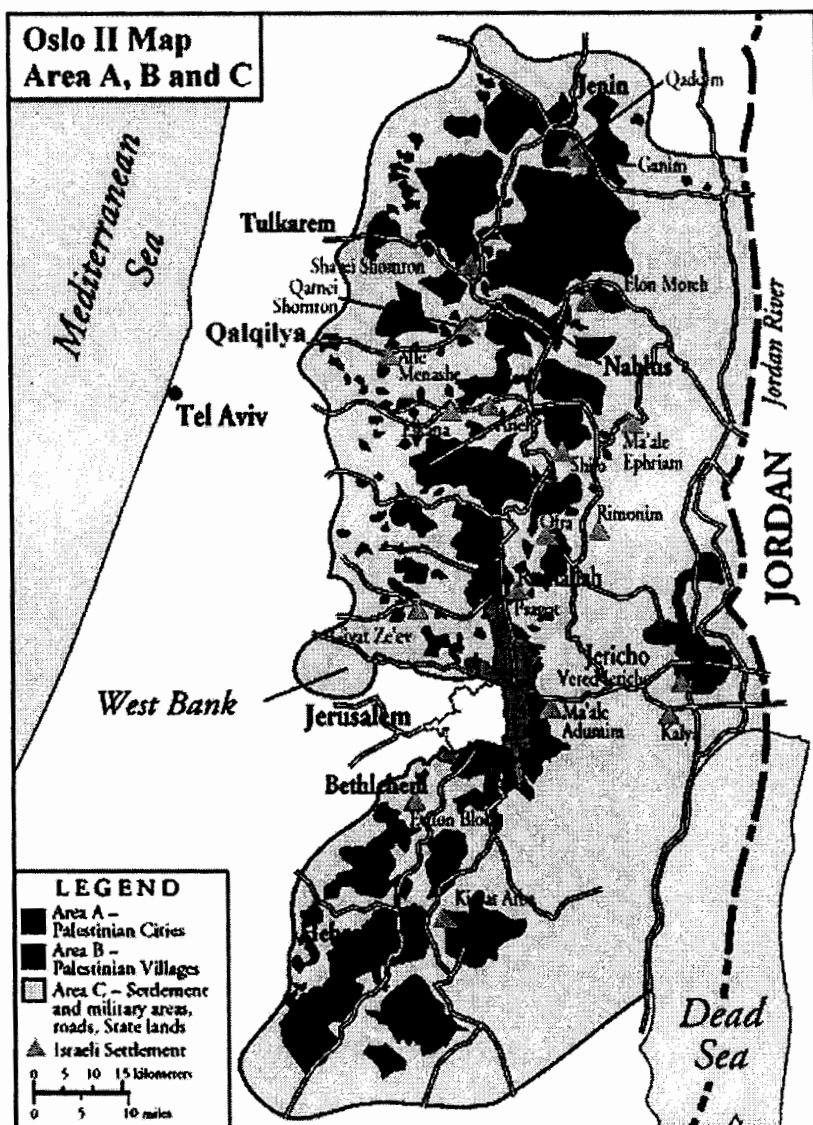
During Rabin's re-election period, there was one major terrorist incident. On August 21, 1995, a Palestinian suicide bomber blows himself up on a bus in Jerusalem. The attack kills 4 Israeli soldiers, 1 American, and wounds more than 100 others. Hamas claimed responsibility. Despite the setback caused by the attack, Rabin remained committed to a policy of engagement. However, 63% of Israelis felt that Rabin's policy toward the Palestinian territories was too soft. This seems to confirm the hypothesis that if Israel has a weak leader, a public with asymmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is consistent with the leader's preference, then the policy outcome is not a diversion.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Accessed 20 January 2005. Available at <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo67.pdf>. Internet.

<sup>20</sup> *Escalating to Nowhere*, Dr. Anthony Cordesman, Accessed 12 April 2005. Available at <http://www.csis.org/burke/index.htm#Reports>. Internet.

Map 4: Territorial Control Ceded to Palestinian Authority under Oslo II Accord<sup>21</sup>



<sup>21</sup> Oslo II Map, GlobalSecurity.org, Accessed 20 April 2005. Available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/palestine/images/oslo-map1.gif>. Internet.

Rabin's commitment to a policy of engagement would prove costly. On November 4, 1995, Rabin was assassinated by an Israeli extremist named Yigal Amir who believed Rabin's policy was too conciliatory. The people of Israel vigorously condemned the act, despite a strong opposition to Rabin's policy toward the Palestinians.

### **The government of Shimon Peres (1995 – 1996)**

On November 22, 1995, the 26<sup>th</sup> Israeli government was formed by Shimon Peres. The coalition consisted of the Labor, Meretz, and Yi'ud parties. Labor received 34.7% of the electoral ballot and 44 seats in the Knesset. Another left wing party, Meretz, received 9.6% of the electoral ballot and 12 seats in the Knesset. Both Labor and Meretz controlled a total of 56 out of 120 seats in the Knesset.

Labor and Meretz, the most powerful in the coalition, supported a policy of engagement with the Palestinians. Yu'id, a right wing group also apart of the coalition, entered the Knesset after the initial elections and received one temporary seat. When the coalition was initially formed, 58 coalition MKs and 5 MKs outside the coalition supported the government. Without a clear majority in the Knesset, Peres came to power as a weak leader. However, the Israeli public was initially more satisfied with Peres's government's performance compared to Rabin's at the end of 1995. Of those polled, 16% of the Israeli public rated government performance as poor, 34% rated it as not good, but 43% rated it as good. This is a 18% increase compared to Rabin's government in 1995.<sup>22</sup> Much of this popularity was generated from the rally effect from

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<sup>22</sup> *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Accessed 20 January 2005. Available at <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo67.pdf>. Internet.

