Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza

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Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza

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Early on the morning of 12 September 2005—almost two years after Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon first announced his intention of pursuing a policy of unilateral disengagement—the last Israeli soldier left Gaza. This brought to an end Israel's 38-year military rule over the area that began with its capture in the 1967 Six-Day War. The implementation of the plan involved the evacuation of over 8,000 Israeli settlers from all twenty-one settlements in Gaza and four isolated settlements in the West Bank.[1] This was undoubtedly a historic event. For the first time, an Israeli government had dismantled and evacuated settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. What made it even more significant was the fact that the disengagement plan was initiated and implemented by a Likud-led coalition government headed by Ariel Sharon, the "father of the settlements." What accounts for this unprecedented move? This article seeks to answer this critical question.

One possible answer focuses on Sharon himself. It views the disengagement as a cunning tactical maneuver designed to shore up Sharon's domestic popularity, deflect international pressure from Israel, and forestall any further withdrawals from the West Bank. This interpretation gained credence when Dov Weisglass, one of Sharon's closest advisers, stated: "The disengagement is

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[1] For details of the plan, see www.pmo.gov.il/PMOEng/Communication/Disengagement Plan/, accessed 10 July 2005.

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actually formaldehyde. It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that's necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians .... The disengagement plan makes it possible for Israel to park conveniently in an interim situation that distances us as far as possible from political pressure."[2]

It is argued here that this narrow focus on Sharon's personal role in disengagement has led observers to miss the broader role of ideological change within Revisionism—the ideology of the Likud Party and the secular Israeli right—in causing disengagement. For many on the secular right, disengagement was grounded in the abandonment of an operational ideological commitment to maintaining Jewish control over *Eretz Yisrael* (the whole Land of Israel), that is, the State of Israel plus the West Bank and Gaza. Without their prior acceptance of partition, disengagement would have been inconceivable. This ideological change has been a long and contested process. In part, it was a result of the perception that practical realities had generated a clash of values within Revisionism. Consequently, the value of *Eretz Yisrael* was effectively demoted in order to preserve a more fundamental value—Israel's continued existence as a democratic Jewish state with a clear Jewish majority. Although *Eretz Yisrael* has not been completely discarded as an abstract ideal, it has become a secondary consideration.

Ideological change was a necessary but not sufficient condition for disengagement. Domestic and international pressures also played a significant role in bringing it about. These factors were particularly important in determining the timing, unilateral nature, and extent of the plan. They were also important in enabling its successful implementation. Indeed, it is in regard to implementation that Sharon's personal contribution, his tenacity and leadership skills, was most vital. Nonetheless, without ideological change, disengagement would have been unthinkable.

The controversy over the role of ideological change with regard to disengagement ties in with one of the major debates in international relations theory concerning the importance of ideational factors,[3] including ideology.[4] According to materialist theories, such as neo-realism and neo-liberalism, ideas are merely an epiphenomenon.[5] Similarly, in the sub-field of foreign

[2] Ari Shavit, "The big freeze," interview with Dov Weisglass, *Ha'aretz*, 18 October 2004.

[3] For example, see the debate regarding the end of the Cold War: Robert English, "Power, Ideas, and New Evidence on the Cold War's End," *International Security* 26 (Spring 2002): 70–92; Stephen Brooks and William Wohlforth, "Power, Globalization, and the End of the Cold War," *International Security* 25 (Winter 2000/01): 5–53; Jeffrey Checkel, *Ideas and International Political Change* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997).

[4] Mark Kramer, "Ideology and the Cold War," *Review of International Studies* 25 (October 1999): 539–576.

[5] Ronald Jepperson, Alexander Wendt, and Peter Katzenstein, "Norms, Identity and Culture in National Security" in Peter Katzenstein, ed., *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996): 33–75.

policy analysis (FPA), the literature on foreign policy change is dominated by theories that focus on policy change imposed by material pressures.[6] While FPA does recognize the role of ideas, the emphasis has been on how ideas explain unexpected consistency in foreign policy, rather than on their role in generating change.[7]

In contrast to this general tendency, scholars working within a constructivist paradigm have demonstrated how norms, ideas, and collective identities play an important role in foreign policy change.[8] Constructivism seeks to demonstrate how ideational factors are crucial in the construction of the interests of political actors, such as states. Ideational factors structure the options available to political actors and the costs and benefits associated with them. Constructivism, however, by its very nature does not seek to provide a complete explanation for particular political outcomes. Instead, it aims at the sort of explanation that demonstrates that certain actions, while not determined by ideational factors, were not possible or not probable without the existence of such factors.[9]

This article adopts a constructivist explanation of unilateral disengagement. Ideological change within the Likud played a vital role in the adoption of this policy. Ideological change was a prerequisite for disengagement, because it radically altered the way that the Likud conceptualized Israel's national interest. It reframed the internal party debate regarding what constituted legitimate and desirable objectives, which in turn led to a restructuring and reevaluation of policy options. And while ideological change did not make the Likud's adoption of the plan inevitable, it certainly made it far more probable, because the plan represented a strategic move toward addressing the threat posed to Israel's Jewish and democratic character by continuing the occupation indefinitely. Aside from leading many to advocate some form of disengagement, the weakening of the value of *Eretz Yisrael* within the Party's discourse meant that even opponents of the plan inside the Likud tended to argue in terms that were favorable to proponents of the plan. External and domestic

[6] Walter Carlsnaes, "Analyzing the Dynamics of Foreign Policy Change," *Cooperation and Conflict* 28 (March 1993): 5–30. On foreign policy change, see Jakob Gustavsson, "How Should We Study Foreign Policy Change?" *Cooperation and Conflict* 31 (March 1999): 73–95; Jerel Rosati, Joe Hagan, and Martin Sampson, eds., *Foreign Policy Restructuring* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).

[7] John Duffield, "Political Culture and State Behavior," *International Organization* 53, no. 4 (1999): 770–772; Valerie Hudson, ed., *Culture and Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1997).

[8] Vendulka Kublakova, ed., *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 2001); Juliet Kaarbo, "Foreign Policy Analysis in the 21st Century: Back to Comparison, Forward to Identity and Ideas," *International Studies Review* 5 (June 2003): 156–163.

[9] On Constructivism, see Emanuel Adler, "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 3 (June 1997): 441–473; Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "Taking Stock: The Constructivist Research Program in International Relations and Comparative Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (June 2001): 235–269.

political factors were also important in bringing about disengagement, but other potential options existed for dealing with these pressures. Part of the reason that disengagement emerged as the preferred response to these pressures was that the assessment of how to deal with these pressures was grounded in an a priori acceptance of partition. In other words, ideological change was also important because it informed the way strategic calculations were made in response to domestic and international pressures.

The next section of this article will discuss the ideology of Revisionism and its influence upon the Likud Party. Ideological changes within the Likud are then traced, and the reasons for these changes are assessed. Following this, the causes of disengagement are critically analyzed. Finally, the conclusion will summarize the argument presented, and look ahead to consider the prospects for another unilateral Israeli withdrawal from much of the West Bank.

REVISIONIST IDEOLOGY: THEORY AND PRACTICE 1925–2000

Revisionist Zionism is the founding ideology of the non-religious right in Israel, represented primarily by the Likud Party. Originally developed by Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky in the first half of the twentieth century, Revisionism was the chief ideological competitor to the dominant Labor Zionism.[10] In line with mainstream Zionism, a principle value of Revisionism was the establishment of a Jewish state in the Jews' historical homeland. Revisionism was primarily distinguished from other varieties of Zionism by its territorial maximalism, insisting upon the Jewish right to sovereignty over the whole territory of *Eretz Yisrael* (originally encompassing all of Mandatory Palestine and Trans-Jordan).[11] Its foremost political objective was to maintain the territorial integrity of the historical land of Israel and establish a Jewish state with a Jewish majority on both sides of the river Jordan. Palestinian inhabitants of this area were to be granted autonomy. While Jewish statehood was always a major ideological goal for Revisionism, it was not to be gained at the price of partitioning *Eretz Yisrael*. Jabotinsky and his disciples, therefore, consistently rejected proposals to partition Palestine into an Arab state and a Jewish state. Hence, Menachem Begin, Jabotinsky's successor, opposed the 1947 United Nations partition plan. In the eyes of Revisionists, the subsequent partition of Palestine in 1949 had no legitimacy.

[10] On Revisionist Zionism, see Rachel Bilski Ben-Hur, *Every Individual a King: The Social and Political Thought of Zev Jabotinsky* (Washington DC: Bnei Brith Books, 1993); Yaacov Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement 1925-1948* (London: Frank Cass, 1998).

[11] Territorial maximalism was not confined to Revisionism; Labor Zionism also included prominent territorial maximalists, as Gershom Gorenberg makes clear in his book, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006). However, territorial maximalism was a defining feature of Revisionist Zionism, whereas it was a minority position within Labor Zionism.

