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# Fear and Conflict Resolution

Theoretical Discussion and a Case Study  
from Israel

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The University of Kansas  
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The Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies (GIIS) is proud to publish Nimrod Rosler's analysis of the role of fear in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We will be making it available to scholars of conflict resolution, academics, politicians, and all those concerned with the progress of peace negotiations in Israel today, and we hope that both its analysis and its recommendations will contribute to the broader conversation about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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## ABSTRACT

Focusing on the possible roles of fear in the context of intractable conflicts, I suggest that fear can serve both as a barrier and as a motivating factor in conflict resolution in general, and in the Israeli-Palestinian case specifically. After elaborating the dominant psycho-political characteristics and implications of fear, the conceptual portion of the article explores the conditions and factors which differentiate between the potential roles of fear in conflict resolution. The empirical section focuses on the use of fear as a barrier and as a motivating factor in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the political discourse in Israel. The research is based on qualitative content analysis of public documents of the principal political programs and on interviews with senior representatives of the programs that were conducted during the formative years of the Disengagement Plan, 2003-2004. Conclusions are drawn regarding emotional appeals, political persuasion, and their social consequences in the Israeli case and in violent and protracted conflict generally.

*Keywords:* Fear, political discourse, conflict resolution, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Disengagement Plan.

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*“I will respond with an answer that is difficult to defend, but at the end of the day is the correct answer: the measure of fear of the Jewish society in Israel. Our measure of fear dictates everything.”*

- Ami Ayalon, then-Head of the Israel Security Agency (Shabak), 2000  
(Benziman 2006, p. 134)

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict touches on fundamental issues regarding Israel’s existence, such as borders and national identity, and therefore triggers a highly emotional discourse. Since Jewish-Israeli society is under constant threat, both real and perceived, the emotion of fear is always present in the public sphere in Israel, as previous research has shown (see e.g., Bar-Tal 2001). But questions that receive less attention in the literature concern how and why this emotion is employed in the actual political discourse in Israel with regard to the conflict. Which political actors use fear in their messages to create arguments for the policies they wish to promote in the context of the conflict? While addressing these questions regarding the Israeli case, the current paper seeks to place them in a general theoretical framework.

## I. Why Fear?

The effects and the roles of fear as a motivating factor in persuasion have been investigated many times in studies of social psychology, and during the last decade interest in their role in politics in general and within societies involved in intractable conflicts in particular has heightened. Most studies mention the emotion of fear as a force which motivates conflict and usually constitutes a psychological barrier which is difficult to overcome (see e.g., Kelman 2007; Rothchild and Lake 1998). However, fear can also motivate a political process intended to resolve conflicts, as a factor leading to a change of attitudes and to persuasion. The central argument of this article is that fear can serve both as a barrier and as a motivating factor in conflict resolution in general and, more specifically, in the Israeli-Palestinian case.

In the first section, the factors and the conditions which distinguish the role of fear in each of these situations will be explored. To this end, I present a theoretical discussion based on interdisciplinary literature regarding the concept of fear and its implications for conflicts. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is a prototype for a difficult and protracted conflict, has served as a case study for research about the negative implications of fear on the possibility of resolving the conflict (see, for example, Maoz and McCauley 2005). The empirical section of the article will focus on the case of Jewish society in Israel, which is characterized by a sense of existential fear – personal and collective – accompanying the routine of daily life and shaping it.

In this framework, I will investigate questions which have not yet been discussed in the literature: Does the use of fear in Israeli political discourse serve as a barrier or as a motivating factor to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? If so – how? The questions are examined using research which was conducted in 2003-2004, a period during which a unique window of opportunity had been opened to create change in the conflict. The research used qualitative content analysis of public documents of the principal political programs at the time and of interviews with senior representatives of the programs that were conducted for the research.

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## ***Fear and its Psychological and Political Implications***

The feeling of fear derives from a subjective evaluation of a situation as being threatening. It results in a sense of aversiveness, uncertainty, and helplessness, which may lead to behaviors such as the avoidance of factors causing the fear, flight from them, or even aggressive behaviors towards these factors (Darwin [1872] 1965; Smith and Ellsworth 1985; Roseman et al. 1996). The basic physical as well as social role of fear is to aid in the survival, and adaptation of the individual and of society to a certain situation (LeDoux 1996; Öhman 2008). From a social standpoint, fear is sometimes constructed by the society in order to maintain conformity of its members to accepted attitudes, values, norms and the society's hierarchy (Scruton 1986).