Rabin's assassination, of which Peres assiduously exploited. His assassination united the people of Israel, at least for a while, and bolstered the policies of the Peres government.

Israel's 26<sup>th</sup> government: Peres's coalition<sup>23</sup>

Party	Description	Political alignment	Votes in percentage	Number of seats	Number of seats before next election	Seats lost/gained
Labor	Israel's main liberal party. Supports diplomatic approach to the conflict, and establishment of a Palestinian state.	Left	34.7	44	41	-3
Meretz	Founded in 1992. Advocates finding a diplomatic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the establishment of a Palestinian homeland roughly based on the 1967 borders.	Left	9.6	12	12	0
Yi'ud	A breakaway group from Tzomet, an Israeli nationalist party. Formed after elections for 13th Knesset	Right	N/A	0	1	0

Measurement of Peres' leadership

Character of policy at beginning of term	<b>Engagement</b>
Strength of leader at beginning of term	<b>Weak</b>

<sup>23</sup> *Factional Makeup of the 13<sup>th</sup> Knesset*, Israel Knesset, Accessed 7 April 2005. Available at [http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng\\_hist\\_all.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng_hist_all.htm). Internet.

Strength of leader 6-9 months before re-election	<b>Weak</b>
Public preferences	<b>Asymmetric</b>
Consistency of policy outcome to leader's policy preferences during re-election	<b>Inconsistent</b>

Realizing that Rabin's assassination had politically strengthened the Labor Party, Peres decided to hold general election ahead of schedule before the rally had died down. Peres also realized that he would need to make politically tough decisions soon with respect to making a deal with Syria on the Golan Heights and discussing final status issues with Yasser Arafat. On February 11, 1996, Peres announced that he would push forward the date of elections from November up to May 1996.

As fate would have it, Peres's decision to advance the elections would prove to be badly timed. Several weeks after Peres's decision on the election date, the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas initiated an intensive bombing campaign. In fact, the bombings were retaliation against the Israeli assassination of Hamas leader Yahya Ayyash on January 6<sup>th</sup>. The first attack occurred on February 25<sup>th</sup>, when a bomb exploded in Jerusalem, killing 24 Israelis. An Israeli woman was also killed the same day in Ashekelon. Another bomb went off on a bus in Jerusalem the next



day, killing 18 Israelis. Another bomb exploded on a bus in Tel Aviv later that day, killing and injuring more Israelis.<sup>24</sup>

### *Diversion or Retaliation? Operation Grapes of Wrath*

On the heels of the Hamas attacks came a series of attacks by Hizballah along the northern Israeli-southern Lebanese border. Attacks were made particularly on Israeli settlements. In response, Prime Minister Peres initiated Operation Grapes of Wrath. The decision to initiate Operation Grapes of Wrath is inconsistent with Peres's former policy preference of moderate engagement. Most importantly, Peres began the operation just before the May general election and just as his public approval rating was beginning to drop due to the Hamas attacks. Peres deviated from his policy of engagement to one of retaliation during the lead up to an election. At the same time, his public approval ratings were declining. During the run up to his re-election, Peres was weakening. In order to divert attention from the Hamas attacks and re-gain the support of an Israeli electorate under siege by terrorism, Peres launched a major offensive against Hizballah.

Operation Grapes of Wrath began on April 11, 1996 and lasted for two weeks. Numerous strikes were made deep into Lebanon, with missile strikes on the Lebanese capital of Beirut. Israeli tanks and artillery fired on suspected Hizballah targets, causing 100,000 Lebanese to flee to the north. Local civilians leaving near the security zone were told to leave their homes by IDF forces.<sup>25</sup>

By the end of the operation, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross, 170 Lebanese civilians were dead, 350 wounded, 350,000 displaced, and hundreds of houses

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<sup>24</sup> Ahron Bregman, *A History of Israel*. New York: Palgrave, 2003

<sup>25</sup> *Operation Grapes of Wrath*, Time Magazine, Accessed 24 February 2005. Available at <http://www.time.com/time/archive/preview/0,10987,984428,00.html>. Internet.

were either damaged or destroyed.<sup>26</sup> During the fighting, an Israeli missile hit a civilian shelter at the UN base in Qana where Lebanese citizens were hiding. As a result of the explosion, 105 Lebanese civilians were killed. The incident sparked outrage amongst the international community and greatly hurt Peres's prestige at home and abroad. Rather than convincing the Israel public that he was touch on terror, the inadvertent bombing of the UN base convinced most Israelis that he was incapable of properly defending Israel.

Peres was a weak leader by the end of his administration. As public opinion for his government eroded, Peres swiftly changes his policy to one of retaliation just before the next election. The Israeli public generally supported further engagement with the Palestinians, but were upset with how Peres conducted his policy. This appears to confirm the hypothesis that if Israel has a weak leader, a public with asymmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is inconsistent with the leader's preference, then the policy outcome is a diversion.