During the first two decades of Israeli statehood, the Revisionist Party, Herut, remained in opposition. In an effort to change this situation and gain political power, Herut slowly began to revise its ideology. While Begin maintained the Revisionist claim to Jewish sovereignty over all of *Eretz Yisrael*, from the late 1950s onward, control over the East Bank of the Jordan ceased to be an operative element within Revisionist ideology. Following Herut's merger with the Liberal Party in 1965, references to the ideal of Jewish sovereignty over "both banks of the Jordan" appeared less and less frequently. By the 1970s, the legitimacy of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was no longer questioned. In 1994, the complete practical abandonment of the "both banks" principle was apparent when an overwhelming majority of Likud Knesset Members (MKs) voted in favor of the peace treaty with Jordan.[12]

After Israel's capture of the West Bank and Gaza in the 1967 war, Revisionism's territorial aspirations concentrated on these territories. These areas were far more central to ancient Jewish history than the East bank of the Jordan or indeed most of the areas within Israel's post-1949 borders. Thus in 1968, Begin defined the "eternal patrimony of our ancestors" as "Jerusalem, Hebron, Bethlehem, Judea, [and] Shechem [Nablus]" in the West Bank.[13] In 1973, Herut's election platform called for the annexation of the West Bank and Gaza.

When Begin finally came to power in the 1977 election, his overriding concern as Prime Minister (1977–1983) was to maintain Israeli control over the West Bank and Gaza.[14] As he declared to a group of Jewish settlers in 1981: "I, Menachem, the son of Ze'ev and Hasia Begin, do solemnly swear that as long as I serve the nation as Prime Minister we will not leave any part of Judea, Samaria, [or] the Gaza Strip."[15] One of the main mechanisms for accomplishing this objective was the establishment of Jewish settlements. From 1967 to 1977, under Labor governments, the Jewish population of the Territories reached 3,200.[16] Labor's limited settlement activity was predicated upon making a future territorial compromise when the majority of the territory would be returned to Arab control. By contrast, the Likud's settlement plan aimed to settle 750,000 Jews all over the territories in order to prevent a territorial compromise. As a result, by 1984, there were about 44,000 settlers.[17]

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[12] Nadav Shelef, "From 'Both Banks of the Jordan' to the 'Whole Land of Israel': Ideological Change in Revisionist Zionism," *Israel Studies* 9 (Spring 2004): 125–148.

[13] *The Jabotinsky Institute Archives in Israel* 1968, H1/13/9/15, cited in ibid.

[14] On Begin's ideology, see Ilan Peleg, *Begin's Foreign Policy 1977-83* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987); Sasson Sofer, *Begin* (London: Blackwell, 1988).

[15] *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 May 1981.

[16] For a detailed discussion of the early years of Israeli settlement building in the Territories under Labor governments see, Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire*.

[17] This figure excludes Israelis living in East Jerusalem; see Elisha Efrat, "Jewish Settlements in the West Bank and Gaza" in Efraim Karsh, ed., *Peace in the Middle East: The Challenge for Israel* (London: Frank Cass, 1994), 135–148.

In the diplomatic arena, Begin pursued his core ideological objective in a relatively pragmatic manner. He held back from annexing the West Bank and Gaza, recognizing that this was not feasible in the short term, due to international opposition. He signed the Camp David Accords (1978) with Egypt that referred to the "legitimate rights of the Palestinians" (although Begin insisted that the Hebrew version referred only to "the Arabs of *Eretz Yisrael*" and not to "Palestinians"). Begin also promoted the idea of autonomy for the Palestinians, albeit only a "personal" autonomy that would not give them control over any territory. But his uncompromising stance in the negotiations over Palestinian autonomy from 1979 to 1981 led to the resignations of the more moderate Moshe Dayan and Ezer Weizman, Foreign and Defense Ministers, respectively, both of whom left the Likud.[18]

According to Weizman, the significant concessions Begin made to the Egyptians in the Camp David Accords and Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty of the following year (returning all of the Sinai peninsula, with its valuable oil resources, and evacuating the Israeli settlement of Yamit) were motivated, in part, by his ideological commitment to the eventual annexation of the territories.[19] By removing the most powerful Arab state from the conflict, reducing international (mainly American) pressure for Israeli concessions on the issue of the territories, and prolonging inconclusive talks on Palestinian autonomy, Begin was buying time for his government's settlement activities in the territories. As Eliyahu Ben Ellisar, the Director-General of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) at the time, explained: "There will be a *de facto* annexation. That is, after five years when both sides will disagree, the situation would mean that things stayed the same in Israel's favor."[20] The return of the Sinai, moreover, did not contradict Begin's Revisionist ideology, because Sinai was not considered part of *Eretz Yisrael* (indeed, Begin was part of the government in 1967 that offered to exchange Sinai and the Golan Heights for peace). Nonetheless, some Revisionists opposed returning any land that had been under Jewish control. Some left the Likud and formed the far-right Techiya Party in protest; others remained in the Likud while opposing the Camp David Accords and the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty. This forced Begin to rely on the Labor opposition to obtain a parliamentary majority for the peace treaty with Egypt.

Yitzhak Shamir, who became leader of the Likud after Begin and served as Prime Minister from 1983 to 1984 and 1986 to 1992, adopted an approach

[18] David Kimche, *The Last Option* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1991), 115–116; Harvey Sicherman, *Palestinian Self-Government: Its Past and Its Future* (Washington DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1991).

[19] Ezer Weizman, *The Battle for Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 1981), 151. On the role of Begin's ideology in negotiations, see Sofer, *Begin*, 169–200; Eric Silver, *Begin: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 170–203.

[20] William Quandt, *Camp David* (Washington DC: Brookings Institute, 1986), 136.

similar to Begin's.[21] Like Begin, Shamir was prepared to compromise on the other areas captured in 1967 that were not considered part of *Eretz Yisrael*. He was therefore willing to compromise with Syria on the Golan Heights in order to circumvent pressure for territorial compromise in the West Bank.[22] By contrast, he was ideologically unwilling to countenance the idea of Israel offering to withdraw from Gaza when moderates in the Likud proposed it to him in 1991–92.[23] Instead, like Begin, Shamir was only willing to offer the Palestinians a very limited form of personal autonomy, an offer he made in the negotiations at the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991. Shamir's strategy was also to buy time for Israel's settlement project in the territories. As he later explained about his government's participation at the Madrid Conference and in the Washington peace talks that followed it: "I would have carried on autonomy talks for ten years; meanwhile we would have reached half a million Jews in Judea and Samaria. Without this demographic revolution, there is no reason to hold autonomy talks."[24] Indeed, under Shamir's Likud-led right-wing government (1990–92), the number of Israelis going to live in settlements more than doubled.[25] In Shamir's long-term plan, a large Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union, and eventually even from the West, would enable Israel to obtain permanent control of the territories. In the meantime, his objective was to at least, "hand over the banner to the next generation without a change in the situation."[26] Overall then, Likud policy under Prime Ministers Begin and Shamir was consistently guided by an ideological commitment to *Eretz Yisrael*. Its basic objective was to undermine the possibility of any future territorial partition.

From Autonomy to Partition

The first Palestinian uprising, known as the *intifada*, which erupted in December 1987, triggered a major ideological crisis for the Likud over its commitment to *Eretz Yisrael*.[27] Until then, the Party had been unified in its

[21] On Shamir's approach, see Chaim Misgav, *Conversations with Yitzhak Shamir* (Tel-Aviv: Sifrat Poalim, 1997) [Hebrew].

[22] Jonathan Rynhold, interview with David Kimche, former Director-General of the Foreign Ministry, London, 1996.

[23] Moshe Arens, *Broken Covenant* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 21, 209, 294.

[24] Clyde Haberman, "Shamir Admits Plan to Stall Talks for 10 Years," *The New York Times*, 27 June 1992.

[25] Colin Shindler, *Israel, the Likud and the Zionist Dream* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 275.

[26] *Ha'aretz*, 2 February 1989.

[27] Jonathan Rynhold, interviews with Ehud Olmert, Dan Meridor, Salai Meridor, Moshe Arens, and Yitzhak Shamir, Jerusalelm, December 1995. See also, Benjamin Netanyahu, *A Place Among Nations* (New York: Bantam, 1993), 13, 121; Shayke Ben-Porat, *Conversations with Dan Meridor* (Tel-Aviv: Sifrat Poalim, 1997), 18–19 [Hebrew]; Zalman Shoval, "Towards the Identity of a Liberal-Nationalist," *Netiv* 1, no. 4 (1988): 43–50 [Hebrew].

opposition to partition. But after the outbreak of the *intifada* and through the 1990s, the Party became increasingly divided over the issue.[28] At first, those advocating a change in the Party's position generally did so only in private. These calls became more public following the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. Eventually, as the debate within the Likud wore on, opposition to partition became a minority position. Hence, what took place within the Likud was a protracted and highly contested ideological change as the Party's consensus gradually shifted from support for Palestinian autonomy to support for territorial partition.