The adaptive functions of fear turn it into a very important feeling for the individual and for the society in which s/he lives. These functions join the automatic physiological mechanisms responsible for reactions of fear and cause it to have dominating effects on cognitive processes such as perception, information processing, memory, and decision making (Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal 2006; LeDoux 1996; Öhman 2008). These reactions turn the feeling of fear into an efficient tool for social and political effect – for changing attitudes or for influencing the direction of a certain action. Messages arousing medium levels of fear were found to efficiently lead to persuasion (see de Hoog et al. 2007; Janis and Feshbach 1953; Rogers 1975).

Fear affects politics in various ways, and not only as an individual emotional phenomenon. It can also serve as a political and social context or climate, and thus be a collective emotion. Various approaches suggest that collective fear characterizes certain social groups and serves as an important stage in formulating identity and in maintaining collective behavior (Bar-Tal 2001; Corradi et al. 1992; Peterson 2002). The nature of fear and its dominant effects as an individual and collective emotion make it a significant phenomenon in relations between nations in general and societies involved in protracted conflicts in particular.

## ***Fear as a Possible Barrier and as a Motivation to Conflict Resolution***

Political scientists argued that fear is fundamental to the distrust between states, and is the key source to group polarization. When joined by material or structural opportunities, it creates and intensifies violence in ethnic conflicts (McDoom 2012; Waltz 1979). Societies involved in wars and other protracted conflicts develop a collective fear orientation due to the prolonged threat and the lurking dangers to individuals and to the society. In situations of protracted conflict, collective fear fulfills functional roles in the subject societies and enables better coping with the pressure and the tension: it puts the individuals and the collective into a state of permanent readiness for potential dangers and focuses attention on signs and information of possible threat; it increases cohesion and solidarity against the external threat, and motivates individuals to act against the enemy in the name of society and for its defense. At the same time, fear has been found as a factor which maintains conflicts, shapes them, and prevents their resolution, resulting in misperceptions regarding the conflict and the other side (Bar-Tal 2001; Crawford 2000; Horowitz 2000; Huddy et al. 2002; Muller 2000; Ross 2007). Various studies have found that experiences of threat and fear are connected to a rightwing outlook of political conservatism (Jost et al. 2003) and strengthen prejudices, ethnocentrism, and intolerance (Duckitt and Fisher, 2003; Stephan and Stephan 2000).

However, fear may also be assumed to serve as a mechanism which can promote the possibility of resolving conflicts. Janis and Mann (1977) and Crawford (2000) argue that a medium level of fear is likely to lead to a strenuous collection of relevant information and investment of thought in search for appropriate forms of action. Similarly, Marcus and his colleagues (2000) assert that anxiety conveys an opportunity for the political actors to engage in persuasion by triggering among individuals reevaluation

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of their opinions and behaviors and in-depth political information processing, and can even lead to a change in political choices (Brader, 2005).

Fear is even likely to aid in promoting learning processes and in reaching ripeness to enable initiation of negotiation and compromise (Bar-Siman-Tov 2001; Zartman 2000). Fear accompanied by a perception of control over the situation and high ability to change it may actually lead to cognitive openness. This openness, coupled with messages which include moderate levels of fear may mobilize support for a change in policy towards resolving the conflict by focusing on the dangers society is facing and the price it will pay if no agreed-upon solution is found.

In addition to the possibility of advancing change in beliefs in favor of resolution of the conflict in peaceful ways, fear may contribute to a process of de-escalation of the conflict by establishing opposition to a continuation of acts of violence against the other side. Fear arouses an intensified perception of the existing dangers (Lerner and Keltner 2001) and strengthens the tendency to avoid taking additional risks involved in military actions against the other side in conflict situations (Huddy et al. 2007).

There is no question that the effects of fear on conflicts and their possible resolution are complex. Spanovic and her colleagues (2010) recently found that fear can motivate aggression in the ongoing conflict in Kosovo. Paez (2006) found correlations between fear and opposition in Spain to negotiations with the Basque rebel organization ETA. However, the question remains as to how it acts within political discourse as a barrier to conflict resolution and how it creates motivations to resolve the conflict. The political discourse in Israel during times of mobilization efforts for a change in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can serve as an illuminating case study to examine these questions.