### **The government of Benjamin Netanyahu (1996 – 1999)**

As a result of the terrorist violence and the Qana incident, Peres lost the May elections to Benjamin Netanyahu. Elections took place on May 29, 1996 and reflected a new constitutional change passed by the Knesset requiring the Israeli electorate to cast two votes, one for prime minister and the other for a political party. The elections resulted in a significant win for Labor. However, in the separate vote, Netanyahu won by a narrow margin of 1,501,023 to 1,471,566.

Due to the changed balance of power between the institutions of the prime minister and the Knesset, the power of the two main parties, Likud and Labor, were significantly reduced.

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<sup>26</sup> *Operation Grapes of Wrath*, International Committee of the Red Cross, Accessed 24 February 2005. Available at <http://www.icrc.org/web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/iwpList150/006F4FF77681725EC1256B66005A978B>. Internet.

This led to a proliferation of medium sized parties, reduced traditional party loyalties, and greatly decentralized power throughout the Knesset. The election of the 14<sup>th</sup> Knesset on May 29, 1996 fell on the same day as the election of Israel's new prime minister. Through the new election, the position of the prime minister was supposed to become more powerful relative to the Knesset. However, this did not happen.

On June 18, 1996, newly elected Prime Minister Netanyahu formed a coalition government consisting of Likud-Gesher-Tzomet (LGT), Shas, NRP, Yisrael Be'aliya, United Torah Judaism, and the newly established Third Way. Netanyahu as determined not to follow the path of the Rabin-Peres government. The right wing Netanyahu coalition was dedicated to a policy of retaliation with the Palestinians. LGT received 25.8% of the electoral vote and 34 seats in the Knesset; Shas received 8.7% and 10 seats; NRP received 8.1% and 9 seats; Yisrael Be'aliya received 5.8% and 7 seats; United Torah Judaism received 3.3% and 4 seats; and the Third Way received 3.2% and 4 seats. Upon the formation of the coalition, 66 coalition MKs and two MKs outside the coalition supported the Netanyahu coalition. Netanyahu's possession of 68 out of 120 Knesset seats illustrates the strength of his coalition, especially compared to those of Rabin and Peres.

Israel's 27<sup>th</sup> government: Netanyahu's coalition<sup>27</sup>

Party	Description	Political alignment	Votes in percentage	Number of seats	Number of seats before next election	Seats lost/gained
Likud-Gesher-Tzomet	Israel's main conservative party. Advocates a peace treaty with Palestinians	Right/Center right/Right	25.8	32	19	-13

<sup>27</sup> *Factional Makeup of the 14<sup>th</sup> Knesset*, Israel Knesset, Accessed 7 April 2005. Available at [http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng\\_hist\\_all.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng_hist_all.htm). Internet.

	based on "peace for peace"					
Shas	An ultra-Orthodox party committed to the interests of Israel's Sephardic community formed in 1984. Advocates territorial compromise with Palestinians.	Center right	8.7	10	10	0
NRP/Mafdal	Advocates making Israeli law consistent with halacha (Jewish law). Lost much of its power in 1981 when new religious parties took on its platform.	Right	8.1	9	7	-2
Yisrael Be'aliya	Formed in 1996 to represent Israel's former Soviet Jews. Advocates Palestinian autonomy, but not a Palestinian state. After doing poorly in 2003 elections, it merged with Likud.	Moderate right	5.8	7	5	-2
United Torah Judaism	Coalition of two ultra-Orthodox parties. Opposes negotiation with Palestinians and creation of Palestinian state.	Right	0	0	1	1
Third Way	Split from Labor party. Formed in response to concessions made by Rabin-Peres governments.	Centrist	3.2	4	3	-1

Measurement of Netanyahu's leadership

Character of policy at beginning of term	<b>Retaliation</b>
Strength of leader at beginning of term	<b>Strong</b>

Strength of leader 6-9 months before re-election	<b>Weak</b>
Public preferences	<b>Asymmetric</b>
Consistency of policy outcome to leader's policy preferences during re-election	<b>Consistent</b>

### *The Peace Process*

The biggest issue facing Netanyahu's government was the peace process. Despite being far more hawkish than his predecessor, Netanyahu initially made significant progress with the Palestinians. Despite his contempt for Arafat, Netanyahu made his first contact with the Palestinian leader on September 4, 1996 at the Erez Checkpoint (a "neutral" zone where Israel proper borders the Palestinian territory). The meeting did not do much to warm relations between the two, and extreme violence erupted soon thereafter.

The violence was initially sparked when Netanyahu called for the opening of an exit at the northern end of a tunnel running under the Old City next to the Temple Mount/Haram El-Sharif. The Temple Mount/Haram El-Sharif is a very holy site in Jerusalem that has great importance for both Judaism and Islam. Netanyahu's order to dig near one of Islam's holy sites caused Palestinian anger to boil over. Over the course of three days, Palestinians clashed with

Israeli soldiers, resulting in the deaths of 15 Israeli soldiers, 80 Palestinians, and many more injured on each side.<sup>28</sup>

*The Hebron Accord (January, 1997)*

In the background of this violence lay an inkling of hope. Over the course of four months in late 1996, Netanyahu's government had been conducting negotiation with the Palestinian Authority. In the face of continuing violence, each side managed to reach agreement on what would be known as the Hebron Accord. In January of 1997, the Hebron Agreement was passed through the Knesset by a majority of 87 in favor, 17 opposed, and one abstention. According to the accord, Israel agreed to transfer control of the West Bank town of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority. However, 20% of the city inhabited by about 400 Israeli settlers would remain under the control of Israel. It is worth noting that compared to the 400 Israeli settlers living in Hebron, nearly 130,000 Palestinians also lived in the city. The Palestinian population were pleased by the withdrawal. However, the move further angered Israeli settlers.<sup>29</sup>