The *intifada* had little effect on the thinking of some Revisionist ideologues, such as Benny Begin (Menachem Begin's son).[29] They continued to advocate limited autonomy for Palestinians, combined with massive Israeli settlement expansion. As noted above, this was also the policy preference of Prime Minister Shamir. A growing number of Likud members, however, began to advocate abandoning the Party's wholesale ideological commitment to *Eretz Yisrael* in favor of a policy based on a willingness to accept some form of partition. Among those to adopt this position were some leading Likud figures from a Sephardi background, such as Meir Shitreet[30] and later Moshe Katsav.[31] Most of these individuals had not joined the Likud for ideological reasons in any case.[32] Others within the Likud without Revisionist backgrounds, such as Zalman Shoval, also began to advocate partition in place of autonomy.[33] Moreover, acceptance of partition in the Likud went beyond individual MKs. In a 1991 poll of the powerful Likud Central Committee, a narrow majority was prepared to cede parts of the West Bank and Gaza in return for true peace (significantly, this poll was taken during a period in which the staunchly Revisionist Herut had become more organizationally dominant than ever before within the Likud).[34]

[28] Jonathan Mendilow, "The Likud's Double Campaign" in Asher Arian and Michal Shamir, eds., *The Elections in Israel 1996* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 203; Efraim Inbar, "Netanyahu Takes Over," *Israel Affairs* 4 (Summer 1997): 33–52.

[29] Ze'ev (Benny) Begin, *A Zionist Stand* (London: Frank Cass, 1991).

[30] *The New York Times*, 23 September 1993; *Economist Survey of Israel*, 22 January 1994.

[31] Mendilow, "The Likud's Double Campaign," 192–193.

[32] Alan Zuckerman, Hanna Herzog, and Michal Shamir, "Herut Activists in Power after Begin" in Gregory Mahler, ed., *Israel after Begin* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 235–256. While Sephardi Israelis were more hawkish than Ashkenazim, their stance was related more to security than to ideology. See Maurice Roumani, "The Sephardi Factor in Israeli Politics," *Middle East Journal* 42 (Summer 1988): 423–435.

[33] *The Washington Post*, 8 October 1993; Zalman Shoval, "Security Zones in Judea, Samaria and Gaza: How to Accept Oslo and Survive," *Nativ* 8 (1995): 30–35 [Hebrew].

[34] *Ma'ariv*, 1 August 1991 [Hebrew]; Elfi Pallis, "The Likud Party: A Primer," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21 (Winter 1992): 49; Giora Goldberg, "The Likud" in Daniel Elazar and Shmuel Sandler, eds., *Who is the Boss in Israel?* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 45–66.

The September 1993 Oslo Accords brought the divisions within Likud out into the open. The Central Committee quickly met and established an executive committee to formulate the Party's official position on the Accords. Unable to reach agreement, no formal proposal was made, and Benjamin Netanyahu, the new Party leader, did not force the issue, out of fear that it would cause the Party to split.[35] Netanyahu tried to bridge the internal divide in the 1996 election campaign. On the one hand, he declared that the Likud would abide by the Oslo Accords as an internationally recognized agreement. He also focused the Likud campaign in favor of a tougher approach to the Palestinians based exclusively on security considerations, a move that angered some Party activists who wanted a more ideological focus. On the other hand, the Party platform's preamble stated that "the right of the Jewish people to *Eretz Yisrael* is an eternal right which cannot be questioned." The platform also promised to encourage settlement activity.[36] Yet following the election, the moderate camp gained adherents. Several Likud MKs, led by Michael Eitan, forged an agreement with Laborites regarding permanent-status issues with the Palestinians. The agreement was the brainchild of Eitan, previously a fervent supporter of *Eretz Yisrael*. It recognized that not all of the settlements would remain within Israel's borders and accepted the creation of an independent "Palestinian entity," which Likud signatories privately acknowledged meant a state.[37]

A decisive break from the value of *Eretz Yisrael* came in January 1997, when Prime Minister Netanyahu signed the Hebron Accord, in which he agreed to transfer control of the West Bank city of Hebron to the Palestinian Authority while keeping 20 percent of it (in which 400 Jewish settlers lived among 130,000 Palestinians) under Israeli control. Netanyahu's agreement to partially withdraw from Hebron—whose biblical and modern history gave it a particular significance to nationalist and religious Jews—was condemned by many of his right-wing supporters. For the first time, a leader of the Likud was officially handing "Jewish land" over to the Palestinians. Under Netanyahu, the Likud's traditional opposition to the partition of *Eretz Yisrael* was irrevocably undermined. As a result, three Likud MKs (Benny Begin, Michael Kleiner, and David Re'em) left the Party and re-formed Herut as an independent right-wing party; and several other Likud politicians joined a lobby of Knesset members called the "Land of Israel Front" in opposition to Netanyahu.[38] Nonetheless, the

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[35] Mendilow, "The Likud's Double Campaign," 192–193.

[36] Ibid., 204; Inbar, "Netanyahu Takes Over," 42–43.

[37] Accessed at www.beilin.org.il/Eng/Peace/beitanbookeng1.html, 10 January 2005.

[38] Jonathan Mendilow, "The Likud's Campaign and the Headwaters of Defeat" in Asher Arian and Michal Shamir, eds., *The Elections in Israel 1999* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 201. The Likud suffered from numerous defections during Netanyahu's premiership. Dan Meridor and Ronny Milo, both Likud moderates, left the party to help form the Center Party, while David Levy took his Gesher faction into an umbrella group, dominated by Labor, called One Israel. These defections had as much to do with personal animosities and ambitions as with ideology, and all three later returned to the Likud.

extent to which ideological opposition to partition no longer informed Likud government policy became even more apparent with the October 1998 Wye River Memorandum, in which Netanyahu reluctantly agreed to carry out a further Israeli withdrawal from 13 percent of the West Bank. In reaction, Shamir declared, "With Netanyahu as Prime Minister I don't sleep well at night .... There is no Likud today. No ideology. Almost nothing is left."[39]

Explaining Ideological Change

Why did many members of the Likud switch over time from opposition to partition to support for it? A number of reasons can be given to explain the gradual abandonment of the ideological ideal of *Eretz Yisrael* by many people inside the Likud. First, there were domestic political considerations, like those that led the Likud from the mid-1950s to abandon the claim to the East bank of the Jordan. As a result of the *intifada,* the majority of the Israeli public no longer favored a continuation of the status quo. Instead, they came to favor a move toward separation from the Palestinians. Even among Likud supporters, the value of *Eretz Yisrael* waned, with around 40 percent supporting either a complete settlement freeze or only limited settlement activities.[40] Thus, Likud leaders gradually recognized that in order to remain credible and attractive to mainstream Israeli voters, the Party had to shift its stance.[41] International considerations also played a role. The *intifada* severely tarnished Israel's international image. The beginning of a U.S. dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organization in December 1988 seriously strained Israel's relationship with its patron. To address these issues, it made sense for the Likud to adopt more-moderate positions. The onset of the Oslo peace process after 1993 further added to the international and American pressure the Likud faced to moderate its policies once in government.

In addition to these international and domestic political pressures, the Likud's ideological shift was the outcome of a profound ideological dilemma experienced by moderate Revisionists as a result of the *intifada.* For moderate Revisionists, autonomy for the Palestinians was a way of synthesizing their ideological commitment to Jewish sovereignty over *Eretz Yisrael*, a Jewish state, and democracy. In contrast, for radical Revisionists, autonomy was just a tactical concession. This was because they placed far greater emphasis on nationalism, with liberal democracy either a secondary value or simply

[39] Nadav Shragai, "Hardliners plan coup," *Ha'aretz*, 14 October 1998.
[40] Giora Goldberg, Gad Barzilai, and Efraim Inbar, *The Impact of Intercommunal Conflict: The Intifada and Israeli Public Opinion* (Jerusalem: Leonard Davis Institute, 1991), 46–49. See also Asher Arian, *Security Threatened* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
[41] Jonathan Rynhold, interview with Dr. Yoel Yeshurun, an influential member of the Likud Central Committee, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, 28 February 2006.

not a value at all.[42] In the mid-1980s, for instance, Ehud Olmert and Dan Meridor, two young moderate Likud politicians with Revisionist backgrounds, promoted the idea of unilaterally implementing autonomy to an unenthusiastic Shamir.[43]