### ***Fear in Jewish Society in Israel***

Collective fear has been found to characterize Jewish society in Israel, which has been involved in a state of protracted conflict with its neighbors and has been affected by past experiences of pogroms, persecution, and expulsion, reaching their peak with the Holocaust. The violent events of the Jewish-Arab conflict and the traumatic experiences of the past have accumulated in the collective memory, creating and transmitting feelings of existential fear (Arian 1995; Bar-Tal 2001). These events and experiences are accompanied by the perception of high military capability of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), expressed by more than 80% of the Jewish-Israeli population in 2007 and 2009 (Ben-Meir and Bagno-Moldavsky 2010). Joined together, these factors have led to stagnation and to a continuation of the conflict.

Collective fear has been expressed in various aspects of Israeli social life: in societal beliefs, in public opinion polls, in literature, in textbooks and in the mass media. The prominent societal beliefs in Israel have been used in a wide range of appraisals, decisions, and personal behaviors (Bar-Tal 2001). Recent surveys conducted among Jewish-Israelis indicate that the levels of fear of terrorist actions against Israel remained high and stable until 2008 (with a minor decrease from 2009 until 2011), despite the fact that the frequency of acts of terrorism had lessened significantly during those years (Ben-Dor et al. 2012).

### ***Fear as a Barrier and as a Possibility for Resolving Conflicts in Israel***

Many of the conditions turning collective fear into a barrier against conflict resolution can be found in Jewish-Israeli society. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been protracted and marked by great hostility between the sides, as well as periods of significant violence which have taken a heavy toll in victims. In addition, the lack of trust and fear have focused on the hostile intentions of Arabs and Palestinians, especially towards the Jews in Israel, as is shown in many public opinion polls. Research conducted among Jews in Israel has indicated that higher levels of fear lead to cognitive stagnation and unwillingness to take risks in negotiations. This is manifested, *inter alia*, by low support for a peace



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process and for the concessions necessary to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict peacefully, as well as its positive effect on support for initiating militant actions against Palestinians (Gordon and Arian 2001; Halperin 2011; Maoz and McCauly 2009).

The fear orientation in Jewish-Israeli society serves as a convenient and available basis for messages aimed at political persuasion, as occurred in the fear-arousing election campaign of 1996 by the Likud Party and its candidate for prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who led the opposition to the Oslo Agreements (Torgovnik 2000; Weimann and Wolfsfeld 2002). Marmor and Weimann (2001) show the similarity between candidates from both sides of the political divide in Israeli election propaganda in 1999 and in 2001, in exploiting the sense of fear. During the election campaign of 2001 as well, the two prime ministerial candidates used fear-arousing propaganda: Ehud Barak, who led the dovish political camp, and his opponent Ariel Sharon, who firmly opposed to the concessions that had been proposed at Camp David by Barak the previous year (Marmor and Weimann 2001). These studies indicate the place of fear in the political discourse during election campaigns. However, during election periods, no practical political policy decisions are generally made. The present research makes a unique contribution to this discussion by investigating the ways fear-arousing messages were employed at a time that stormy public discussions with far-reaching consequences were being held regarding the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In sum, fear stems primarily from perceiving or interpreting an external stimulus as a physical or symbolic threat. Its effects on human consciousness make it an effective tool for changing attitudes in general and for political persuasion in particular. Its appearance as a collective emotional orientation in societies involved in conflicts, and specifically in Jewish-Israeli society, supplies an opportunity for the political actors to recruit the public in support of their political programs, no matter whether the goal is to prevent a resolution process or to promote one. Before presenting the hypotheses of this research with regard to the use made of fear by the representatives of three political programs in Israel, I will briefly survey the political circumstances which existed in Israel during the period investigated.