Several months later, on July 30, 1997, a Hamas suicide bomber blew himself up in Jerusalem. The carnage resulting from the attack was high, killing 14 Israelis and injuring 160 others. Israeli public opinion began to decline once again. Of those Israelis polled, 16% felt government performance was poor, 50% felt it was not good, and only 31% felt it was good. The poll illustrates that the number of Israelis satisfied with government performance dropped by 12% between 1996 – 1997. Netanyahu maintained a consistent policy of retaliation. In

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<sup>28</sup> Ahron Bregman, *A History of Israel*. New York: Palgrave, 2003

<sup>29</sup> *Shattered Dreams of Peace*, PBS Online, Accessed 15 March 2005. Available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows.oslo/negotiations/>. Internet.

response, Netanyahu suspended the implementation of Oslo II, increased security, and gave Mossad, Israel's domestic intelligence agency, the order to assassinate Hamas leader Khaled Mashal. The assassination attempt failed, however.

*Wye River Memorandum (October, 1998)*

Netanyahu would once again make efforts to politically engage the Palestinians in late 1998 during the Wye River Plantation negotiations. However, public opinion toward Netanyahu's government was worsening. Of those polled, 21% felt government performance was poor (an increase of 5% from 1997), 45% felt it was not good, and only 29% were satisfied (a drop of 2% from 1997).<sup>30</sup>

Netanyahu left for Wye plantation in Maryland with a negotiation team composed of the more hawkish elements of Israeli politics. The team consisted of future Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (then Foreign Minister), Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, and Trade Minister Natan Sharansky. The agreement called upon the PA to honor previous commitments such as preventing future violence, collect illegal firearms, arrest suspected terrorists, increase bilateral security cooperation, and enforce a zero tolerance policy towards terrorist violence. The Israelis agreed to redeploy is troops, transferring control over a percentage of occupied land to the PA as the Palestinians made good on their commitments.<sup>31</sup> The Knesset passed the Wye River Memorandum with a majority of 75 in favor, 19 opposed, and 9 abstentions.

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<sup>30</sup> *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Accessed 20 January 2005. Available at <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo67.pdf>. Internet.

<sup>31</sup> *The Wye River Memorandum*, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Accessed on 5 April 2005. Available at <http://www.mfa.gov.il>. Internet.

### *A failure of implementation and the end of an administration*

The failure on each side to implement their respective commitments made at the Wye River negotiations caused increased tension. By late 1998, Arafat was threatening to declare a Palestinian state. In response, on December 20, 1998, Netanyahu convinced his government to suspend the implementation of the Wye Memorandum until Arafat stated he would not declare a Palestinian state, pressure terrorist groups to suspend their operations, collect weapons, and fulfill other commitments. Unable to make progress on the peace process, Netanyahu drew the ire of the Israeli public. Politically hurt, he decided to call for elections in May of 1999.<sup>32</sup>

Prime Minister Netanyahu's administration remained hawkish from beginning to end. In response to Palestinian attacks, Netanyahu would suspend talks with the Palestinian Authority until some degree of peace was achieved. Only 31% of Israelis believed his government was performing well in 1997, compared to 43% for Peres in 1996. Netanyahu's government confirms the hypothesis that if Israel has a weak leader, a public with asymmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is consistent with the leader's preference, then the policy outcome is not a diversion.

### **The government of Ehud Barak (1999 – 2001)**

The 28<sup>th</sup> Israeli coalition government was formed by Ehud Barak on July 6, 1999 and consisted of One Israel, Shas, Meretz, Center Party, Mafdal, Yahadut Hatorah, and Yisrael B'aliya. Within the 15<sup>th</sup> Knesset elections, One Israel received 20.2% of the electoral votes and 26 seats; Shas received 13% and 17 seats; Meretz received 7.6% and 10 seats; Center Party

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<sup>32</sup> Ahron Bregman, *A History of Israel*. New York: Palgrave, 2003



received 5% and 6 seats; Yahadut Hatorah received 3.7% and 5 seats; and Yisrael B'aliya received 5.1% and 6 seats.

Israel's 28<sup>th</sup> government: Barak's coalition<sup>33</sup>

Party	Description	Political alignment	Votes in percentage	Number of seats	Number of seats before next election	Seats lost/gained
One Israel	Coalition of Labor, Gesher, and Meimad parties formed in 1999. Coalition is dominated by Labor.	Left	20.2	26	0	-26
Shas	An ultra-Orthodox party committed to the interests of Israel's Sephardic community formed in 1984. Advocates territorial compromise with Palestinians.	Center right	13	17	17	Plus 4
Meretz	Founded in 1992. Advocates finding a diplomatic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the establishment of a Palestinian homeland roughly based on the 1967 borders.	Left	7.6	10	10	0
Center Party	Formed as a middle way between Labor and Likud in 1999. Advocates negotiations with Syria and Palestinians.	Centrist	5	6	3	-3
NRP/Mafdal	Advocates making Israeli law consistent with halacha (Jewish law). Lost much of its power in 1981 when new religious parties took on its platform.	Right	4.2	5	5	0

<sup>33</sup> *Factional Makeup of the 15<sup>th</sup> Knesset*, Israel Knesset, Accessed 7 April 2005. Available at [http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng\\_hist\\_all.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng_hist_all.htm). Internet.