The *intifada* changed the moderates' view of autonomy. It demonstrated to them that Israel would not be able to rule over the Palestinians in the territories indefinitely, and that trying to do so would not only severely damage Israel's international legitimacy, but would also undermine its democratic character. Yet they no longer believed that autonomy was a viable long-term solution. Hence, the value of Jewish sovereignty over *Eretz Yisrael* came into conflict with the value the moderates attached to Israel's status as a Jewish and democratic state. The *intifada* cast Revisionist territorial maximalism in clear opposition to the requirement to sustain the compatibility of Zionism and democracy. This was understood clearly by Moshe Arens, who served as both Foreign and Defense Minister. As he put it: "Just as after the Holocaust certain territorial claims had to be abandoned, so now Israel must maintain a reasonable correlation between concrete objectives and resources. As a nation dedicated to Western values and ideals, we must live by them ... in our dealings with the Palestinian population. Autonomy will provide limited participation ... but can serve as no more than a transition point to full participation which must be granted them sooner or later."[44] Consequently, leading Likud moderates Dan Meridor, Ehud Olmert, Ronny Milo, Benjamin Netanyahu, and Moshe Arens began to privately support some form of partition, although this did not as yet find expression in the formal positions of the Likud.[45]

This shift in thinking represented an ideological change—the abandonment of the goal of maintaining Israeli control over all the historically Jewish territory captured in 1967. The fact that this ideological change was expressed by only a relatively small number of people at the time belies its significance. This is very typical of the process of ideological change.[46] What was really significant about it was the fact that this ideological change was being articulated by individuals who (with few exceptions) had very deep roots within the Revisionist movement (as opposed to other members of the Likud without Revisionist backgrounds). These individuals took Revisionist ideology

[42] On the differences between radical and moderate Revisionists, see Jonathan Rynhold, "Reconceptualizing Israeli Approaches to 'Land for Peace' since 1967," *Israel Studies* 6 (Summer 2001): 33–54; Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement.*

[43] Jonathan Rynhold, interviews with Meridor and Olmert, Jerusalem, December 1995.

[44] Arens, *Broken Covenant*, 278.

[45] Jonathan Rynhold, interviews with Dan Meridor, Moshe Arens, Ehud Olmert, December 1995, and Netanyahu advisor, Shai Bazak, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, 2001; Arens, *Broken Covenant*, 21, 200, 209–210, 268, 294.

[46] Martin Seliger, *Ideology and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 1976), 237–267.

seriously, and they found themselves having to choose between conflicting values within the moderate version of Revisionism (*Eretz Yisrael* versus a democratic Jewish state).

The moderates did not completely abandon Revisionist ideology. Rather, their ideological change was conservative in nature, in that it was designed to protect already-existing core values in response to a practical problem, rather than instituting a radical change of ideology based on the adoption of an alternative set of values.[47] The conservative nature of this ideological change meant that the Likud moderates' acceptance of partition did not extend to a wholesale embrace of the "dovish" positions of the Israeli left. Rather, they retained a "hawkish" approach, marked by a deep skepticism about the possibility of a negotiated solution to the conflict with the Palestinians, a firm belief in the utility of military force in managing the conflict, and a desire to limit the size of a future Palestinian state. Despite their acceptance of territorial compromise, the moderates still sought to maintain control of some land in the territories for both strategic and nationalistic reasons. In the absence of a deep acceptance of Israel by the Arab world, which they thought could come about only after a long time, through a combination of Israeli power and Arab democratization, they viewed any Arab–Israeli agreement primarily through the prism of the balance of power and not in terms of a historic reconciliation. Thus, moderates argued that a long-term interim arrangement with the Palestinians was both more desirable and more feasible than a final contractual peace.[48]

In accordance with this outlook, moderates sought to implement partition through an interim arrangement, including at least an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza.[49] In this vein, as Prime Minister, Netanyahu became the first Likud leader to publicly present a partition plan. Based on the plan of former Labor politician Yigal Allon, Netanyahu's "Allon Plus" plan indicated that Netanyahu was prepared to withdraw from Gaza and roughly half of the West Bank, a move which would effectively mean the abandonment of some Jewish settlements.[50] Indeed, on presenting the plan, Netanyahu referred to the retention by Israel of settlement blocs away from dense concentrations of Palestinian population, rather than all settlements remaining under Israeli

[47] Noel O' Sullivan, *Conservatism* (London: J.M. Dent, 1976), 12. On Conservatism and its relationship to change, see also Jonathan Mendilow, "What is Conservatism: Some Signposts in the Wilderness," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 1 (February 1996): 221–238; Andrew Vincent, *Modern Political Ideologies* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995), 55–83.

[48] Jonathan Rynhold, interviews with Olmert and Meridor, Jerusalem, December 2005; Arens, *Broken Covenant*, 200; Ze'ev Schiff, "Netanyahu secretly plans Palestinian entity," *Ha'aretz*, 25 November 1997.

[49] Rynhold, "Reconceptualizing Israeli Approaches"; Shavit, *Jabotinsky and the Revisionist Movement*; Shoval, "Security Zones in Judea, Samaria and Gaza."

[50] Uzi Benziman, "Time to come clean," *Ha'aretz*, 30 March 1997; Nadav Shragai, "Shahak: Settlements will be evacuated," *Ha'aretz*, 4 November 1998.

control.[51] Most of the settlement activity that took place during Netanyahu's premiership was in these blocs. In addition, Netanyahu talked about accepting a demilitarized Palestinian state, albeit one with limited sovereignty.[52]

THE CAUSES OF THE 2005 UNILATERAL DISENGAGEMENT

Ideological Change

The shift within the Likud and its Revisionist ideology played a major role in bringing about Israel's disengagement from Gaza. The abandonment of the Revisionist commitment to the value of maintaining Jewish control over *Eretz Yisrael* meant that other core values, notably maintaining Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state, along with security concerns, now shaped the policy preferences of many leading members of the Likud. Having given up trying to permanently secure Israel's possession of the West Bank and Gaza, they now focused on securing Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state. While this ideological shift did not make unilateral disengagement inevitable, it certainly made it highly probable, because it represented a strategic move toward addressing the threat to Israel's Jewish and democratic character posed by indefinitely continuing the occupation. This threat was made real and pressing by demographic trends.

According to well-publicized demographic predictions, by 2010 there will be more Palestinians than Jews in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza combined.[53] Hence, to many, it seemed that the only feasible way to ensure a long-term Jewish majority in Israel was by withdrawing from parts of the West Bank and all of Gaza. There were approximately 1,375,000 Palestinians and only 8,000 Jewish settlers in Gaza.[54] Withdrawing from Gaza would, therefore, automatically ameliorate Israel's demographic situation. In this vein, Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Sharon's confidante and one of the architects of the disengagement plan,[55] plainly stated: "Above all hovers the cloud of demographics."[56]

Demography, by itself, has no clear policy implications. Rather, the demographic trend facing Israel was important because it seriously called into

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[51] David Makovsky, "Netanyahu presents Allon-Plus Plan," *Ha'aretz*, 5 June 1997.

[52] David Makovsky, "We may accept a limited Palestinian state," *The Jerusalem Post,* 20 December 1996; Yoel Marcus, "And you shall beat your swords," *Ha'aretz*, 10 June 1997; Ze'ev Schiff, "Netanyahu's map," *Ha'aretz*, 19 August 1997; Akiva Eldar, "Arens not opposed to PA sovereignty," *Ha'aretz*, 12 May 1999.

[53] Lilly Galili, "Jewish demographic state," *Ha'aretz*, 30 June 2002.

[54] *CIA Fact Book 2005*, accessed at www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/, 10 February 2005.

[55] Olmert was deeply involved in the formulation of the disengagement initiative in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO); Jonathan Rynhold, interview with high-ranking official in the PMO, Jerusalem, 2 March 2006.

[56] "Demographics Drive Likud's Shifting Agenda," *The Forward*, 26 December 2003.

question Israel's ability to remain a Jewish and democratic state. This is what concerned advocates of disengagement. With a majority of non-Jews under its control, Israel could be Jewish *or* democratic, but not both. Without a withdrawal from densely populated Palestinian areas, Israel was in danger of one day being turned into a single, binational state if the Palestinian majority chose to demand the right to vote in Israel rather than to have their own state (such a democratic demand would no doubt receive widespread support from the international community). Hence, what Olmert sought to avoid was a situation in which Israel became either a binational state or an "apartheid" state.[57] Likud MK Yuval Steinitz put it bluntly: "Imagine a situation in which the Palestinians demand a bi-national state .... Once Gaza is out of the equation they cannot claim one state without Gaza. This is why I favor the [disengagement] plan."[58]

A prominent Likud supporter of disengagement, Dan Meridor, clearly articulated the choice confronting Likud members: "An essential condition to our control of the territories was that we ensure a Jewish majority .... But demographic trends mean that we will either be a Jewish state or a democracy. We can no longer be both. The question that each Likudnik has to deal with is what is our ultimate goal? ... The two dreams—nationalism and democracy— cannot be dreamt together .... People hate to make a decision and cut, but the time has come to cut."[59] Zippi Livni, who served as the Likud Justice Minister in Sharon's government, expressed similar reasoning in support of Israeli territorial withdrawals: "I also believe, like my parents [both of whom were well-known Revisionists and friends of Begin], in the right of the Jewish people to the entire Land of Israel. But I was raised on other values, the need to preserve Israel as a homeland for the Jewish people, and our democratic values. It's not any less important that Israel be a democracy, and there must be a Jewish majority. So choosing between my dreams, and my need to live in a democracy, I prefer to give up some of the land and to live in a sovereign, Jewish, democratic state."[60] These statements explicitly convey the conflict of values that forced many long-time supporters of *Eretz Yisrael* to abandon this ideological goal. As demographic trends brought Revisionist values into conflict, they chose a democratic Jewish state over maintaining the integrity of *Eretz Yisrael*.