## **II. The Al-Aqsa Intifada: Fear in Jewish Society at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century**

The failure of the political summit in July 2000 between Ehud Barak, Yasser Arafat, and Bill Clinton gave the signal for the outbreak of the next round of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which created a social context of intense fear among Jewish-Israelis (Bar-Tal and Sharvit 2007). From a personal standpoint, the fear was expressed in anxiety with regard to travelling by public transportation, being in public places, and even leaving home at all (Klar et al. 2002). Surveys taken at the time indicated that in 2002 fear reached its peak, and 92% of the respondents expressed fear for their personal security and for the safety of their families (Arian 2002). A number of collective fears were expressed in the surveys as well: the fear that "most Palestinians have never accepted the existence of the State of Israel and would destroy it if they could," which was identified with by 72% of the population in the Peace Index Survey taken in March 2001; an extreme sense of threat with regard to Israeli national security, including the fear of the Palestinian "right of return" to Israel and fear of the loss of a Jewish majority in the state (see the Peace Index surveys of August 2003, November 2003, and December 2003). The events at the beginning of this period – the failure of the peace talks and the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, as well as the portrayal of the Palestinians and of Arafat as bearing sole responsibility for the violence – led, as noted, to severe perceptions of threat and feelings of rising fear.

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## ***Political Programs, 2003-2004***

Despite this difficult reality of violent conflict, during 2003 political initiatives began to appear from the Zionist left, which led to renewed discussion of the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The leftwing program for a comprehensive settlement presented a variety of proposals for the resolution of the conflict, based on negotiations with the Palestinian side. From among the many movements which composed the Zionist left in Israel, salient in the public debate were two movements: The People's Voice and the Geneva Initiative. The programs of these two movements included similar principles regarding a comprehensive permanent settlement with the Palestinians.

Ariel Sharon, the prime minister during those years, was then leading the moderate rightwing and the political center and he reacted by presenting the unilateral program of the center, including a (unilateral) disengagement which was not meant to resolve the conflict but rather just to manage it. The basis of his plan included two projects: the construction of a barrier separating Israel from the West Bank and a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from a portion of northern Samaria (Bar-Siman-Tov and Michael 2007; Sharon 2003). Then Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom and his ministry worked intensively on presenting the separation fence to the public in Israel and in explaining it internationally, especially in February 2004, when it was the subject of a hearing at the International Court of Justice in The Hague.

Simultaneously, a political struggle was initiated from the far right which came out in opposition to a change in the status quo in the Israel-Palestinian conflict and against the disengagement from the Gaza Strip. The rightwing program for maintaining the settlements in the occupied territories was composed of various proposals, less uniform, focused on both maintaining the status quo and opposing the disengagement plan as well as opposition to other proposals raised by the Israeli center and left (See e.g., Bachur-Nir and Cohen 2003; Yesha Council 15 March 2004). Among the movements operating on this side of the political spectrum during that period, the Council for Judea and Samaria (*Yesha* Council) was one of the most active and presented a clear and consistent agenda. Its principal aims were to promote and to strengthen the settlement project on the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, to promote implementation of Israeli sovereignty over these territories, and to prevent political agreements which would harm the integrity of the entire land of Israel (Roth 2005).

## **III. Research Method and Hypotheses**

### ***The Aims of this Research and Its Hypotheses***

On the basis of data from earlier studies mentioned above, there is no doubt that the emotion of fear exists with great intensity in Jewish-Israeli society, and this was especially true during the Al-Aqsa Intifada. In general, this research attempts to investigate how this emotion of fear was used in political discourse dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the framework of the research, I investigate in detail whether each of the three programs used fear-arousing- messages for persuasion, acting as either a barrier or a possibility for resolving the conflict, and if so, to what extent. To this end, I examine the content of the threats on which these messages focused and I consider the frequency with which these messages of fear were used. Fear-arousing messages were defined in the research as *messages in which an existing or potential threat to the nation and to the state is mentioned – regarding their situation, their character and their values – and to the members of society as individuals.*

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This research empirically enables for the first time an examination of whether the central actors in the political arena of a society involved in an intractable conflict use messages of fear as a barrier or as a possibility to resolve the conflict, and how this is done to mobilize public support. This support is highly important in a society involved in protracted conflict, which requires ongoing mobilization and great material and psychological investment from its members. However, leading a peace process also demands great efforts to mobilize a society deeply involved in the conflict for many years, to the point that this conflict has engulfed its identity (Rosler 2012).