Yahadut Hatorah	The name under which Agudat Yisrael and Degel Yatorah ran during the 13th - 16th Knessets. Agudat Yisrael supports a hawkish policy regarding territorial concessions in the West Bank. Degel Yatorah is a breakaway from Agudat Yisrael.	Center	3.7	5	5	0
Yisrael Be'aliya	Formed in 1996 to represent Israel's former Soviet Jews. Advocates Palestinian autonomy, but not a Palestinian state. After doing poorly in 2003 elections, it merged with Likud.	Moderate right	5.1	6	4	-2

#### Measurement of Barak's leadership

Character of policy at beginning of term	<b>Engagement</b>
Strength of leader at beginning of term	<b>Strong</b>
Strength of leader 6-9 months before re-election	<b>Strong</b>
Public preferences	<b>Symmetric</b>
Consistency of policy outcome to leader's policy preferences during re-election	<b>Consistent</b>

The 15<sup>th</sup> Knesset elections were significant in that two different prime ministers were elected by personal vote instead of being elected as head of a party list. As such, Ehud Barak

from One Israel was elected on May 17, 1999, and Ariel Sharon took his place on February 6, 2001.

The Barak government was committed to a policy of engagement and willing to make more concessions to the Palestinians than the opposition. As an individual leader, Barak presided over some of the most pressing times in Israeli history. Despite being a decorated military commander, Barak; policies focused primarily on engagement with the Palestinians. He conducted negotiations with Syria and the Palestinians, implemented a unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon, and probably came closer than any of his predecessors towards a resolution of the decades-old Arab-Israeli conflict. He also failed to reach a final agreement at Camp David in late 2000, sparking the most intense terrorist violence ever before witnessed by Israeli society.

From the very beginning of his administration, Barak began meeting with other Arab leaders to discuss how to resolve the conflict. His first meeting was with Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak on July 9, 1999. Immediately afterward, he traveled to Aqaba to meet with King Abdullah of Jordan on July 13<sup>th</sup>, and then on to Washington DC the next day to meet with President Clinton in the US.<sup>34</sup> Progress was eventually made, and the Arab leaders decided to reciprocate Barak's strategy of engagement. As such, both Arafat and Barak found themselves at Sharm El-Sheik in September of 1999. Barak would need to reach some kind of agreement that would pay off politically.

#### *The Sharm El-Sheik Memorandum*

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<sup>34</sup> Ahron Bregman, *A History of Israel*. New York: Palgrave, 2003

The crux of the Sharm El-Sheik negotiations dealt with the interim issues (those dealing with the implementation of the Oslo Accords) and set a deadline for implementation of the final status issues of a permanent peace settlement. The final status issues deal with: the sovereignty of Jerusalem, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, the removal of Israeli settlements, security arrangements, borders, and cooperation with neighboring states, and other issues of concern. In addition, the memorandum called for further redeployments of Israeli IDF soldiers. With respect to the transfer of control over territory, Israel agreed over the following days to transfer 7% of the West Bank territory from complete Israeli control to partial Palestinian control. Israel also agreed to transfer an additional 5% of the West Bank on November 15<sup>th</sup>, and an additional 5% on January 20, 2000. In total, 40% of the West Bank would be placed under partial or complete Palestinian control. One month later, each side was to meet again to discuss final status issues.<sup>35</sup>

However, the implementation of the Sharm El-Sheik agreement proved tougher than originally thought. Arafat demanded that the construction of settlements in the Palestinian territories be stopped and that Israel transfer to the PA control over Arab towns around Jerusalem. Barak rejected these demands, and progress grinded to a halt. On September 5, 1999, two car bombs detonate, one in Tiberias and the other in Haifa. The attack seriously wounds a 73 years old woman. The attack comes less than one day after the signing of the Sharm El-Sheik Memorandum.<sup>36</sup>

It was in this environment that Barak traded his efforts on the Palestinians with Syria. In an attempt to reach an agreement with Syria, Barak offered real hope of trading the Golan

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<sup>35</sup> *Shattered Dreams of Peace*, PBS Online, Accessed 15 March 2005. Available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/oslo/negotiations/>. Internet.

<sup>36</sup> *Escalating to Nowhere*, Dr. Anthony Cordesman, Accessed 12 April 2005. Available at <http://www.csis.org/burke/index.htm#Reports>. Internet.

Heights (previously a Syrian region until the 1967 war) to Syria for a return to peace between the two countries. Despite expending enormous political capital on the issue, Barak could not convince Syrian President Hafiz Al-Asad to accept the offer. Barak suffered harsh condemnation within Israeli society for his concessions and his inability to broker a deal. Israeli public opinion toward Barak dropped significantly. At the time, 22% of Israelis felt government performance was poor, 44% felt it was not good, and 29% felt it was good.<sup>37</sup> Barak's political strength was beginning to weaken.

### *The Pullout from Lebanon*

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon in order to expel the PLO and stem attack coming from southern Lebanon. However, the level of Israeli troops was quickly reduced, leaving about 1,000 Israeli IDF soldiers to patrol the region. As a result of the Israeli presence, the Lebanese terrorist group Hizballah was established. At the end of the Lebanese civil war (1975 – 1990), the Arab League requested that Syria send its troops into the country and establish stability. Until the Israeli pullout, IDF soldiers were consistently targeted by Hizballah forces. Against this background, Barak had hoped Israel could make its pullout part of a wider Israeli-Syrian peace deal. With Syria now rejecting a peace deal, Barak realized his only chances were for a unilateral pullout. And so, on May 24, 2000 the pullout was initiated.<sup>38</sup> Despite the fact that Israeli forces did not incur any casualties, complaints could be heard throughout Israeli society.