Prime Minister Sharon himself repeatedly referred to the demographic logic of disengagement. Although in the past Sharon had been dismissive of the demographic argument in support of a withdrawal from the territories, in the months preceding the announcement of the disengagement plan, he consulted

[57] Nahum Barnea, "Interview with Ehud Olmert," *Yediot Achronot*, 5 December 2003 [Hebrew].
[58] *Ma'ariv*, 12 November 2004 [Hebrew].
[59] International Crisis Group, "Disengagement and After," *Middle East Report* 36 (2005): 8.
[60] Steven Erlanger, "Israel's Top Envoy Evokes Meir," *The New York Times*, 5 February 2006.

a well-known demographic expert.[61] Subsequently, he publicly presented this as a major justification for his unilateral disengagement plan. As he put it: "Disengagement recognizes the demographic reality on the ground specifically, bravely and honestly."[62] In a similar vein, after the cabinet's final approval of the plan on 20 February 2005, Sharon declared that disengagement "ensures the future of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state."[63] Sharon was acknowledging and giving voice to the ideological change that had taken place within the Likud, according to which the value of *Eretz Yisrael* was subordinated to the more important value of maintaining Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, with a large Jewish majority.

The necessity of maintaining a large Jewish majority in order to safeguard Israel's long-term future as a Jewish and democratic state led many influential Likud members to support the disengagement plan, even those who were skeptical that the Palestinians would actually outnumber Jews in the next 20 years.[64] Of course, this does not mean that this was the only reason Likud members supported the disengagement plan. For some, support for disengagement was dictated primarily by narrow political considerations. They believed that disengagement was popular with the Israeli public and thus the chances of the Likud getting reelected were better if the plan was implemented. In addition, many felt that their personal chances of receiving patronage would be enhanced by supporting Prime Minister Sharon. In any case, they were not seriously committed to the value of *Eretz Yisrael*.[65]

Sharon's Acceptance of Partition

Israel's disengagement from Gaza is often presented as simply the work of one man, Ariel Sharon. It is certainly true that Sharon's tenacious leadership, his "bulldozer" style, and his personal popularity were important to the successful *implementation* of the plan. Nonetheless, Sharon's *decision to adopt* the plan cannot be isolated from wider ideological currents within the Likud. Although Sharon's roots were in Labor Zionism, rather than Revisionism, he shared the latter's commitment to the value of maintaining Jewish control over *Eretz Yisrael* (as did some other Labor Zionists). Describing his role in the formation of the Likud in the early 1970s, for instance, Sharon wrote that he agreed with

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[61] Jonathan Rynhold, interview with high-ranking official in the PMO, Jerusalem, 2 March 2006.

[62] Zaki Shalom, "Underlying the Disengagement Plan," accessed at http://www.tau.ac.il/jcss/sa/v8n2p3Shalom.html, 2 September 2005.

[63] Greg Myre, "Cabinet Ratifies Gaza Pullout," *The New York Times*, 21 February 2005.

[64] Jonathan Rynhold, interview with Aharon Sagir, Likud Central Committee member and former head of the Jerusalem branch of Likud, Jerusalem, 6 March 2006.

[65] Assessment expressed in interviews with Jonathan Rynhold by Aharon Sagir, Jerusalem 6 March 2006; Dr. Yoel Yeshurun, Bar-Ilan University, Israel 28 February; and Danny Danon, head of World Beitar and Likud candidate in the 2006 election, Jerusalem, 20 March 2006.

"the substance of much of what he [Begin] was saying ... his attitude towards the Land of Israel, Jewish rights."[66] Sharon also expressed "deep identification with" and "wholehearted support for" the settler movement, *Gush Emunim* ("Bloc of the Faithful"), and he actively supported massive Jewish settlement in the territories for both "national and security reasons."[67] He envisaged limiting Palestinian autonomy to non-contiguous cantons in less than half of the West Bank.[68] Indeed, part of the purpose of the 1982 Lebanon War, orchestrated by Sharon (Begin's Defense Minister at the time), was to weaken the Palestinian national movement such that it would be forced to reconcile itself to this grand design.[69]

Like others in the Likud, from the late 1980s onwards, Sharon began to accept the idea of partition. The first inkling of this change came in July 1988, when following the *intifada* and King Hussein's renunciation of Jordan's claim to the West Bank, Sharon advocated Israel unilaterally setting a border in the West Bank by annexing part of the territory.[70] This implied that Sharon expected a future partition of the West Bank, with Israel keeping large areas of it (those containing Israelis in the settlements and security areas).[71] Sharon's approach was apparent again in 1998, when his appointment as Foreign Minister was crucial to Netanyahu's ability to gain the backing of his Cabinet and the Likud for the Wye Agreement. Yet, while supporting the Wye Agreement, Sharon also urged the settlers to "run and grab the hills" before it was too late.[72]

On becoming Prime Minister in March 2001, Sharon began to signal more clearly his intentions for the territories. He publicly accepted the eventual creation of a Palestinian state. He also changed the language he used with regard to the West Bank and Gaza. Instead of referring to "liberated territories," Sharon told Likud MKs in 2002: "I think the idea that it is possible to continue keeping 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation—yes it is occupation, you might not like the word, but what is happening is occupation—is bad for Israel.... Controlling 3.5 million Palestinians cannot go on forever."[73] But Sharon did not believe that a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict was possible. Instead, he advocated conflict management by means of a long-term interim agreement involving "painful

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[66] Ariel Sharon with David Chanoff, *Warrior: An Autobiography of Ariel Sharon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 279–280.

[67] Ibid., 362, 367–368. The house Sharon bought in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem is a further indication of his commitment to settlement for national reasons.

[68] Ibid., 259.

[69] Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (London: Unwin, 1985), 43, 260, 267–268.

[70] Benny Morris, "US rebukes Israelis for shelving debate," *The Guardian*, 8 August 1988.

[71] Ariel Sharon, "In Plain Hebrew," *Yediot Achronot*, Weekend Supplement, 10 May 1996 [Hebrew].

[72] Margot Dudkevitch, "Sharon tells settlers to grab hills," *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 November 1998.

[73] Gideon Alon, "Irate Likud MKs put PM on the defensive," *Ha'aretz*, 27 May 2003; Caroline Glick, "Sharon: there is no military solution," *The Jerusalem Post*, 27 September 2002.

compromises."[74] While many were skeptical that "painful compromises" meant the evacuation of settlements, a close associate of Sharon, Likud MK Reuven Rivlin, believed that Sharon had exactly this in mind. Six months before Sharon announced his disengagement plan, Rivlin claimed that during talks with then-Prime Minister Ehud Barak in October 2000 about the possibility of forming a national unity government, Sharon proposed an interim agreement that would involve the evacuation of numerous settlements in the West Bank and Gaza, as well as the establishment of a territorially contiguous Palestinian state.[75]

The Implications of a Diplomatic Deadlock

The idea of partition was, therefore, already well established within the Likud and in Sharon's own thinking when he came to power in 2001. But while he accepted partition in theory, in practice, Sharon ruled out dismantling any settlement during his first term as Prime Minister. Publicly, he continued to argue that even the isolated settlement of Netzarim in Gaza was vital to Israeli security. Furthermore, he consistently opposed the idea of unilateral disengagement when proposed not only by the Labor Party, but also by Dan Meridor and his own National Security Adviser, Uzi Dayan. Instead, Sharon officially endorsed the Road Map (albeit with 14 reservations) sponsored by the "Quartet" (the U.S., the European Union, Russia, and the UN), and concentrated on maintaining U.S. support for his hard-line policies toward the Palestinians.[76] Sharon considered the Road Map an important diplomatic victory for Israel. Instead of prioritizing peace negotiations over establishing security, it predicated a Palestinian state and permanent-status negotiations on the prior establishment of security and an interim agreement.[77]

It was not until the Road Map appeared to reach a dead end and the diplomatic situation became deadlocked that Sharon adopted the policy of disengagement.[78] In the summer of 2003, a cease-fire came into effect, and the newly appointed Palestinian Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) was prepared to work with the United States and Israel on the basis of the Road Map. In September, however, Abbas resigned in the wake of renewed Palestinian terror attacks, citing Yasser Arafat's refusal to grant him sufficient powers as the main reason for his resignation.[79] Abbas was replaced by Ahmed

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[74] Herb Keinon, "Sharon: solution will come with time," *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 September 2001.

