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Israel's two states debate

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TOBY GREENE

The Israeli–Palestinian peace process is of intense interest to scholars and policy-makers; and yet the internal Israeli policy debate and its impact on policy outcomes is often overlooked or read simplistically. Common misperceptions include the notions that the prime minister has executive power, that Israel is uniformly resistant to territorial compromise, and that Israeli politicians can be divided into pro-peace and anti-peace camps.¹ It is impossible to understand Israeli actions, the constraints on Israeli policy-makers, and the trajectory of the conflict itself without a deeper analysis of the current Israeli debate and the impacts it has on decision-making. This article seeks to contribute to such an analysis by offering a framework for understanding the variety of policy prescriptions regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict proposed by Israeli policy-makers, and showing how they relate both to Israeli public opinion and to the policy-making process.

In an insightful recent study of Israel's national security decision-making, Freilich includes among the country's decision-making 'pathologies' the fact that 'Israel constitutes a classic example of the "political process" or "bureaucratic politics" models of decision-making'.² The bureaucratic politics model describes a situation in which different parts of a government system can differ substantially about what should be done and compete to affect government decisions and actions.³ These characteristics are strongly evident in Israel, where the executive is the cabinet, and the electoral system produces coalitions with multiple parties representing conflicting world-views and interests while controlling 'semiautonomous ministerial fiefdoms'.⁴ Decision-making, even on national security, is politicized, and different ministers may, with full awareness, simultaneously advance policies with conflicting ends. The distribution of portfolios is tied to coalition agreements, and Israeli prime ministers have limited prerogative powers. Though

¹ See e.g. Fawaz A. Gerges, 'The Obama approach to the Middle East: the end of America's moment?', *International Affairs* 89: 2, March 2013, p. 313.

² Charles D. Freilich, *Zion's dilemmas: how Israel makes national security policy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2012), p. 36.

³ Graham T. Allison and Morton H. Halperin, 'Bureaucratic politics: a paradigm and some policy implications', in R. Tanter and R. Ullman, eds, *Theory and policy in international relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 42.

⁴ Freilich, *Zion's dilemmas*, p. 47.

the prime minister can at times surmount domestic obstacles and act decisively, doing so entails huge political risks.⁵

This article does not provide a typology for all possible solutions to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.⁶ It establishes a framework for understanding Israel’s contemporary policy debate, drawing on statements and writings by political leaders, leading think-tanks and commentators, and on public opinion data. The internal Israeli discourse has not been entirely overlooked by specialists. Heller and Hollis’s edited volume helpfully presents contrasting Israeli policy prescriptions.⁷ This article updates the picture and offers fresh terminology and definitions. It then outlines Israeli public opinion on the issues, before examining the four different approaches represented within the 2013–14 government, and then drawing conclusions.

First, it is worth briefly presenting the dilemma posed to Israel by control of the occupied territories, especially East Jerusalem and the West Bank (referred to by many Jews according to the biblical names of Judaea and Samaria), which relates to views deeply held by Jews in Israel and around the world. Israel’s leaders have been divided over the occupied territories from the moment they came to control them in 1967, and the basic shape of the debate is familiar. To put it crudely, the left has been open to territorial compromise in return for peace agreements with Israel’s neighbours or the Palestinians, on which it has placed a strategic and moral premium. The left has further considered control over a large Palestinian population as a demographic threat to Israel’s character as a Jewish and democratic state. The right has prioritized maintaining Israeli control of the territory, driven by a combination of security considerations and nationalist or religious ideological commitment to Jewish sovereignty over the historic ‘Land of Israel’.⁸

The Israeli debate has always been more nuanced, fragmented and dynamic than this outline suggests, and the state’s actions have been wrought with internal contradictions.⁹ While Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1967, it never extended sovereignty to other areas of the West Bank. Nonetheless, successive governments oversaw the establishment of Jewish settlements in East Jerusalem and throughout the West Bank, whose combined Jewish population now exceeds 500,000.¹⁰ The fate of these settlements, especially more isolated communities that cannot be annexed to Israel through agreed border adjustments in a future peace deal, complicates Israel’s policy choices.

The first intifada, which broke out at the end of 1987, was a watershed event for Israeli public opinion, significantly undermining the idea that Israel could control

⁵ Yehezkel Dror, *Israeli statecraft: national security challenges and responses* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 8.

⁶ For an attempt at such a typology, see E. Lewin, ‘In praise of the no-solution solution’, *Journal of Political Science and Public Affairs* 3: 141, Feb. 2015, pp. 1–8.

⁷ Mark Heller and Rosemary Hollis, *Israel and the Palestinians: Israeli policy options* (London: Chatham House, 2005). See also Jonathan Rynhold, ‘Re-conceptualizing Israeli approaches to “land for peace” and the Palestinian question since 1967’, *Israel Studies* 6: 2, Summer 2001, pp. 33–52.

⁸ Yossi Beilin, *Israel: a concise political history* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1992), pp. 162–3.

⁹ Mark Tessler, *A history of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 41–12, 465–74.

¹⁰ <http://fmep.org/resource/comprehensive-settlement-population-1972-2010/>, accessed 16 July 2015.

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the West Bank and its large Palestinian population indefinitely, and helping prepare the political ground for the Oslo Accords.¹¹ Since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 Israeli leaders from across the spectrum have negotiated with Palestinians over a final status agreement. The details of these negotiations, and the differences over core issues including refugees, Jerusalem, borders and security, are not addressed here. However, it is worth noting some key developments since the Oslo Accords that have influenced the Israeli debate.

Most significant has been the failure, after several attempts, to reach a final status agreement—an outcome for which each side blames the other. Having declared the bilateral negotiations a ‘failure’, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has pursued in recent years a strategy that President Abbas has described as ‘internationalization of the conflict as a legal matter, not only a political one’.¹² The centrepiece of this strategy has been securing recognition for the State of Palestine in the UN and other international bodies outside the context of negotiations with Israel. This is widely interpreted in Israel as evidence of Palestinian unwillingness to make compromises, particularly relating to their demand for the ‘right of return’ to Israel for Palestinian refugees and their descendants.

Meanwhile, Israeli settlement construction has continued and the settlement population has grown, increasing frustration towards Israel in both Washington and European capitals. The ongoing occupation has also helped fuel a small but vocal civil society movement to promote boycott, divestment and sanctions of Israel (BDS).¹³

Also important have been the rounds of violence. The second intifada (2000–2004), including an unprecedented wave of suicide bombings targeting buses, cafés and other public places in Israel, had a deep and lasting impact on the Israeli public. Israelis widely interpreted it as a consequence of handing the areas of the West Bank where most of the Palestinian population is concentrated over to Yasser Arafat and the PLO. The impact of the second intifada on Israeli opinion, especially on the centre-left, was all the sharper for following what Israelis saw as Palestinian rejection of generous final status proposals made by Ehud Barak at Camp David in July 2000, and bridging proposals made by Bill Clinton in December 2000.¹⁴ The belief that there is ‘no partner’ for peace on the Palestinian side took hold, and the centre-left Labor party has not won an election in Israel since.