It is hypothesized that the significant differences – ideological and practical – between the three political programs examined should lead each of them to emphasize fear messages which characterize it in particular and to exploit these messages with varying intensity. Thus, a number of sub-hypotheses are proposed:

1. The three political programs will use fear messages in political discourse in order to persuade listeners, but in different ways, i.e., the leftwing program will exploit fear in order to promote a negotiated resolution; the rightwing program will use it as a barrier against a peace process involving concessions; and the unilateral program of the center will use fear both as a barrier against plans for a comprehensive agreement and as an opportunity to manage the conflict.
2. The frequency of the use of fear will decrease to the extent that the program tries to use this fear for conflict resolution, as the need for such a resolution requires only a medium level of fear, in contrast with the higher levels of fear necessary to turn it into a barrier.
3. To the extent that the program is directed towards using fear as a barrier, its messages will emphasize threats posed by the actions of the other side and the risks involved in a process to resolve the conflict, as well as justifications for keeping the present policies.
4. Each program will present threats in accord with the ideology on which it is based and with the agenda it represents. Thus, the rightwing program will present threats to the integrity of borders of Greater Israel and will emphasize the dangers of negotiations. The center program, as the official program of the Israeli government, will focus on threats to the continuous management of the state. The leftwing program will focus on threat to democracy and to the moral values of Israel as well as on the possibility of achieving peace.

## ***The Research Method***

In order to examine the use made of fear messages in political discourse in Israel with regard to the future of the Israel-Palestinian conflict, use was made of two complementary methods, first, a qualitative content analysis of documents, which was followed by interviews (Krippendorff 2004). In the framework of document analysis, all the documents representing each of the three main political programs were collected and analyzed. A total of 121 documents were analyzed, which were published during the period of a year when the public debate on the subject reached a peak: 1 May 2003 to 2 May 2004 (See Appendix 1). After a preliminary analysis of all of the documents, threats were divided according to their content into ten main categories (See Table 1). We then checked the frequency of documents from each program in which each of the categories appeared, and its specific content. Then, each document was examined in its entirety in order to determine the level of dominance of the fear messages appearing in it (Huberman and Miles 1994) according to a scale of four levels (level 1 – fear is the only main argument of the document; level 4 – fear is not mentioned at all in the document).

The second method, which complemented the first, included an analysis of semi-structured interviews which I conducted for the research with a senior representative of each of the political programs: For the leftwing program for a comprehensive settlement, I interviewed Gadi Baltiansky, the Director General of The Geneva Initiative project. For the rightwing program to maintain the settlements in the territories, I interviewed the Political Secretary and the spokesman for the Yesha Council at that time – Yehoshua

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Mor-Yosef.<sup>1</sup> For the third interview, about the unilateral program of the center, I spoke to a senior personality, one of the leaders of the Disengagement Plan, who requested to remain anonymous (henceforth, he will be termed Interviewee No. 3). The interviews were intended to examine the nature of the proposed program and its supporting arguments, from the personal and in-depth standpoint of a senior representative; and to understand how fear messages were chosen as well as the attitude of the interviewee towards them and their usage. The transcribed interviews were analyzed using the same procedure used to analyze the documents.

## IV. Results

### *The Results of the Document Analysis*

The results of the analysis indicate similarities and differences among the documents of the three political programs (see Table 1): The security threat was very common among all of the documents with a frequency of between 84% and 100%, but each of the programs emphasized different threats in this category. The most prevalent threat in this category was the threat of terror among the rightwing (81%) and the center programs (100%), emphasizing the dangers expected from the Palestinian side and thus served as a barrier against support for resolving the conflict. In contrast, in the documents of the leftwing program for a comprehensive settlement, the threat of violence was most common in this category (62%) and the threat of terror was less common (49%). The rightwing and the center groups primarily stressed the threat of violence directed by the Palestinians to Israel, as, for example:

The Hamas organization exploits the ceasefire in order to rehabilitate their infrastructure and to develop more dangerous means of fighting which will be used against Israel at the right moment for the terrorist organizations (Yesha Council 30 July 2003).

In contrast, the leftwing program for a comprehensive settlement emphasized the threat of violence on both sides of the conflict and added a suggestion for dealing with this by a change in the existing policy in favor of a political process. For example:

After three years of mutual bloodletting on both sides, this is the first serious proof that there are serious people among them with whom it is possible to reach an agreement (Beilin 2003).