[75] Ari Shavit, "Courting disaster" (interview with R. Rivlin), *Ha'aretz Magazine*, 5 June 2003.

[76] Herb Keinon, "Road map approval paves way for summit," *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 May 2003.

[77] Jonathan Rynhold, interview with a senior official in the Prime Minister's Office, 2 March 2006.

[78] Ibid; Aluf Benn, "PM, IDF clash over unilateral moves," *Ha'aretz*, 30 November 2003.

[79] Michael Dobbs, "Palestinians Urged to Break Up Terrorist Groups," *The Washington Post*, 21 August 2003; Khaled Abu Toameh, "Abbas: I will never take job again," *The Jerusalem Post*, 28 March 2004.

Qurei (Abu Ala). It quickly became apparent inside the PMO that Qurei was not interested in fulfilling the first part of the Road Map, namely Palestinian security reforms. Instead, he wanted to proceed straight to permanent-status negotiations, in contravention of the sequential stages set out in the Road Map. Sharon concluded that there was no Palestinian partner willing and able to enforce an interim agreement within the framework of the Road Map. With the Road Map stalled, Sharon feared that a diplomatic vacuum would develop that would lead to new international proposals unfavorable to Israel (possibly along the lines of the Geneva Accords, a draft permanent-status peace agreement promoted by leading figures on the Israeli left and leading Palestinians). Such proposals were unlikely to adhere to the "security first" approach of the Road Map. Thus, at this point, Sharon initiated discussions regarding disengagement inside the PMO.[80] As he later explained: "Only an Israeli initiative will keep us from being dragged into dangerous initiatives like the Geneva and Saudi initiatives."[81] Without some sort of Israeli initiative to break the diplomatic deadlock, Sharon was worried that even the United States would seek to impose a peace plan on Israel and put it under great pressure.[82]

Continuing with the status quo posed not only grave diplomatic risks for Israel but also the risk of increasing international isolation and opprobrium. This concern was heightened by the success of the Palestinians in garnering international opposition to the West Bank separation barrier. The UN General Assembly had condemned the barrier and referred the issue of its route to the International Court of Justice in October 2003 (the Court later ruled that the barrier was illegal).[83] Moreover, the widespread international efforts to delegitimize Israel as a racist, apartheid state threatened an erosion of support for Israel even in the United States and among diaspora Jewry.[84]

The international political situation was, therefore, an important factor in determining the timing of the disengagement initiative. Israel needed to do something in order to maintain good relations with the United States, stave off the specter of an internationally imposed peace agreement, and avoid further international criticism. Furthermore, U.S. involvement played a role in determining the extent of the disengagement. Withdrawal from the four small West Bank settlements was an American suggestion that Sharon agreed to in return for U.S. support.[85] This support for the disengagement plan helped the

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[80] Jonathan Rynhold, interview with a senior official in the PMO, 2 March 2006.

[81] Quoted in James Bennet, "Sharon's Wars," *The New York Times Magazine*, 15 August 2004.

[82] "Excerpts of Sharon's speech in Ma'aleh Adumim," *Ha'aretz*, 13 April 2004.

[83] Tovah Lazaroff, "Worldwide anti-fence campaign kicks off," *The Jerusalem Post*, 10 November 2003; Aluf Benn, "UN: Israel must reverse fence construction," *Ha'aretz*, 22 October 2003; Melissa Radler, "UN refers fence to The Hague," *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 December 2003.

[84] Nahum Barnea, "Interview with Ehud Olmert," *Yediot Achronot*, 5 December 2003 [Hebrew].

[85] Nicholas Kralev, "White House urged broader withdrawal," *The Washington Times*, 13 August 2004.

Sharon government to solidify the Israeli public's support for the plan, which, in turn, assisted Sharon in overcoming right-wing opposition to it.

It is important to point out, however, that the disengagement plan was not in itself a result of overwhelming international pressure. There was no U.S. demand for an Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. In fact, the U.S. was initially very skeptical of the disengagement plan.[86] The administration of George W. Bush and the international community remained committed to the Road Map. The international community's main demand of Sharon would have been the dismantling of illegal settler outposts. Sharon had already formally agreed to do this. If Sharon's main objective was only to deflect international pressure, he could have done so by starting peace talks with Syria, as Moshe Ya'alon, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff (2002–2005) suggested. In fact, in November 2003, the United States had actually proposed to Sharon that Israel resume talks with Syria (the Syrian government had indicated a willingness for such talks)—a proposal that Sharon flatly rejected.[87] Hence, international pressure did not determine Sharon's disengagement policy. Other policies could have been adopted to assuage diplomatic pressures. But since Sharon and much of the Likud had already accepted the need for a territorial withdrawal, the international situation reinforced this preference and played a crucial role in determining the timing, extent, and unilateral nature of the actual withdrawal.

Terrorism

What role, if any, did Palestinian terrorism play in bringing about the disengagement? Most Palestinians see the disengagement as an Israeli retreat in the face of Palestinian violence. For them, it represents a major victory for the Palestinian armed struggle that resumed following the collapse of the Oslo peace process in 2000.[88] In fact, however, Palestinian terrorist attacks had already significantly declined prior to Sharon's announcement of his disengagement plan. Palestinian violence and Israeli fatalities peaked in early 2002. Consequently, in the spring and summer of 2002, Israel carried out two large-scale military operations in the West Bank (Operations "Defensive Shield" and "Determined Path"). In the following year, the number of terrorist attacks perpetrated declined by 30 percent, and the number of Israeli fatalities fell by 50 percent. In 2004, the number of attacks fell by an additional 50 percent and casualties by 30 percent. In 2005, Israeli casualties fell by a further 60 percent.[89]

[86] Steven Weisman, "US May Support Israeli Approach on Leaving Gaza," *The New York Times*, 13 February 2004; Ben Kaspit, "On the Verge of a Package Deal," *Ma'ariv*, 1 March 2004 [Hebrew].

[87] Aluf Benn, "Sharon rejected US proposal for Syria talks," *Ha'aretz*, 14 September 2004.

[88] "Palestinians believe armed struggle led to pullout," *Associated Press*, 12 September 2005.

[89] "2003 Terrorism Review," Israel Foreign Ministry, 8 January 2004, accessed at www.israel-mfa. gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2004/1/2003+Terrorism+Review.htm, 2 March 2006; "2004 Terrorism Data," Israel Security Agency, 5 January 2005, accessed at http://london.mfa.gov.il/mfm/

Far from underlining the futility of a military response to terrorism, the IDF's forceful actions in the West Bank and Gaza were widely credited with dramatically decreasing the threat of terrorism. Israel, in short, appeared to be winning its war on Palestinian terror. In any case, there was no real expectation that disengagement would lessen terrorism. Olmert publicly stated that disengagement "is not an answer to terror" and that "terror will continue" afterwards.[90] Israel's domestic intelligence service also believed that following the disengagement, Palestinian terrorist organizations would continue to stage attacks against Israeli civilians and that they would simply try to move their operations from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank.[91] To a certain extent, Palestinian terrorism was actually a disincentive for a unilateral disengagement because of the widespread concern—expressed by, among others, IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon[92]—that it would be perceived (as it in fact was) as a reward for terrorism and would serve as a political boost for Hamas (as it in fact did).

Nevertheless, the prospective economic cost of countering endemic terrorism did provide a significant incentive for disengagement. During 2003, the defense establishment told Sharon that the ongoing cost of militarily occupying Palestinian cities was becoming a major drain on the IDF's budget and manpower. The strain on these resources was only going to increase because of the construction of the West Bank barrier. Although there was no prospect of a financial crisis in the short term (in fact, Israel's economy was improving), the PMO was concerned about the long-term implications for Israel of these mounting costs.[93] Unilateral disengagement made sense from this perspective as a means to reduce these costs. Furthermore, Gaza was the most obvious candidate for withdrawal, since Israel was expending a hugely disproportionate amount of resources to defend its settlements. For example, an infantry company, an armored platoon, and an engineering force were assigned to defend a settlement of 26 families in the Gaza Strip.[94]

Domestic Considerations

Domestic considerations also played a role in bringing about the disengagement. First, disengagement was broadly popular with Israelis. By 2003, with the

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Data/67539.doc, 20 March 2005; "2005 Terrorism Review," Prime Minister's Office, 2 January 2006, accessed at www.israel-mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-Obstacle+to+Peace/Terrorism+and+Islamic+Fundamentalism-/2005+Terrorism+Review.htm, 15 February 2006.

[90] "Min. Olmert: Withdrawal Not Answer to Terror," 29 March 2004, *Independent Media Review & Analysis*, accessed at www.imra.org.il/story.php3?id=28466, 30 March 2004.