Israeli opinion has also been shaped by the unilateral territorial withdrawals from south Lebanon in 2000 and the Gaza Strip in 2005, the latter including the evacuation of 8,000 settlers and the demolition of their homes. A majority of Israelis supported these moves, believing they would reduce the human and economic cost of occupation and, in the case of the Gaza Strip, the demographic threat to Israel’s Jewish majority. What followed, however, was Hezbollah

¹¹ Asher Arian, *Security threatened: surveying Israeli opinion on peace and war* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹² Mahmoud Abbas, ‘The long overdue Palestinian state’, *New York Times*, 16 May 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/17/opinion/17abbas.html?_r=0, accessed 16 July 2015.

¹³ See Asher Susser, *Israel, Jordan, and Palestine: the two-state imperative* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2011).

¹⁴ Jonathan Rynhold and Gerald Steinberg, ‘The peace process and the Israeli elections’, *Israel Affairs* 10: 4, Summer 2004, pp. 181–204.

coming to control south Lebanon and Hamas coming to control the Gaza Strip (first forming a government after winning elections in 2006 and then assuming total control after violently ejecting forces loyal to President Abbas in 2007). Both groups used those territories from which Israel had disengaged as a base from which to kidnap soldiers inside Israel and launch thousands of rockets at Israeli towns and cities. Several major confrontations followed during which Israel attempted to suppress the rocket fire and degrade the armed groups.¹⁵ These developments turned the majority of Israelis against the idea of unilateral disengagement, and left them believing that the status quo in the West Bank was the safer option.¹⁶

Regional developments have also been significant. The partial collapse of the Arab state system since 2010 has highlighted the uncertain context in which Israeli policy-makers are operating.¹⁷ Most recently the United States has led the P5+1 powers to a major diplomatic agreement with Iran over its nuclear programme, while Iran remains a key supporter of Palestinian armed groups, further straining relations between Washington and Israel.

With this context in mind, what follows is a typology that categorizes the policy prescriptions relating to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict most discussed in Israel. The drawback to any typology is that, for the sake of parsimony, it involves overlooking variations within each type and drawing artificial boundaries. However, this categorization attempts to reflect the debate more accurately than is typically the case. It proposes three categories: preservation of the status quo; proactive two-statism; and entrenchment–annexationism.¹⁸ Two variations of proactive two-statism are considered: progress via negotiated agreement (Plan A) and progress via unilateral moves (Plan B).

Preservation of the status quo

Many on the Israeli centre-right take the view that the conflict cannot be solved at present, and that the focus should be on conflict management. Thus in June 2014 Gideon Saar, then a Likud minister, told a conference: ‘There is no evidence that any alternative is better than the status quo.’¹⁹ Those taking this view tend to regard

¹⁵ Gilead Sher, ‘A proactive policy for Israel: a commentary on “Is unilateralism always bad?”’, *Negotiation Journal* 30: 2, April 2014, pp. 157–63.

¹⁶ Jonathan Rynhold, ‘Peace and security in the 2009 election’, *Israel Affairs* 16: 1, Jan. 2010, pp. 142–64.

¹⁷ Clive Jones and Beverley Milton-Edwards, ‘Missing the “devils” we knew? Israel and political Islam amid the Arab Awakening’, *International Affairs* 89: 2, March 2013, pp. 399–415.

¹⁸ Other variations of lesser significance should be mentioned. A politically insignificant minority on the Israeli far left advocate a bi-national state. Avigdor Lieberman proposes areas of northern Israel with large Arab populations be transferred to Palestinian sovereignty, but he has not articulated a practical programme, and the proposal has few other advocates. Some, e.g. Benny Morris, advocate restoring sovereignty to Jordan and Egypt, but this idea is hardly present in the mainstream discourse. See Dror, *Israeli statecraft*, pp. 163–4. In a more recent development Yossi Beilin, one of the Israeli architects of the two-state solution, has spoken about an Israeli–Palestinian confederation, in which two separate states will share joint functions in some areas, but this idea has yet to be fully developed or to gain wider political momentum in Israel. See Yossi Beilin, ‘Confederation is the key to Mideast peace’, *New York Times*, 14 May 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/15/opinion/yossi-beilin-a-confederation-for-peace.html?_r=0, accessed 16 July 2015.

¹⁹ Speech by Gideon Saar to Herzliya Conference, 9 June 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uHqVRPAqPHs>, accessed 2 Aug. 2015.

the root of the conflict as the failure of the Palestinians and the Arab world generally to accept the existence of a Jewish state.²⁰ They argue that peace, if it can be achieved, will stem from Israel establishing deterrence, and making clear that attempts to harm Israel or impose a solution are futile. Until such time as Palestinian or broader Arab society accepts this, the goal is to achieve the best possible economic and security situation in the circumstances. Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon stated, for example: 'I am not looking for a solution, I am looking for a way to manage the conflict and maintain relations in a way that works for our interests.'²¹

Those in this category argue against the creation of a Palestinian state not in principle, but on pragmatic grounds, maintaining that the current Palestinian leadership has neither the will nor the legitimacy to make a comprehensive peace with Israel. Those advocating this approach often stress the need for a long-term change in Palestinian society in the West Bank, through economic development and improved Palestinian governance, as a prerequisite for lasting peace.²² Many in this category also stress the need for Palestinian educational reform, highlighting the negative portrayal of Israelis and Jews, glorification of violence, and rejection of Jewish national rights in Palestinian culture as a barrier to peace.²³

Individuals subscribing to this approach are generally security focused, and less bothered by the demographic concerns or fear of diplomatic isolation that drive their centre-left rivals to try to change the status quo. They argue that were Israel to pull out of the West Bank, that territory would become another base for terrorism on Israel's borders. Just as Iranian-backed Hezbollah filled the vacuum on the Lebanese border and Hamas took over the Gaza Strip, so, they argue, there would be a similar outcome in the West Bank. They also tend to stress the regional dimension of the conflict, highlighting the growing chaos and instability around Israel, including the threat posed by the Iranian-led radical Shi'i axis and resurgent Sunni extremism in the form of Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), to bolster their case against risking opening up a vacuum in the West Bank.²⁴ They tend to conclude, therefore, that the security threats posed by giving up control of the West Bank are more significant than the diplomatic threats posed by the status quo, which they claim are exaggerated. They are unperturbed by the claims of the left that time is working against Israel, arguing that the impact of settlement growth, the demographic threat to Israel as a Jewish state and the erosion of Israel's international legitimacy are overblown. Efraim Inbar, director of the Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, writes, for example, that 'real pressure on Israel to change the status quo is unlikely' and that 'attempting to manage it

²⁰ Yosef Kuperwasser and Shalom Lipner, 'The problem is Palestinian rejectionism: why the PA must recognize a Jewish state', *Foreign Affairs* 90: 6, Nov.–Dec. 2011, pp. 2–9.