### *Camp David II (2000)*

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<sup>37</sup> *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Accessed 20 January 2005. Available at <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo67.pdf>. Internet.

<sup>38</sup> Ahron Bregman, *A History of Israel*. New York: Palgrave, 2003

Beginning in June of 2000, the United States worked feverishly to start a new round of talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians. With rumors spreading that Barak was willing to concede roughly 90% of the West Bank, there appeared to be hope of a final settlement of the conflict. In response to Barak's enormous efforts, Israeli public opinion increased in favor of his government and his saw his political strength increase. Of those polled, 19% of Israelis felt government performance was poor (a 7% drop from 1999), 51% felt it was no good, and 33% felt it was good.<sup>39</sup>

President Clinton invited both Barak and Arafat to Camp David to start negotiations. Between July 11<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>, each side was engaged in intense negotiations. At the end, however, a final agreement could not be reached. Efforts were made to reach agreement until the very end.

On September 28<sup>th</sup>, Likud leader Ariel Sharon made a controversial visit to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, a place sacred to Jews as well as Muslims. The incident inflamed Palestinian anger and caused a number of violent clashes between Palestinians and Israeli security officials. The violence that erupted would turn into the second Palestinian intifada.<sup>40</sup>

Despite protests from the Israeli settlements, most Israelis were supportive of the peace process during the last days of the Barak administration. However, because of the failure to reach an agreement at Camp David, Barak's own government was quickly dissolved and replaced by the Sharon government, which had won the rights to the second portion of the split administration. The experience of Prime Minister Ehud Barak confirms the hypothesis that if

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<sup>39</sup> *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Accessed 20 January 2005. Available at <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo67.pdf>. Internet.

<sup>40</sup> Ian Bickerton and Carla Klausner, *A Concise History of the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Prentice Hall: Pearson, 2005

Israel has a strong leader, a public with symmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is consistent with the leader's preference, then the policy outcome is not a diversion.

### **The government of Ariel Sharon (2001 – present)**

When elections were held in February of 2001, the Israeli electorate showed their displeasure with Barak and his inability to establish peace and security for the average Israeli. Mostly as a reaction to the surge in terrorist violence, the Israeli people decided to vote for a hard-line candidate committed to a policy of retaliation. Ariel Sharon was elected prime minister on February 6, 2001. On March 7th, Sharon formed the 29<sup>th</sup> Israeli coalition government, which was led by Likud and consisted of a Labor-Meimad, Shas, Center Party, NRP-Mafdal, Yahadut Hatorah, Yisrael B'Aliya, and Ichud Leumi-Yisrael Beteinu. Likud received 29.4% of the electoral ballot and 38 seats in the Knesset, Labor-Meimad received 14.5% of the ballot and 19 seats, Shas received 8.2% of the ballot and 11 seats, Center Party received 5% and 6 seats, Yahadut Hatorah received 3.7% and 5 seats, Yisrael B'Aliya received 5.1% and 6 seats, and Ichud Leumi-Yisrael Beteinu joined after the election and received 7 seats. The composition of the coalition was decidedly right wing and supported a policy of retaliation with the Palestinians. With only 58 Knesset Members supporting the coalition, Sharon's first government was weak.

The composition of Sharon's second coalition, formed roughly two years later on February 27, 2003, remained politically right wing and hard line. However, Sharon's power increased tremendously. His second coalition held 83 seats in the Israeli Knesset; more than any other coalition discussed thus far. The Israeli people supported Sharon because they hoped he could bring a modicum of security back to Israel after the eruption of the second intifada. For a breakdown of the coalition party and respective strengths, please see the charts below.

Israel's 29<sup>th</sup> government: Sharon's coalition<sup>41</sup>

Party	Description	Political Alignment	Votes in percentage	Number of seats	Number of seats before next election	Seats lost/gained
Likud	Israel's main conservative party. Advocates a peace treaty with Palestinians based on "peace for peace"	Right	14.1	19	21	Plus 2
Labor-Meimad	Merger between Labor and Meimad parties. Meimad was established as a religious-Zionist alternative to the NRP. It advocates the use of negotiation to settle the peace process.	Center Left	0	0	25	Plus 25
Shas	An ultra-Orthodox party committed to the interests of Israel's Sephardic community formed in 1984. Advocates territorial compromise with Palestinians.	Center	13	17	17	0
Center Party	Formed as a middle way between Labor and Likud in 1999. Advocates negotiations with Syria and Palestinians.	Centrist	5	6	3	-3
NRP-Mafdal	Advocates making Israeli law consistent with halacha (Jewish law). Lost much of its power in 1981 when new religious parties took on its platform.	Right	4.2	5	5	0
Yahadut Hatorah	The name under which Agudat Yisrael and Degel Yatorah ran during the 13th - 16th Knessets. Agudat Yisrael supports a hawkish policy regarding territorial concessions in the West Bank. Degel Yatorah is a breakaway from Agudat Yisrael.	Center	3.7	5	5	0

<sup>41</sup> *Factional Makeup of the 15<sup>th</sup> Knesset*, Israel Knesset, Accessed 7 April 2005. Available at [http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng\\_hist\\_all.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng_hist_all.htm). Internet.