[91] Gideon Alon, "Shin Bet: Hamas, jihad have no cause to stop attacks," *Ha'aretz*, 27 July 2005.

[92] Yaakov Katz, "Ya'alon: Israel strengthened Hamas," *The Jerusalem Post*, 21 February 2006.

[93] Jonathan Rynhold, interview with a senior official in the PMO, Jerusalem, 2 March 2006. On the implications of the barrier for disengagement, see Jonathan Rynhold, "Israel's Fence: Can Separation Make Better Neighbours?" *Survival* 46 (Spring 2004): 55–76.

[94] The Movement for Unilateral Disengagement, accessed at www.hipardut.org.il/Index_e.asp, 3 May 2004.

prospects of a return to Israeli–Palestinian negotiations fading, Sharon's personal popularity began to fall significantly for the first time. Sharon's disengagement plan helped to reverse this situation. The plan consistently obtained the support of 55–63 percent of the Israeli public. Withdrawing from Gaza and the most-outlying settlements in the West Bank also made sense politically, because it was widely believed that such settlements were a liability and would eventually be abandoned.[95]

Second, disengagement could solidify a domestic political consensus, which many in the higher echelons of the IDF believed to be crucial to sustaining national morale in a situation of endemic low-intensity conflict.[96] Sharon himself had come to recognize the importance of this by the time he became Prime Minister.[97] He became concerned that members of elite army units were questioning the conduct and aims of the conflict. Some even refused to serve in the territories.[98] Thus, when he first publicly announced his disengagement policy on 18 December 2003, he explicitly linked it to the idea of shoring up the national consensus.[99] The core of the national consensus was a desire to maintain Israel's identity as a Jewish (in demographic terms) and democratic state.[100] By withdrawing from Gaza and thus separating from over one million Palestinians, disengagement strengthened this consensus. As Sharon explained, "Disengagement from Gaza unites the people, distinguishing between goals which deserve to be fought for, since they are truly in our souls—such as Jerusalem and maintaining Israel's character as a Jewish state—from goals which it is clear to all of us will not be realized, and which most of the public is not ready, justifiably, to sacrifice so much for."[101]

Despite these domestic benefits of the disengagement plan, it also entailed considerable political risks that could have severely undermined Israel's domestic stability. The plan alienated a significant minority of Israelis, religious Zionists, the overwhelming majority of whom opposed disengagement, primarily for ideological reasons. Thus, some religious settler leaders and rabbis called for civil disobedience and even the use of force to resist the evacuation of settlements.[102] This led Justice Minister Yosef Lapid and Sharon himself to express concern about a possible civil war;[103] indeed, 40 percent of

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[95] "Peace Index," October 2000, March 2001, July 2002, December 2003, Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace, accessed at http://spirit.tau.ac.il/socant/peace, 3 October 2004.

[96] Stuart Cohen, "Changing Societal-Military Relations in Israel: Operational Implications," *Contemporary Security Policy* 21 (December 2000): 116–138.

[97] Keinon, "Sharon: solution will come with time."

[98] Ze'ev Schiff, "The Sharon heritage," *Ha'aretz*, 2 February 2006.

[99] Accessed at http://www.bitterlemons.org/docs/sharon1.html, 3 May 2004.

[100] Arian, *Security Threatened*, 23; "Peace Index," August 2003.

[101] Herb Keinon, "Sharon: this is the year for real peace," *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 December 2004.

[102] Yaakov Katz, "Sharon: keep IDF out of Gaza debate," *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 September 2004.

[103] "Lapid cautions right against incitement," *The Jerusalem Post*, 9 September 2004; Tamar Lazaroff, "Settler rabbis say Dichter's report baseless," *The Jerusalem Post*, 6 July 2004.

Israeli Jews thought that the chances of this occurring were high or moderately high.[104] Thus, if the primary goal of disengagement was domestic political gains, it was a big political gamble. For this reason, while domestic political considerations contributed to the adoption of the disengagement plan, these considerations were not sufficient to bring the plan about on their own. A prerequisite for the risky domestic political calculation made by Sharon was a prior acceptance of partition as something that had to happen sooner or later. Sharon and much of the Likud first had to cross the ideological Rubicon and accept partition in order for them to be willing to reap whatever domestic political benefits disengagement offered. After all, previous Likud leaders had not proposed a withdrawal from Gaza, despite its probable popular appeal. In 1992, for instance, the Likud would certainly have benefited in the election of that year by declaring its willingness to withdraw from Gaza. However, when the idea was proposed by Likud moderates, Prime Minister Shamir rejected it for ideological reasons.[105]

IDEOLOGICAL CHANGE AND OPPOSITION TO DISENGAGEMENT IN THE LIKUD

It is worth considering an objection that might be raised against the argument that ideological change was a precondition for the Sharon government's adoption of disengagement, namely, that the prolonged and bitter struggle Sharon had to wage against opponents of disengagement within the Likud indicates that ideological change did not really take place, or if it did, that it concerned only a few individuals.

It is incontrovertible that opposition to disengagement inside the Likud caused Sharon significant problems. Indeed, without the support of the Labor Party, the plan could not have been implemented; such was the depth of divisions on the issue within the Likud. Opponents of disengagement defeated Sharon in a referendum of Likud members on his disengagement plan in April 2004. Thirteen "rebel" Likud MKs consistently voted against Sharon's government, even causing Sharon to lose a vote on the traditional "State of the Nation" speech in the Knesset in October 2004. Much of the powerful Likud Central Committee (made up of 3,500 members) was also unsympathetic to the plan.[106] They promoted the idea of a national referendum, despite Sharon's opposition to it. Other leading Likud figures, such as Finance Minister Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, and Education Minister Limor Livnat, only reluctantly accepted disengagement.[107] Netanyahu eventually resigned because of his opposition to the plan, just prior to its implementation.

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[104] "Peace Index," September 2004.

[105] Arens, *Broken Covenant*, 21, 209, 294.

[106] See survey of 401 members of the Likud Central Committee, 21 March 2005, accessed at www.likudnik.co.il/Front/NewsNet/reports.asp?reportId=49158, 20 April 2005.

[107] Jonathan Rynhold, interview with a senior official in the Foreign Minister's Office, Jerusalem, 9 February 2006; "Gaza pullout plan wins resounding majority," *Ha'aretz*, 27 October 2004.

Most of this Likud opposition to disengagement, however, was non-ideological. Only a minority of disengagement opponents in the Likud grounded their position primarily in ideology. Among longtime Likud activists, ideological opposition was mainly to be found among the dwindling older generation of "founders" or among the members of the Revisionist youth movement, Beitar.[108] The most vociferous ideological opposition to the plan within the Likud came from the "Jewish Leadership" faction, which controlled 130 Central Committee members. But this group had only recently joined the Likud, and its ideology was grounded in an extreme version of religious Zionism that had nothing to do with Revisionism.[109]

The majority of the plan's opponents within the Likud did not question its ideological legitimacy. The aspect of the plan they took issue with was not its relinquishing of territory, but rather its unilateral nature. They argued that it would be viewed as a victory for terror that would damage Israeli deterrence and assist Hamas, or that Israel should at least get something in exchange for surrendering territory.[110] Netanyahu emphasized these points upon his resignation when he remarked, "I too share the desire to exit Gaza."[111] Of the thirteen Likud rebels, only one, Uzi Landau, was truly opposed for ideological reasons.[112] The others (such as Michael Ratzon, Natan Sharansky, and Gilad Erdan[113]) were motivated by their opposition to the plan's unilateralism, by personal political calculations,[114] or even personal political animus toward Sharon (this was allegedly true of David Levy and Naomi Blumenthal, both of whom had previously adopted moderate positions[115]). As for the Likud referendum on the disengagement plan, it is important to note that the turnout was only 51 percent, and that in numerous polls taken two weeks prior to the vote, a majority of Likud members actually favored the plan.[116] This suggests that the idea of territorial withdrawal was considered by most Likud members to be both legitimate and conceivable.

The overwhelming majority of demonstrators and activists against the disengagement came from a religious-Zionist background and not from within

[108] Jonathan Rynhold, interview with Danny Danon, Jerusalem, 20 March 2006. The Likud has an ambivalent relationship with Beitar. For years it diverted funds to the less ideological Likud Youth.

[109] Nadav Shragai, "Anti-pullout forces sit back," *Ha'aretz*, 8 December 2004.

[110] For example, Moshe Arens, "All tactics and no strategy," *Ha'aretz*, 15 March 2005.

[111] Aluf Benn, "High stakes gambler," *Ha'aretz*, 8 August 2005.

[112] Jonathan Rynhold, interview with Dr. Yoel Yeshurun, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, 28 February 2006.