²¹ Shlomo Cesana, 'Palestinians want to destroy the Jewish state', *Israel Hayom*, 15 Oct. 2014, http://www.israel-hayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=20759, accessed 16 July 2015.

²² e.g. Speech by Moshe Ya'alon to INSS Conference, 28 Jan. 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rJ9ZRC5q1HQ>, accessed 16 July 2015.

²³ Kuperwasser and Lipner, 'The problem is Palestinian rejectionism'.

²⁴ Moshe Arens, 'Israel is getting bad advice', *Haaretz*, 27 Aug. 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.543638>, accessed 16 July 2015.

[this situation] in order to minimize suffering to both sides and to minimize the diplomatic costs to Israel' is the best course.²⁵

Those in this category also argue that it would be a mistake to offer more concessions to break the deadlock, since this would reward Palestinian intransigence and inflate further Palestinian demands. In this context they see no need to freeze settlement construction. They tend to argue that most construction is in settlement blocks, and that it strengthens Israel's hold on strategically important areas that it can expect to keep in any future agreement. They are prepared to acquiesce in some construction even in more isolated settlements, reasoning that these can always be evacuated. The case is made, for example, by Dore Gold, president of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, that 'the marginal increase in territory that might be affected by natural growth is infinitesimal'.²⁶

Those taking this approach tend to be suspicious of US or European diplomatic interventions, regarding western leaders as either naive or driven by self-interest, whether personal ambition, a desire to smooth relations with Arab and other Islamic states or—for European states—the wish to meet domestic political demands, especially from growing Muslim constituencies.²⁷

Proactive two-statism

By contrast, Israeli leaders on the centre and left believe the status quo does not represent Israel's interests. As well as making traditional arguments for the strategic benefits of peace, they see time working against Israel, and the establishment of a separate Palestinian state as urgently required to preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic character.²⁸ They tend to take seriously the threat of increasing international isolation posed by the continuing occupation, augmented by the Palestinian diplomatic campaign to gain unilateral recognition. They also express concerns that stalemate increases the danger of a third intifada.²⁹ This camp can be broken down into two sub-categories.

Plan A

There are those, generally on the left, who still believe in the possibility of a negotiated agreement with the PA. They believe Israel can do more to promote this by building trust, especially by limiting settlement construction, and by being

²⁵ Efraim Inbar, 'Doing almost nothing is a good option', Perspectives Paper no. 247, BESA Center, 15 May 2014, <http://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/almost-nothing-good-option/>, accessed 16 July 2015.

²⁶ Dore Gold, 'US policy on Israeli settlements', Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 9 June 2009, <http://jcpa.org/article/u-s-policy-on-israeli-settlements/>, accessed 16 July 2014.

²⁷ Shimon Shiffer, 'Ya'alon: Kerry should win his Nobel and leave us alone', Ynetnews, 14 Jan. 2014, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4476582,00.html>; Manfred Gerstenfeld, 'France: importing conflict from, and exporting problems to the Middle East', *Jerusalem Post*, 7 Jan. 2015, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/France-Importing-conflict-from-and-exporting-problems-to-the-Middle-East-387038> (both accessed 16 July 2015).

²⁸ See Avi Gil, 'Israel's strategic dilemmas: don't wait for the dust to settle', in Daniel C. Kurtzer, ed., *Pathways to peace: America and the Arab-Israeli conflict* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

²⁹ e.g. 'Former Shin Bet chief: Palestinian "despair" threatens third intifada', *Haaretz*, 9 Jan. 2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/israeli-elections-2013/israeli-elections-news-features/former-shin-bet-chief-palestinian-despair-threatens-third-intifada-premium-1.492779>, accessed 16 July 2015.

flexible on final status issues, for example by accepting pre-1967 lines as a basis for a territorial agreement.

Former Foreign Minister and lead negotiator Tzipi Livni is the most prominent representative of this position, which is also held by much of the centre-left Labor and left-wing Meretz parties, and advocated by Shimon Peres.³⁰ It should be noted that even among these Plan A supporters there is a consensus on maintaining settlement blocks in a land-swap deal, ensuring that any solution for Palestinian refugees preserves Israel's Jewish character, and ensuring adequate security arrangements.

Plan A supporters argue that the benefits of advancing through negotiations (in contrast to unilateral moves) would include improved relations with Palestinian moderates, and their empowerment against Hamas. They also point to the prospect of transformed relations with moderate Arab states, enabling greater cooperation against Iran and violent Sunni Islamist groups. They frequently highlight the Arab Peace Initiative as offering hope for peace with the wider Arab world, if a deal were to be made with the Palestinians.³¹ Advocates of Plan A further argue that a more constructive approach would improve relations with the United States and Europe, thereby strengthening Israel's legitimacy in military confrontations with armed groups, while fending off attempts to impose a solution. Livni said in October 2013: 'When there is no peace process, there is no legitimacy to act in order to keep Israel's security. So stalemate is against Israel's security needs.'³²

Plan A advocates are fully aware of the practical difficulties of implementing a deal immediately. They can hardly ignore the fact that the PA has lost control of the Gaza Strip. For this reason they have at times spoken of a 'shelf agreement' which would establish a shared vision for final status, showing both Israelis and Palestinians that a deal is possible, while acknowledging that full implementation might be delayed.³³ They are also aware of the heavy shadow cast by the repeated failure of final status negotiations and the very poor state of relations between leaders of Israel and the PA. This leads to their repeated focus on the need to rebuild relations with moderate Palestinians through confidence-building measures. Plan A supporters often assert the need to freeze settlement construction, either throughout the West Bank or at least in outlying settlement blocks beyond the security barrier, in areas Israel cannot hope to keep in a negotiated solution.³⁴ The point of this, they argue, is not only to help build confidence among Palestinian partners, but also to stop the creation of facts on the ground which may diminish the feasibility of securing a negotiated separation in the future.

³⁰ See e.g. Itamar Sharon, 'Livni attacks Ya'alon over Abbas comments: grumbling is easy', *Times of Israel*, 16 March 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/livni-attacks-Ya'alon-grumbling-is-easy/>, accessed 16 July 2015.

³¹ Nechama Duck, 'Ex-generals, police chiefs tell PM: resume peace talks', *Ynetnews*, 2 Nov. 2014, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4586854,00.html>, accessed 16 July 2015.

³² Ari Soffer, 'Tzipi Livni: negotiations with the PA are in Israel's interests', *Israel National News*, 23 Oct. 2013, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/173141#.VLjlxkeUeSo>, accessed 16 July 2015.

³³ Amira Schiff, 'The "Annapolis process": a chronology of failure', *Israel Affairs* 19: 4, Jan. 2013, pp. 660–78.