Yisrael Be'aliya	Formed in 1996 to represent Israel's former Soviet Jews. Advocates Palestinian autonomy, but not a Palestinian state. After doing poorly in 2003 elections, it merged with Likud.	Moderate right	5.1	6	4	-2
Ichud Leumi-Yisrael Beteinu	Merger of Ichud- Leumi with Yisrael Beitenu. Ichud Leumi is a conservative party that is skeptical of the peace process. Yisrael Beitenu represents Russian-Jewish Israelis.	Right	0	0	7	Plus 7

Measurement of Sharon's leadership (first government)

Character of policy at beginning of term	<b>Retaliation</b>
Strength of leader at beginning of term	<b>Weak</b>
Strength of leader 6-9 months before re-election	<b>Strong</b>
Public preferences	<b>Symmetric</b>
Consistency of policy outcome to leader's policy preferences during re-election	<b>Consistent</b>

Israel's 30<sup>th</sup> government: Sharon's second coalition<sup>42</sup>

<sup>42</sup> *Factional Makeup of the 16<sup>th</sup> Knesset*, Israel Knesset, Accessed 7 April 2005. Available at [http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng\\_hist\\_all.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/history/eng/eng_hist_all.htm). Internet.

Party	Description	Political Alignment	Votes in percentage	Number of seats	Number of seats before next election	Seats lost/gained
Likud	Israel's main conservative party. Advocates a peace treaty with Palestinians based on "peace for peace"	Right	29.4	38	40	Plus 2
Shinui	A centrist secular party. It supports the peace process, but only with "moderate" Palestinians and not with Yasser Arafat.	Center	12.3	15	15	0
Ichud Leumi	Ichud Leumi is a conservative party that is skeptical of the peace process.	Right	0	0	0	0
NRP-Mafdal	Advocates making Israeli law consistent with halacha (Jewish law). Lost much of its power in 1981 when new religious parties took on its platform.	Right	4.2	6	6	0
Labor-Meimad	Merger between Labor and Meimad parties. Meimad was established as a religious-Zionist alternative to the NRP. It advocates the use of negotiation to settle the peace process.	Center Left	14.5	19	19	0
United Torah Judaism	Coalition of two ultra-Orthodox parties. Opposes negotiation with Palestinians and creation of Palestinian state.	Right	4.3	5	0	-5

Measurement of Sharon's leadership (second government)

Character of policy at beginning of second term	<b>Retaliation</b>
Strength of leader at beginning of term	<b>Strong</b>

Strength of leader 6-9 months before re-election	N/A
Public preferences	N/A
Consistency of policy outcome to leader's policy preferences during re-election	N/A

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has presided over one of the bloodiest and most intense periods in Israeli history. In the ashes of the failed Camp David peace talks came what can only be described as a war. The past five years has witnessed hundreds of medium to large scale attacks and quite possible thousands of shootings, stabbings, and other form of violence. The large bulk of Palestinian attacks have been met with Israeli retaliation. As a leader committed to a policy of retaliation, it is not surprising that Prime Minister Sharon has employed a strategy of tit-for-tat.

Upon the outset of the intifada, Israeli opinion was more supportive of Sharon's government. In 2001, 33% of Israelis felt that government performance was good. However, after one year into the intifada, public opinion changed drastically. Of those polled, only 20% felt government performance was good in 2002 (a 13% drop) and 22% felt it was good in 2003. As the violence wore on, public opinion changed yet again, and Israelis began to sympathize more with Sharon's hard-line policy in the Palestinian territories. In 2002, 57% of Israelis felt Israeli policy toward the territories was too soft, and 34% felt it was correct. By 2003, 29% felt

it was too harsh and 58% felt it was correct.<sup>43</sup> The Palestinian violence clearly moved Israeli public opinion in the direction of Sharon's hard-line policies.

Five days after his inauguration, Sharon imposed a total blockade of the West Bank town of Ramallah, the home of PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat. Roughly one week later, Sharon begins a campaign of air raids in Gaza and the West Bank. By May, the Mitchell Commission issues its report calling for a six week cease-fire in order to re-start negotiations. The violence continues unabated, until former CIA director George Tenet brokers a ceasefire. However, the ceasefire does not take hold on the ground.

By mid 2002, Sharon's re-election campaign is getting underway. About the same time, US President George W. Bush delivers a speech calling for the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state. In addition, Bush makes it known that the US will no longer negotiate with Yasser Arafat and does not recognize him as the official leader of the Palestinian people. With an Israeli public supporting a policy of retaliation, Sharon continues his attacks on Palestinian militants and incursions into all areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority. During this time, Sharon orders a siege of Arafat's compound that lasts for eleven days. Under American pressure, Sharon finally ends the incident. However, it is likely that the event bought electoral support for Sharon from hard-line elements within Israeli society.

Just before the Israeli elections, Israeli soldiers conduct the largest raid on Gaza since Sharon came to power in 2001. The operation kills twelve Palestinians and wounds another eight. The scale of the attack was clearly meant to pay off during the elections two days later. However, Sharon did not deviate from his policy of retaliation. In addition, Israeli opinion largely favored Sharon's policy of retaliation. This confirms the hypothesis that if Israel has a

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<sup>43</sup> *Israeli Public Opinion on National Security*, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Accessed 20 January 2005. Available at <http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/memoranda/memo67.pdf>. Internet.

strong leader, a public with symmetric preferences, and the policy outcome is consistent with the leader's preference, then the policy outcome is not a diversion.