The existential threat to Israel was the second most common category in the documents of the center (24%) and the rightwing (42%), and it, too, is likely to be a barrier against conflict resolution. In contrast, the existential threat is mentioned in only 14% of the leftwing documents, and is ranked third in frequency.

A surprising finding was noted when comparing the frequency of the threat to Israel's Jewish existence in the documents of all three political programs: This threat appeared in 70% of the documents of the leftwing program, but only in 22% of the documents of the rightwing and 20% of the documents of the center. When examining how this threat was expressed in each of the programs, the picture becomes

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<sup>1</sup> The director general of The Geneva Initiative and the political secretary and spokesman for the Yesha Council agreed to the publication of the interviews using their own names.

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clear: the leftwing program mentions the refugee issue in its documents (54%) with regard to the solutions it proposes for the issue. For example:

The term "right of return" is not mentioned in the agreement. There is no reference to the question of how the refugee problem was created and there are only directions for a possible resolution – according to the model proposed by President Clinton (Geneva Initiative n.d.a).

However, the very mention of the issue in itself arouses great fear among the Israeli public (Zakay et al. 2002). An additional message of fear in the framework of this threat category, mentioned by the group in 35% of its documents, is the demographic threat, as expressed in this example:

The two sides have surely understood that reaching a solution which is mutually acceptable on those issues is necessary in order to immediately end the violent conflict; to set a permanent border which is stable and defensible, between Israel and Palestine, and to eliminate the growing threat of a bi-national state (Geneva Initiative n.d.b).

The two messages present the proposed resolution of a threat in the framework of a comprehensive agreement, and the second message even emphasizes the danger to Jewish society in Israel implicit in the continuation of the conflict. In documents of the center and rightwing groups as well, the threat of the right of return and the demographic threat are very common in this threat category, but with lower frequency. In addition, these groups present the refugee issue as a threat with no specific solution, as in this example:

With regard to the American "changes", it is clear that there are political achievements, first and foremost with regard to the Palestinian "return argument". At the time of the approval of the "road map", in accord with my demand, a government decision for a clause determining that entry of Palestinians to the territory of the State of Israel would not be permitted. (Shalom 2004).

Rightwing and center groups also use the threat of a bi-national state, arguing that it is liable to lead to the loss of a Jewish majority in Israel, similar to the leftwing program.

The unilateral program of the center frequently uses the threat category of undesirable results for Israel in negotiations (52%), in comparison to the rightwing groups (29%) and to the leftwing (27%) whose use of this category is similarly lower. In the framework of this category, all of the political programs make relatively great use of the threat of concessions without compensation or those made under fire, but each of them accuses the others of this intention and their conclusions are different. Examples taken from documents of the three programs illustrate this:

Every withdrawal which has not been agreed upon and coordinated with the Palestinian Authority in actual fact grants the area to Hamas, as, at present, Hamas is the more organized body on the Palestinian side, while also giving it an ideological advantage (Beilin 5 March 2004).

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has decided to withdraw under fire from the Gaza Strip. He intends to uproot a number of settlements in Yesha and to expel thousands of settlers from their homes without receiving any compensation (Yesha Council 15 March 2004).

The demand that we make concessions without the Palestinians acting against terror is dangerous to Israel (Markus 2004).

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Additionally, the threat category of the democratic-moral character of Israel, which is more frequently found in the leftwing documents (32%) than in those of the rightwing (15%) and of the center (4%), receives different meanings in the texts. The rightwing, for example, maintains that the evacuation of Jews is an immoral act, while the leftwing argues that remaining in the occupied territories harms Israeli morality.

As expected, the threat referring to a warning against loss of territorial resources, a value which is identified with both the political rightwing in Israel, and the opposition to concessions involved in resolving the conflict, is very common in rightwing documents (59%), less common in the documents of the unilateral program of the center (28%) and mentioned only once in a document of the leftwing program for a comprehensive settlement (3%). The rightwing program for maintaining settlements in the territories presents the threat primarily as a danger involving evacuation of Jews from the land of Israel (in 41% of the documents), and as a threat to the integrity of Greater Israel (in 34% of the documents). On the other hand, the center program warns of a threat to the large bloc of settlements and a return to the borders of 1967. The only time this category of threats is mentioned by the leftwing program refers to the threat to Israeli sovereignty on Temple Mount.