³⁴ See e.g. speech by Isaac Herzog to 15th Herzliya Conference, 7 June 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-itooFQHfWY>, accessed 2 Aug. 2015; speech by Zahava Galon to 15th Herzliya Conference, 7 June 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=talvETFiGTs>, accessed 2 Aug. 2015.

In the context of the very low expectation of progress through bilateral talks with the Palestinians, Plan A supporters also increasingly call for an Israeli initiative to respond favourably to the Arab Peace Initiative. They hope the involvement of moderate Arab states may help give the Palestinians support in making difficult concessions, while also giving greater incentives for the Israeli public to countenance concessions on their side. They also argue that the regional strategic interests shared by Israel and Sunni Arab states—including the threats from both Iran and Sunni extremism typified by ISIS—create an opportune moment to try to engage the wider Arab world.³⁵ Other steps typically advocated by Plan A supporters include enhancing cooperation with the PA on the economy and security in the West Bank and on reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip, and taking steps to rebuild relations with the US administration around a shared agenda to advance the peace process.

A variation on the attempt to reach a final status agreement in one go, if this proves impossible, is an attempt to reach a partial or interim agreement. This can be labelled 'Plan A-minus'. The goal is to seek a consensual step towards final status without requiring agreement on all issues at once. Those advocating this approach hope that while Israel may not have a partner for a comprehensive deal, it may have a partner for a partial agreement. Yossi Beilin, among others, has proposed the immediate creation of a Palestinian state in parts of the West Bank, alongside a schedule for reaching a permanent agreement.³⁶ The most immediate objection to this approach is that the Palestinians have consistently rejected interim proposals, arguing that a 'provisional' Palestinian state will become permanent, and the remaining Palestinian demands will be buried.³⁷ However, the most substantial challenge to Plan A inside Israel is the repeated failure of all final status talks, widely blamed in Israel on Palestinian intransigence.

Plan B

Plan B supporters agree that Israel's interest lies in breaking the status quo and advancing towards a two-state reality. However, like the status quo adherents, they attribute the failure to reach an agreement to inherent gaps between the parties which currently cannot be bridged. Individuals in this camp include supporters of the peace process disillusioned by what they perceive as Palestinian intransigence in the face of reasonable Israeli offers.³⁸ Plan B supporters conclude, in the words of Amos Yadlin, director of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS),

³⁵ Speech by Tzipi Livni to 15th Herzliya Conference, 8 June 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPyo6T_Q-Os, accessed 2 Aug. 2015.

³⁶ Yossi Beilin, 'Why Kerry failed at peace', *Politico*, 14 May 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/why-kerry-failed-at-peace-106596.html#ixzz3IBjXyagd>, accessed 16 July 2015.

³⁷ Herb Keinon and Khaled Abu Toameh, 'Abbas denies considering interim peace agreement', *Jerusalem Post*, 29 Oct. 2013, <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/PA-refutes-report-saying-Abbas-has-softened-his-stance-on-peace-talks-330089>, accessed 16 July 2015.

³⁸ e.g. Shlomo Avineri, 'Don't expect Abbas to sign anything', *Haaretz*, 18 Feb. 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.574759>, accessed 15 July 2015; Ari Shavit, 'Waiting for the Palestinian Godot', *Haaretz*, 24 April 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-1.574759>, accessed 16 April 2015.

that: 'The gaps between our minimum and the Palestinian minimum were too great.' In particular, they judge that Israel cannot make further concessions on security arrangements in the Jordan Valley or on the Palestinian demand for the 'right of return'.³⁹

Plan B supporters also believe that the Palestinian side will not make major compromises because it has its own 'Plan B' alternative to a negotiated agreement, including unilateral diplomatic moves. As long as the PA can strengthen the Palestinian diplomatic position and the isolation of Israel through unilateral moves, they will have no reason to compromise.⁴⁰ Plan B advocates feel their case has been proved by Abu Mazen's refusal to agree to a framework document produced by US Secretary of State John Kerry in 2014 and continuation of unilateral measures in international institutions.

Like status quo adherents, Plan B advocates think the conflict has to be managed; but their approach to managing it is radically different, in that they propose unilateral Israeli measures to change the status quo. Currently, according to Plan B advocates, settlement growth and declining public confidence on both sides are making a two-state solution harder to achieve; they propose to reverse these trends by moving proactively towards separation. While Plan B proponents invariably accept that negotiated steps would be preferable, they argue that Israel should not wait for the Palestinians, and should take independent steps to advance a two-state reality if necessary.

This approach originated on the left following the collapse of final status negotiations in 2001.⁴¹ However, it came to the fore after being taken up by pragmatists in the Likud led by Ariel Sharon. It was Sharon who drove through the unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip and four small West Bank settlements in 2005, before splitting from Likud to form the centrist Kadima party with the intention of continuing the process in the West Bank.⁴²

Recent years have seen renewed interest in unilateral separation, which has seen its credibility boosted by the endorsement of INSS, Israel's leading strategic think-tank. Supporters of various versions of Plan B can be found across the centre-left parties, but Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid has gone furthest of the party leaders in publicly backing it, doing so in a policy speech in June 2014.⁴³

Overshadowing Plan B, however, is the precedent of the 2005 disengagement. This move was done without coordination with the Palestinians, and ultimately involved forcibly removing some settlers who ignored evacuation orders. Plan B advocates stress they would avoid some of the adverse results of 2005, including the rise to power of Hamas in the Gaza Strip and associated escalation in rocket

³⁹ Presentation by Amos Yadlin to INSS conference, 29 June 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbX5jovMRLI&index=3&list=PLCapdZwzDpNnYultApPpGDjy-OGwGGOFT>, accessed 2 Aug. 2015.

⁴⁰ Presentation by Amos Yadlin to INSS conference.

⁴¹ Jonathan Rynhold, 'Israel's fence: can separation make better neighbours?', *Survival* 46: 1, Spring 2004, pp. 55–76.

⁴² J. Rynhold and D. Waxman, 'Ideological change and Israel's disengagement from Gaza', *Political Science Quarterly* 123: 1, Spring 2008, pp. 11–37.