[113] Tova Lazaroff, "Likud buries referendum bill," *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 May 2004. Ratzon even spoke of his willingness for much greater concessions in the context of an agreement with the Palestinians. Akiva Eldar, "A sheep in wolf's clothing and a wolf in sheep's clothing," *Ha'aretz*, 4 May 2004.

[114] Jonathan Rynhold, interviews with Dr. Yoel Yeshurun, Bar-Ilan University, Israel, 28 February 2006; Danny Danon, Jerusalem, 20 March 2006.

[115] Gideon Alon, "New government squeaks through," *Ha'aretz*, 11 January 2005.

[116] See polls published in *Yediot Achronot* [Hebrew], 15 and 22 April 2005.

the Likud. Their ideological fervor provided the basis for mass political mobilization. In contrast, the ideological shift in the Likud made it much more difficult to mobilize active opposition to disengagement, because most of the plan's opponents in Likud conceded that partition was legitimate and even necessary. Behind the criticism of most Likud members was a tacit acceptance of the inevitability of partition. *How* this should be done was fiercely debated, *whether* this should be done was much less controversial. The very fact that the internal Likud debate was largely conducted in practical, non-ideological terms is indicative of the profound ideological change the Party had already undergone.

CONCLUSION

Ideological change within the Likud was a vital prerequisite to the Sharon government's adoption of disengagement. Over time, and with much rancor along the way, a majority reluctantly accepted the need for partition, which meant abandoning the value of *Eretz Yisrael* as a practical objective. For many key Revisionists, *Eretz Yisrael* was relegated to a secondary value in order to protect the other core value—the Jewish and democratic character of the state. While this ideological change did not make disengagement inevitable, it made it much more probable. External and domestic pressures were important in determining the timing, unilateral nature, and extent of the withdrawal. They also contributed to its successful implementation. But these pressures did not dictate a policy of disengagement. Rather, once partition was already accepted as an objective, disengagement came to be perceived as an especially good way to respond to these pressures.

While it is important to recognize the critical role of ideological change in bringing about Israel's disengagement, the extent of this ideological change should not be misconstrued or exaggerated. Center-right supporters of disengagement did not embrace the "dovish" ideology of the Israeli left. They remain deeply skeptical about the possibility and desirability of resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict through negotiations. Rather than representing the complete abandonment of Revisionism, disengagement represents a conservative change within Revisionist ideology. It was conservative insofar as it was not a radical change based on the adoption of an alternative set of values, but was rather designed to protect existing values in response to a practical problem. Conservative ideological change has traditionally been discussed with regard to a country's domestic politics[117] but has not generally been applied to foreign policy. Yet this concept could prove theoretically useful to scholars of foreign policy by providing a midway category between the kind of radical transformation of values and identities usually emphasized by constructivists and the type of tactical ideational accommodation characteristic of rationalist explanations (like those of realists).

[117] Arens, *Broken Covenant*, 278.

One of the reasons that nearly everyone was taken by surprise by the disengagement plan was that the process of ideological change within the Likud had been largely ignored. Some observers continue to deny the significance of this process by explaining the disengagement as a one-time response by a single individual, Ariel Sharon, to various pressures. Yet, when Sharon left the Likud to form the new centrist party, Kadima ("Forward") following the disengagement, he took more than a third of the Likud MKs with him, including those with strong Revisionist backgrounds such as Zippi Livni and Ehud Olmert, in addition to many Likud activists and local politicians. Why, then, did Sharon decide to leave the Likud in November 2005? If the Likud really had changed ideologically, as this article has argued, then surely Sharon had no need to break from it? Sharon's dramatic decision to leave the Likud and establish Kadima came about as a result of his growing frustration with his opponents in the Likud's Knesset faction and in the Party's powerful Central Committee. Rather than continue to wrangle with his opponents in the Likud as he had done over his disengagement plan, Sharon opted to form a new party around himself, giving him more power and freedom of action. It was, in short, a matter of political expediency for Sharon, because he would no longer have to deal with a divided and fractious Likud Party.[118]

Following Sharon's incapacitating stroke in January 2006, Ehud Olmert became the new leader of Kadima. He advocated another, more-extensive unilateral withdrawal from much of the West Bank by 2010, a plan he called "realignment." Olmert made it abundantly clear that the primary objective of the plan was to preserve Israel's character as a Jewish and democratic state, with a large Jewish majority.[119] While the details of the plan were unclear, Olmert spoke of adjusting the route of the separation barrier (possibly in both directions) so that it would become an internationally recognized border. He indicated that he wanted to retain three settlement blocs, Ariel, Ma'ale Adumim, and Gush Etzion, where the majority of the settlers live, while retaining the Jordan valley as a security border.[120] He also expressed a willingness to withdraw from outlying Palestinian suburbs of Jerusalem.[121] The withdrawal would involve the evacuation of somewhere between 20,000 and 80,000 settlers, leaving between 65 and 90 percent of the West Bank to the Palestinians, a withdrawal at least as extensive as that proposed by the Labor Party in its 2003 election campaign.[122] He appeared to be thinking in terms of a civilian withdrawal, on the model of the four settlements dismantled in the West Bank, rather than

[118] See Jonathan Spyer, "The Likud" in Shmuel Sandler, Jonathan Rynhold, and Manfred Gerstenfeld, eds., *Israel at the Polls 2006*, special issue of *Israel Affairs* 13 (April 2007): 289–304.
[119] Aluf Benn, "A country that's fun to live in: Interview with Ehud Olmert," *Ha'aretz*, 10 March 2006.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Tal Wolvovich, "Olmert: Israel Will Have to Compromise on Jerusalem," *Ma'ariv*, 8 June 2004.
[122] Ben Kaspit, "Mitzna's Road Map," *Ma'ariv*, 20 December 2002 [Hebrew]. Dan Diker, "Sharon's Strategic Legacy for Israel," *Jerusalem Issue Brief* 5, no. 15 (2006).

a complete withdrawal from Gaza (that is, dismantling settlements and evacuating settlers, but not withdrawing the IDF) because of security concerns, heightened since Hamas came to power in the Palestinian territories following its victory in the February 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections.[123]

Although the Likud opposed Olmert's realignment plan in its 2006 election campaign, it brandished a map that demonstrated its willingness to withdraw from about half of the West Bank under certain conditions. Moreover, one of the first things Netanyahu did on becoming Likud's leader again was to remove from the Party's election list the radical leader of the "Jewish Leadership" faction, Moshe Feiglin. Even in the remnant of Likud, the value of *Eretz Yisrael* is no longer as central as it was in the times of Begin and Shamir; nor is this shift on the right confined only to the Likud. Yisrael Beitenu, a predominantly Russian immigrant party headed by Avigdor Lieberman, a former Likud associate of Netanyahu and one-time supporter of territorial maximalism, now endorses partition, including the secession of densely populated Arab areas within pre-1967 Israel, for demographic reasons. Indeed, since the March 2006 election, only the National Union/National Religious Party, with 9 Knesset seats, remains ideologically committed to *Eretz Yisrael*. The bulk of their support comes from the religious-Zionist community.

Without their erstwhile allies on the secular right, the religious right now finds itself outside the new national consensus. This consensus holds that Israel should pull out from most of the West Bank, keeping hold of only the large settlement blocs, while abandoning the smaller and more isolated settlements. Despite this, most Israelis remain highly skeptical of the possibility of reaching a stable peace, even if Israel were to withdraw completely from all occupied territory. Instead, the underlying rationale behind support for partition is twofold: the need to protect Israel's character as a Jewish and democratic state with a large Jewish majority, and the belief that separation from the Palestinians will enhance Israelis' "personal security" against terrorism.[124]

Prime Minister Olmert's realignment plan, however, has now been shelved. The continued firing of Qassam rockets into southern Israel from Gaza following Israel's withdrawal, and Hamas's raid from Gaza into Israel on 29 June 2006 and its seizure of an Israeli soldier, Corporal Gilad Shalit, caused public support for the realignment plan to drop from about 50 percent to, according to one poll, less than 20 percent.[125] The Israeli public now fear that the consequences of the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza—thousands of rockets fired at civilians inside Israel by Palestinian militants—will be replicated in the West Bank, which would put all of Israel's major population centers within the

[123] Gil Hoffman, "Civilian disengagement part of Olmert's plan," *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 March 2006.
[124] For details, see Jonathan Rynhold, "Peace and Security in the 2006 Election" in Sandler, Rynhold, and Gerstenfeld, eds., *Israel at the Polls 2006*.
[125] Poll conducted by Maagar Mohot for *Hatzofe* [Hebrew], 16 July 2006.

missiles' range. Less than a year after Israel left Gaza, Israeli soldiers were back in force in an effort to rescue the kidnapped soldier and stop the rocket fire. However hard the Gaza withdrawal was for Israel, staying might prove to be just as hard. Thus, although Israelis on both the left and right now overwhelmingly want to find an exit from the West Bank, there may be no easy way out.