### *Conclusion*

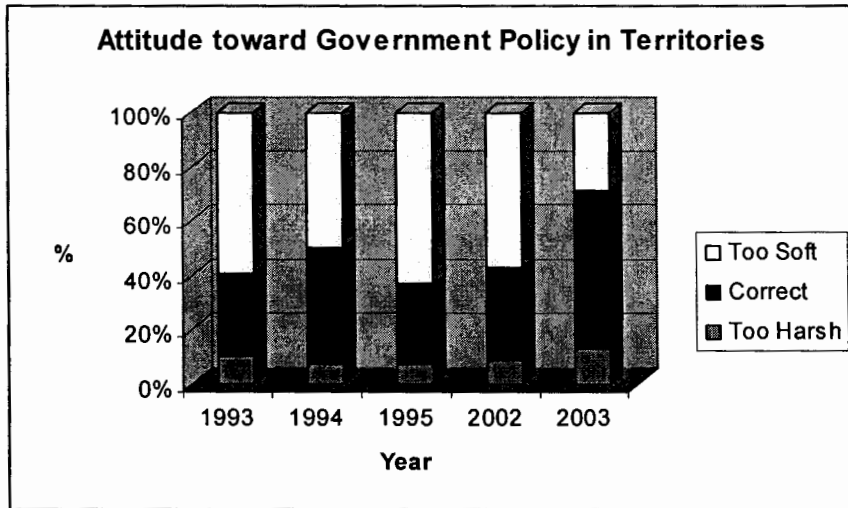
The purpose of this study was to determine whether Israeli leaders engage in diversionary behavior, or use force against Palestinian militants, just prior to an election in order to increase public support and influence electoral gains. Most Israeli leaders since the beginning of the peace process have not engaged in diversionary behavior in order to benefit in the electoral polls. Rabin remained committed to a policy of engagement prior to his upcoming election, and did not retaliate against terrorist attacks on a scale sufficient for a change of policy. Netanyahu also remained steadfast with respect to his hard-line policy of retaliation. His periodic withdrawal from the peace talks ran parallel to his stated policy. Barak maintained his policy of engagement with the Palestinians more so than any other leader. In addition, the lull in terrorist violence during the Camp David talks did not provide him with an opportunity to engage in diversionary behavior. Prior to his re-election in 2003, Ariel Sharon did use force in order to gain support in the election.

Upon examination of the empirical data, it becomes apparent that distinguishing between diversionary force and simple retaliation can be quite difficult. The case of Israel is especially daunting because Israeli leaders generally do respond to attacks with some use of force. What this study has found is that a diversionary use of force can be identified by its timing (6-9 months prior to an election) and the level of force used. For example, the Peres decision to initiate Operation Grapes of Wrath and the Sharon administration's decision to invade Gaza two days before the 2003 election were much larger in scale than previous military operations.

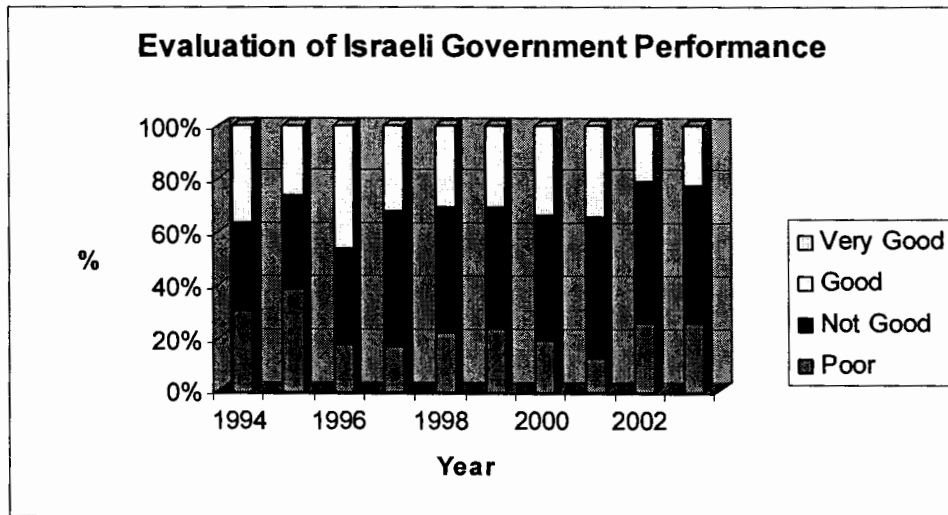
The Israeli case indicates that diversionary behavior may be employed not only in interstate relations, but also under conditions that fall between the intra and interstate levels. Future research concerning conflicts that fall into this gray area, such as Sri Lanka and Chechnya, will provide greater insight into the mechanisms of diversionary behavior.

The results of this study should provide insight into the future conduct of Israeli foreign policy. Based upon Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's use of force just before the 2003 elections, it is quite possible that Israel will use mounting force just prior to the upcoming 2007 elections. If this holds true, then the peace camp in both Israel and Palestine only have until early 2006, less than one year, before Israeli behavior turns more aggressive. This reduced timeline for diplomatic measures will potentially increase efforts at engagement by Israeli soft-liners in the coming months.

**Graph 1**



**Graph 2**



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