⁴³ Speech by Yair Lapid to 14th Herzliya Conference, 8 June 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1XmycmoG3_M, accessed 16 July 2015.

fire, the polarizing effects of forced evacuation and the shortcomings in resettlement plans.⁴⁴

Plan B advocates generally emphasize leaving the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in areas critical for Israeli security, especially along the River Jordan; pursuing as far as possible coordination with the Palestinians and the international community; and accompanying unilateral measures with a clear articulation of Israel's vision for final status. They typically propose initial measures that would precede any forced evacuations, including internal Israeli dialogue about the future border and which settlements to retain; a diplomatic initiative to clarify the limits of Israeli territorial claims in the West Bank; expanding PA control in parts of Area C, the 60 per cent of the West Bank under full Israeli control; freezing construction and cutting subsidies beyond the settlement blocks; and compensating settlers who voluntarily relocate.⁴⁵ It should be noted that most Plan A supporters would also be likely to back many of these measures, if they were consistent with a negotiated agreement, though they sometimes warn that unilateral steps strengthen extremists and undermine Palestinian moderates who want a negotiated agreement.⁴⁶

While Plan B enjoys growing support among centrist policy elites, its critics argue that after Israel's withdrawals from the Gaza Strip in 2005 and south Lebanon in 2000, both territories were taken over by armed groups that have since fired thousands of rockets at Israeli civilians. Israel's military operations against armed groups in these territories have in turn drawn intense international condemnation. Meanwhile Israel is accused internationally of meting out collective punishment through its policies restricting movement and access in the Gaza Strip, imposed after the Hamas takeover, including a naval blockade.

Plan B advocates also face the criticism that they are effectively giving the Palestinians something for nothing, which will only fuel their intransigence. Plan B advocates respond that the most potent threats to Israel currently are delegitimization, isolation and the declining feasibility of reaching a two-state outcome, and that its proactive approach will restore Israeli legitimacy as a Jewish and democratic state and undercut Palestinian unilateralism.⁴⁷

Entrenchment–annexationism

At the other end of the spectrum from proactive two-staters are those who strongly reject the creation of a Palestinian state west of the Jordan, maintaining that there is room for only a Jewish state, and seek to entrench Jewish/Israeli presence through settlement and annexation. For most of its advocates, this approach is rooted in

⁴⁴ Udi Dekel, Anat Kurz and Gilead Sher, 'The political process: Plan A, Plan B, and what lies between them', in Shlomo Brom and Anat Kurz, eds, *Strategic survey for Israel 2013–2014* (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2014).

⁴⁵ Dekel et al., 'The political process'; Omer Bar Lev, 'It's in our hands' (Heb.), Oct. 2013, <http://omerbarlev.co.il/images/files/Its-in-our-hands.pdf>, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁴⁶ David Kimche, 'Negotiations for a permanent status agreement', in Heller and Hollis, eds, *Israel and the Palestinians*.

⁴⁷ Toby Greene, 'Can disengagement secure legitimacy? The European angle', *INSS Strategic Assessment* 16: 4, Jan. 2014, pp. 47–60.

territorial-nationalist or national-religious ideology in which permanent Jewish sovereignty over the 'Land of Israel' is a primary goal. An important source of support for this strain of thinking is the national-religious sector, representing 8–10 per cent of Israeli society. This sector sees Israel's creation as a divine act and the Land of Israel as divinely promised, and considers maintaining Jewish sovereignty over the 'Land of Israel' a religious imperative.⁴⁸

However, those advocating this approach make their case to the Israeli mainstream by arguing, in concert with the status quo camp, that there is no Palestinian partner and that Israeli control of the territory is necessary for Israeli security. They make the additional arguments that a Palestinian state in the West Bank would be another base for terrorism, and a magnet for Palestinian refugees who will ultimately spill into Israel.⁴⁹

Those who take this approach are unified in their commitment to entrenching Israel's presence in the West Bank through settlement.⁵⁰ However, they take varying approaches to the long-term fate of the West Bank. Most prominent is the proposal of Jewish Home leader Naftali Bennett to annex Area C, while maintaining Palestinian autonomy in Areas A and B, which are controlled by the PA.⁵¹ Bennett offers no clear answer to the question of the citizenship rights of Palestinians in Areas A and B, simply responding that there is no perfect solution to the conflict.⁵² He also plays down the threat posed by any international diplomatic backlash to annexing Area C, arguing that the world does not accept Israel's annexation of East Jerusalem or the application of Israeli law to the Golan Heights either, with little consequence.

A minority of entrenchment–annexationists openly propose annexing the entire West Bank and offering Israeli citizenship to all the Palestinians. They reject the assertion that this would make the Jews a minority, claiming that the Arab population of the West Bank is overstated in official statistics.⁵³ However, the demographic claims they make to justify this are themselves rejected by leading Israeli demographers,⁵⁴ and have attracted accusations of manipulation for ideological ends.⁵⁵

The entrenchment–annexationist camp suffered major setbacks with the Oslo Accords, the building of the West Bank security barrier after the outbreak of

⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, 'Leap of faith: Israel's national religious and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict', 21 Nov. 2013, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/israel-palestine/147-leap-of-faith-israel-s-national-religious-and-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict.aspx>, accessed 2 Aug. 2015.

⁴⁹ 'Naftali Bennett's stability initiative—doing what's good for Israel', Dec. 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n1oFOEY_6lM, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁵⁰ See Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, *Lords of the land: the war over Israel's settlements in the occupied territories, 1967–2007* (New York: Nation Books, 2009).

⁵¹ 'Naftali Bennett's stability initiative—doing what's good for Israel'.

⁵² 'Saban Forum 2014—a conversation with Naftali Bennett', Brookings Institution, 17 Dec. 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaThF8wXC_E, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁵³ See e.g. Caroline Glick, *The Israeli solution: a one-state plan for peace in the Middle East* (New York: Crown Forum, 2014).

⁵⁴ Evgenia Bystrov and Arnon Soffer, *Israel: demography 2013–2014: challenges and chances* (Haifa: University of Haifa, 2013).

⁵⁵ Ian S. Lustick, 'What counts is the counting: statistical manipulation as a solution to Israel's "demographic problem"', *Middle East Journal* 67: 2, Spring 2013, pp. 185–205.

the second intifada, and especially the 2005 disengagement. However, while no new settlements have been formally established in the West Bank since the Oslo Accords, the settler movement has used political leverage and grassroots activism to secure the piecemeal advancement of planning and construction to expand existing settlements and establish unauthorized outposts. These acts have been among the factors undermining attempts to negotiate a final status agreement. Meanwhile, all Israeli governments have continued construction of Jewish neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem. Furthermore, momentum behind unilateral separation in the West Bank, which was high following the 2005 disengagement, waned as a result of the Second Lebanon War and the Hamas takeover in the Gaza Strip in 2006–2007.

Since the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as prime minister in 2009 there has been a clear overlap in government between the status quo camp, dominant in Netanyahu's Likud party, and the entrenchment–annexationists, in their shared resistance to territorial concessions. However, the annexationists' ambitions have to some extent been kept in check by Netanyahu, who as well as accepting—rhetorically, at least—the two-state paradigm, has faced countervailing pressure to curb settlement construction from coalition partners to his left and from US and European governments.⁵⁶ Both domestic and international opposition constitute considerable obstacles to those wanting to launch major new settlement construction, especially in the most sensitive areas, and to any decision to annex parts of the West Bank.

Public opinion

In seeking to understand the context in which politicians are operating, it is important to grasp broad trends in public opinion. Owing to the uncertainties involved with polling, including sampling and wording of questions, three separate sets of relevant data are cited here.

INSS has surveyed Jewish Israeli opinion since 1985. Their data show support for the establishment of a Palestinian state rising from 21 per cent in 1987 to 55 per cent in 1999 and generally remaining in the 50–60 per cent range.⁵⁷ However, while support for a Palestinian state has been relatively stable, belief in the possibility of reaching an agreement has declined, from 44 per cent in 2001 to a low of 29 per cent in 2012.⁵⁸

Corroborating data come from the Harry S. Truman Research Institute at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, which surveys Israeli opinion twice yearly. The institute's surveys in 2013 and 2014 showed Israeli support for the two-state solution at 58–63 per cent. However, when the same surveys asked Israelis about

⁵⁶ Lorin Bell-Cross, 'Settlements and the two-state solution: Lorin Bell-Cross interviews Dani Dayan', *Fathom*, Aug. 2014, <http://fathomjournal.org/settlements-and-the-two-state-solution-lorin-bell-cross-interviews-dani-dayan/>, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁵⁷ Yehuda Ben-Meir and Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, *The voice of the people: Israeli public opinion on national security 2012* (Tel Aviv: INSS, 2013), p. 78.

⁵⁸ Olena Bagno-Moldavsky and Yehuda Ben Meir, 'Who in Israel is ready for a peace agreement with the Palestinians?', *Strategic Assessment* 17: 1, April 2014, p. 49.

Palestinians' aspirations, they found 51–56 per cent believing the Palestinians aspire to conquer all of Israel, with 31–37 per cent also believing the Palestinians intend to destroy much of the Jewish population.⁵⁹

INSS links the majority Jewish support for the two-state solution to its finding that most Israeli Jews consider having a country with a Jewish majority more important than controlling all of 'Greater Israel'.⁶⁰ Their 2014 survey backed this up with the finding that 54 per cent were willing to remove 'small and isolated settlements' and a further 12 per cent ready to remove 'all settlements' in the context of a permanent agreement, while some 34 per cent were opposed to the removal of settlements under any circumstances. In attributing responsibility for the failure of final status negotiations, 34 per cent blamed the 'recalcitrance of the Palestinian Authority', 9 per cent blamed the 'lack of flexibility on behalf of the Israeli government' and half responded that 'the gap between the two parties is too large'.⁶¹

When presented with options for resolving the conflict, 11 per cent of the INSS respondents chose a 'permanent agreement that would include substantial territorial concessions, including part of Jerusalem', 28 per cent chose 'a partial agreement with limited territorial concessions that leaves Jerusalem under Israeli control', 23 per cent chose unilateral disengagement, and 33 per cent opposed all these. Despite the apparent reluctance of respondents to make more than limited territorial concessions, when asked how they would vote in a referendum on a deal similar to the Clinton Parameters,⁶² the result was 51 per cent in favour and 24 per cent opposed.

So what does the Israeli public expect its government to do? The Israel Democracy Institute's monthly 'Peace Index' measures Israeli opinion on negotiations. From April 2013 until July 2014, 61–69 per cent of those surveyed said they were 'strongly' or 'moderately' in favour of negotiations. From July 2014, when major conflict erupted between Israel and armed groups in the Gaza Strip, support for these options fell to 56 per cent, and it remained at 55–60 per cent until the government collapsed in November 2014. In the same period the percentage who 'strongly' or 'moderately' believed negotiations would lead to peace 'in the coming years' was 27–34 per cent. The highest figure was recorded in August 2013, following the resumption of peace talks, and the lowest in September 2014, following the 50-day conflict between Israel and armed groups in the Gaza Strip.

By consistently pursuing talks based on a two-state formula, therefore, Netanyahu reflected public will, but actual expectations, and therefore pressure to

⁵⁹ Data ranges cited apply to the following polls: Joint Israeli–Palestinian Poll 48, June 2013, <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/381>, accessed 2 Aug. 2015; Joint Israeli–Palestinian Poll 50, Dec. 2013, [http://truman.huji.ac.il/upload/Joint_press_December_2013%20\(2\).pdf](http://truman.huji.ac.il/upload/Joint_press_December_2013%20(2).pdf), accessed 2 Aug. 2015; Joint Israeli–Palestinian Poll, June 2014, <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/467>, accessed 2 Aug. 2015; Joint Israeli–Palestinian Poll, December 2014, <http://truman.huji.ac.il/upload/Joint%20Poll%20Dec%202014.pdf>, accessed 2 Aug. 2015.

⁶⁰ Yehuda Ben Meir and Gilead Sher, 'Israeli public opinion and separation from the Palestinians', in Brom and Kurz, eds, *Strategic survey for Israel 2013–2014*.

⁶¹ Bagno-Moldavsky and Meir, 'Who in Israel is ready for a peace agreement with the Palestinians?'

⁶² For the full content of the Clinton Parameters, see D. Ross, *The missing peace: the inside story of the fight for Middle East peace* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2005), pp. 809–13.

succeed, were limited.⁶³ These low expectations also help to explain why the issue has dropped down the public agenda, as evidenced by the low profile the large parties gave to the issue in the 2013 and 2015 elections. Meanwhile, Israeli Jews who oppose any territorial compromise and the creation of a Palestinian state are clearly in the minority, though the raw numbers do not take into account that they may be more committed to their positions than others.⁶⁴

Ideological diversity and policy incoherence

Israel's policy incoherence seems only to be increasing with the declining electoral strength of large parties. In every election from 1948 to 1992, the largest party had at least 40 out of 120 Knesset seats. Since then no party has reached 40, and in the four elections since 2006 the largest party has struggled to reach 30.

The 2013–2014 government consisted of members of five parties. Likud and Yisrael Beitenu ran a joint election list but remained separate parties, with Likud beginning the 19th Knesset with 20 seats and eight ministers, Yisrael Beitenu with eleven seats and five ministers. Yesh Atid had 19 seats and five ministers, Jewish Home had twelve seats and three ministers, and Hatnua had six seats and two ministers.

These political forces were divided among those broadly in the status quo camp (parts of Likud and Yisrael Beitenu), those advocating a proactive two-statism (Hatnua and Yesh Atid), and those advocating an entrenchment–annexationist agenda (Jewish Home and parts of Likud). Of those advocating a proactive two-statism, Hatnua leader Tzipi Livni remained in the Plan A school, while Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid, as mentioned above, proposed a Plan B alternative following the collapse of negotiations.

Prime Minister Netanyahu's position was somewhat ambiguous. By dropping his opposition to a Palestinian state in his June 2009 Bar Ilan speech, he distanced himself from the entrenchment–annexationist camp. From 2012 onwards he spoke of a two-state solution as necessary to prevent a binational state emerging, appearing to move closer to the proactive two-statist school.⁶⁵ However, he also continued to warn of the dangers of giving up control of the West Bank. In January 2014 he said:

We want to ensure that in the political negotiations with the Palestinians, we achieve two goals: one, we don't want ... a binational state ... And second, we do not want another country to be established here under Iran's sponsorship that fires missiles and rockets at us ... We need to achieve both these goals.⁶⁶

⁶³ See also Gershon Gorenberg, 'The other negotiator: the Israeli public at the peace table', in Kurtzer, ed., *Pathways to peace*.

⁶⁴ Dror, *Israeli statecraft*, p. 112.

⁶⁵ Speech by Benjamin Netanyahu to INSS 5th annual conference, 29 May 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=SP93A5956B716364C4&v=vpJnXrCro5c>, accessed 2 Aug. 2012.

⁶⁶ Speech by Benjamin Netanyahu to INSS Annual Conference, 29 Jan. 2014, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/Press-Room/2014/Pages/PM-Netanyahu-addresses-INSS-Annual-Conference-28-Jan-2014.aspx>, accessed 16 July 2015.

Netanyahu also made some concessions to the entrenchment–annexationist agenda, for example by choosing to release Palestinian prisoners to initiate talks with the Palestinians in 2013, rather than freeze settlement construction.⁶⁷ At the same time, he expended political capital in both 2010 (with a partial settlement freeze) and in 2013 (with the release of Palestinian prisoners) to initiate negotiations, and allowed Livni to lead the negotiations in coordination with him. While international considerations, especially US pressure, played a major role in these decisions, US envoy Martin Indyk said at the end of the Kerry-led process in 2014 that Netanyahu was ‘in the zone of a possible agreement’, adding: ‘I saw him sweat bullets about it.’⁶⁸ Tzipi Livni confirmed that he was willing to accept with reservations a US framework document, believed to have included reference to 1967 lines plus swaps as the basis of a territorial agreement.⁶⁹ However, Netanyahu never publicly acknowledged any specific concessions. He had good reason to believe such concessions would split his party or lead to Jewish Home leaving the government and undermining his political base.

Meanwhile, the entrenchment–annexationists in the government contributed to undermining final status negotiations. Settlement announcements in November 2013 triggered the resignation of Palestinian negotiators and, according to Indyk, ‘humiliated’ Palestinian President Abbas—particularly the suggestion that they were agreed by the Palestinian side in return for the release of prisoners.⁷⁰ For its part, Jewish Home also promoted legislation to make it harder to bring about territorial concessions by requiring referendums or special Knesset majorities to approve them.⁷¹

In parallel, Likud Defence Minister Moshe Ya’alon was caught on record in January 2014 berating the process, saying:

Only our continued presence in Judea and Samaria and the River Jordan will ensure that Ben-Gurion Airport and Netanya don’t become targets for rockets from every direction. American Secretary of State John Kerry, who turned up here determined and acting out of misplaced obsession and messianic fervor, cannot teach me anything about the conflict with the Palestinians.⁷²

A critical moment arrived in April 2014. With the nine-month negotiation period brokered by John Kerry due to expire at the end of that month, Israel and the United States sought a basis on which to extend the talks and defer unilateral Palestinian

⁶⁷ Jeffrey Goldberg, ‘Netanyahu says Obama got Syria right’, *Bloomberg View*, 22 May 2014, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2014-05-22/netanyahu-says-obama-got-syria-right>, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁶⁸ ‘In conversation with US Special Envoy for Israeli–Palestinian Negotiations’, Aspen Ideas Festival, July 2014, <http://www.aspenideas.org/session/conversation-us-special-envoy-israeli%E2%80%93palestinian-negotiations-0#p3w76Ttdwlg>, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁶⁹ Barak Ravid, ‘The secret fruits of the peace talks, a future point of departure?’, *Haaretz*, 5 July 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/israel-peace-conference/premium-1.603028>, accessed 16 July 2015; David Horowitz, ‘Surrounded by Islamist brutality, says Tzipi Livni, Israel can’t just “huddle into itself”’, *Times of Israel*, 23 Sept. 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/surrounded-by-islamist-brutality-says-tzipi-livni-israel-cant-just-huddle-into-itself/>, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁷⁰ ‘In conversation with US Special Envoy for Israeli–Palestinian Negotiations’.

⁷¹ ‘Livni slams draft law on Jerusalem’s future’, Al Jazeera, 22 Oct. 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/10/livni-slams-draft-law-jerusalem-future-2013102123636129398.html>, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁷² Shiffer, ‘Ya’alon: Kerry should win his Nobel and leave us alone’.

steps. This involved the release of a fourth tranche of Palestinian prisoners, scheduled for 29 March, and the release by the United States of the convicted American spy Jonathan Pollard to Israel.⁷³ On 1 April, with the release of the prisoners overdue, and the extension deal still being negotiated, the Housing Ministry, held by Jewish Home Minister Uri Ariel, reissued tenders for 708 homes in East Jerusalem. The same day Abu Mazen signed Palestinian applications to 15 international conventions, a breach of understandings according to Israel. Palestinian negotiators said this was a response to the delay of the prisoner releases,⁷⁴ though John Kerry saw the settlement announcement as significant.⁷⁵ Livni publicly accused Ariel of trying to 'torpedo what I'm doing together with the prime minister'.⁷⁶ The Israeli cabinet was divided again three weeks later when Abbas signed a reconciliation agreement with Hamas. While some ministers called for an end to peace talks and harsh retaliation, Livni and Lapid pressed for a more muted 'suspension' of talks.⁷⁷

Following the collapse of the process Netanyahu showed a fleeting public interest in Plan B, acknowledging that 'the idea of taking unilateral steps is gaining ground, from the center-left to the center-right. Many Israelis are asking themselves if there are certain unilateral steps that could theoretically make sense.'⁷⁸ However, this interest apparently evaporated around the time ISIS made its advance through Iraq in June. When Netanyahu addressed a conference on Plan B convened by INSS that month, he said: 'The root of the conflict is the refusal to recognize the Jewish state in any boundary. Until we resolve this issue, no settlement evacuation will make any difference.' He further stressed: 'The evacuation of Israel's forces would most likely lead to the collapse of the PA and the rise of radical Islamic forces, just as it did in Gaza,'⁷⁹ giving the strong impression that status quo thinking was the order of the day. Following the conflict with Hamas in the summer of 2014, he stressed trying to make progress in the Palestinian arena by working with moderate Arab states that share Israel's concern to contain 'militant Islam', without explaining how he would advance this.⁸⁰

The government fell in November 2014, and following the February 2015 election Netanyahu formed a new administration consisting of Likud, Kulanu (a new centrist socio-economic party), Jewish Home and the ultra-Orthodox

⁷³ Roger Cohen, 'Why Israeli-Palestinian peace failed', *New York Times*, 23 Dec. 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/12/24/opinion/roger-cohen-why-israeli-palestinian-peace-failed.html>, accessed 2 Aug. 2015.

⁷⁴ 'Q&A: Palestine's accession to international treaties', Palestine Liberation Organization Negotiations Affairs Department, 2 April 2014, <http://nad-plo.org/userfiles/file/fact%20sheets/Q&A%20Accession.pdf>, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁷⁵ Michael Wilner, 'Kerry says "Jewish state" recognition will have to wait', *Jerusalem Post*, 8 April 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/Diplomacy-and-Politics/Kerry-says-Jewish-state-recognition-will-have-to-wait-347908>, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁷⁶ Hezki Asher and Ari Yashar, 'Housing minister says Livni looking for a scapegoat', *Israel National News*, 5 April 2014, http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/179295#.VS_TSGqqkp, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁷⁷ Yair Lapid, 'Why I voted in favor of suspending the peace negotiations', *Time*, 27 April 2014, <http://time.com/78211/why-i-voted-in-favor-of-suspending-peace-negotiations-with-the-palestinians/>, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁷⁸ Goldberg, 'Netanyahu says Obama got Syria right'.

⁷⁹ Speech by Benjamin Netanyahu to INSS conference, 29 June 2014, <http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/Media-Center/Speeches/Pages/speechINSS290614.aspx>, accessed 16 July 2015.

⁸⁰ 'Transcript of Benjamin Netanyahu's address to the 2014 UN General Assembly', *Haaretz*, 29 Sep. 2014, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.618308>, accessed 16 July 2015.

parties. This government is narrower in its range of opinions on the Israeli–Palestinian arena, but a range still exists. While Netanyahu made remarks during the election campaign to the effect that no Palestinian state would be formed under his leadership, after the election he tacked back to speaking in favour of a two-state solution.⁸¹ Jewish Home and some Likud ministers, however, maintain their principled opposition to a Palestinian state. For their part, the ultra-Orthodox parties and Kulanu are relatively ambivalent, being more concerned with domestic and socio-economic goals, but generally taking a fairly pragmatic and open stance. It is interesting to note, however, that Kulanu includes at least one prominent advocate of Plan B: the historian and former Israeli Ambassador to the United States Michael Oren.⁸²

The new government was formed with a fragile 61-seat majority. Netanyahu left vacant the position of foreign minister, it being widely understood that he wanted to be able to give it to Isaac Herzog, leader of the centre-left Zionist Union party (a merger of Labor and Tzipi Livni's Hatnua faction) should opportunity arise to co-opt him and his party.⁸³ It appears, therefore, that Netanyahu would like to retain the option of positioning himself once more at the centre of a coalition with a wide range of views on the peace process, with support from the left should he need to make concessions.

Conclusions

Both scholars writing about Israeli policy and policy-makers seeking to intervene in the peace process should be aware of internal Israeli dynamics. In Israel, power is vested in a cabinet characterized by deep political and ideological splits, diminishing the capacity for decisive and coherent policy. This problem has worsened with the shrinking of the large parties. Even to speak of 'Israel's policy' in the Israeli–Palestinian arena, as though Israel had a unified policy, is frequently misleading. There are three distinct approaches to the Israeli–Palestinian issue that have significant support. These differences of opinion reflect deep differences of world-view.

Israeli public opinion on this issue is dynamic. Deeper analysis of the relationship between political events and Israeli opinion is warranted, but in the meantime it is worth highlighting some important relationships. The repeated failure of final status negotiations presents a major challenge to the credibility of Plan A. Many more Israelis blame Palestinian intransigence than blame their own leaders, and a majority believe the Palestinians ultimately want to destroy Israel. Few Israelis think, therefore, more generous offers by Israel will bring about a breakthrough.

⁸¹ 'PM Netanyahu's statement at the start of his meeting with EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini', 20 May 2015, <http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Events/Pages/eventMorgini200515.aspx>, accessed 17 July 2015.

⁸² Raphael Ahren, 'If peace talks fail: Michael Oren's Plan B', *Times of Israel*, 26 Feb. 2014, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/if-peace-talks-fail-michael-orens-plan-b/>, accessed 15 July 2015.

⁸³ Adiv Sterman, 'Hoping to woo Herzog, Netanyahu to keep foreign ministry in back pocket', *Times of Israel*, 7 May 2015, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/hoping-to-woo-herzog-netanyahu-to-keep-foreign-ministry-in-back-pocket/>, accessed 15 July 2015.

The Palestinians' expressed preference for the internationalization of the conflict over continuing bilateral negotiations only reinforces the majority Israeli view that there is no partner. Disillusioned Israeli supporters of Plan A, and even Tzipi Livni herself, have expressed deep frustration with the Palestinians.⁸⁴

International diplomatic pressure on Israel, the BDS movement, and international support for Palestinian attempts to secure recognition unilaterally, are interpreted in contrasting ways within the Israeli debate, as each side tries to win public support. Those in the status quo and annexationist camps identify these developments as evidence of western naivety, ambivalence regarding Israel's security, or anti-Semitism. They position themselves as protecting Israel's interests by standing up to international pressure or dangerous initiatives. Those in the proactive two-statism camp, by contrast, argue that Israel should actively try to separate itself from the Palestinians in order to head off the threats posed to its international alliances and economy. External attempts to impose terms for resolving the conflict that do not respond explicitly in substance or presentation to concerns held widely in Israel are likely to fuel the argument of the status quo camp in this debate. So too are measures by third parties which are perceived by Israelis to be one-sided or to come from untrusted sources, such as recognition of Palestinian statehood in European parliaments.

At the same time, events such as the 50-day conflict with armed groups in the Gaza Strip in 2014 present a major challenge to the credibility of Plan B. It is extremely difficult to convince Israelis that they should unilaterally cede territory when almost every Israeli has personally been threatened by rocket fire from territory ceded unilaterally in the past. Any unilateralist approach to separating from the Palestinians in the West Bank therefore faces enormous political challenges.

Meanwhile, while the entrenchment–annexationist camp wields considerable political power and determination, it does not represent the majority. Most Israelis, indeed most Israeli Jews, still accept the two-state solution and value a Jewish majority above maintaining sovereignty over all the Land of Israel. The 2005 disengagement demonstrated the inability of the settlers to resist the will of the majority, when the Israeli public are convinced by a strong leader that territorial concessions represent Israel's interests.

However, decisive action to change the status quo requires enormous determination and political skill on the part of the prime minister, and readiness to absorb great personal and political risk. This was the case when Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo Accords in 1993, when Ehud Barak attempted to reach a final status agreement in 2000, and when Ariel Sharon opted for disengagement in 2005. In the absence of this level of determined and single-minded leadership, the various camps use what power and influence they have to try to advance their respective conflicting programmes. It is important to recognize how high the stakes are in this internal Israeli struggle. All sides believe the direction Israel takes will have an impact not only on the future character of the state, but on its very ability to survive.

⁸⁴ Cohen, 'Why Israeli–Palestinian peace failed'.