In the next stage, I investigated the dominance of messages of fear in the entire documents. A comparison between the documents of the three political programs presents a clear picture, almost linear in character (See Diagram 1). The  $\chi^2$  test conducted on the data indicated a significant correlation. The fear messages were more dominant in the documents of the rightwing program to maintain settlements in the territories. In its documents they are mentioned as the only argument or as one of the main arguments in the document (levels 1 and 2) in 78% of the texts. In contrast, in the texts of the unilateral program of the center, their frequency was 60% and in texts of the leftwing program for a comprehensive settlement – 32%. The documents of the rightwing program are also characterized by the highest incidence in which fear is the only argument (22%), as opposed to the incidence of these documents among the center program (4%) and the left (0%).

A mirror image is seen with regard to documents in which fear is mentioned as a secondary argument in the document: the leftwing program is the group in which these are most prevalent (68%), in contrast to the center program (40%) and the rightwing program (22%). In all of the political programs there was not one document in which no fear-arousing message appeared.

## ***Results of the Interview Analysis***

Naturally, the three interviews contained, for the most part, similar threats to the ones most common in the documents of their groups: the security threat, the threat to the welfare of the Israeli state and society, and the threat of undesirable results of negotiations for Israel. Three additional categories of threat were mentioned in two of the three interviews: a threat to the Jewish existence of Israel was expressed in the interviews with Baltiansky and with the representative of the center program; a threat to the democratic-moral character of Israel was raised in the interviews with Mor-Yosef and with Baltiansky; a threat of loss of territorial resources was brought up in interviews with Mor-Yosef and with the representative of the center program. Even though most of the central categories appear in more than just one of the interviews, each of them usually reflects different versions of the threats in the same category. So, for example, the category of threat to the welfare of the Israeli nation and society is presented in the interview with Mor-Yosef as the threat of an internal rift; in the interview with Baltiansky, it is represented as the threat of turning Israel into a violent society and in the third interview, it is expressed as a threat to the public mood and atmosphere:

There is one thing that very much bothers them [voters for the Likud – N.R.]; it is the subject of the rift, of the rift in the nation and that's what worries them, that we will be thrust into, God

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forbid, a situation of civil war and of refusal to follow orders on a large scale (Interviewee Mor-Yosef 28 November 2004).

People are becoming more violent, more aggressive, the incredible lightness of humiliation, of arrogance, and in the end, our behavior at roadblocks knows no roadblock, it does not stop at roadblocks; it is not blocked on our way home or on the road; it also permeates society (Interviewee Baltiansky 6 December 2004).

We reached a dead end [at the end of 2003 – N.R.] and we must remember that the atmosphere in Israel was becoming more difficult (Interviewee Number 3 13 December 2004).

The three interviews were ranked as 2 on the scale of the fear dominance measure; that is, fear was one of the principal arguments in the interview but not the only one.

Mor-Yosef and Baltiansky both stated that the arguments used by their groups were chosen in an organized fashion and out of awareness of the issues, but Mor-Yosef revealed an internal disagreement which had become evident within the Yesha Council:<sup>2</sup> the disagreement was between an ideological group which believed that the Council should base its claims on the argument that the right to the land had been a God-given promise, while a different group, which was more dominant on the council at the time, believed that they should use arguments which had proven themselves as more effective:

I must tell you that among us, there is disagreement [...]. Some of us say: listen, every Jew loves Judea, Samaria, and Gaza, doesn't want to give it up [...] But I don't accept that [...] the professional tools which examine this clearly prove that this kind of speech...about roots and about the mission of the nation of Israel and that – that doesn't arouse emotions; it doesn't open hearts; people don't identify with that (Interviewee Mor-Yosef 28 November 2004).

The third interviewee stated that the arguments of his group had not been determined beforehand, but had been accumulated in the statements of the various initiators of the program.

Regarding the use made by their groups of fear messages, the three interviewees maintained that "the Israeli reality test" had led them to choose these messages. In the interviews with Mor-Yosef and with Baltiansky, both maintained that they would have preferred to use other arguments rather than fear messages, but that they had no choice. All three of them agreed that, considering the previous four years, during which violence had increased between the sides, threatening messages were more effective in Israel than arguments referring to hope for the future or for an end to the conflict with a peace agreement.

On the basis of the interviews, it is difficult to conclude whether the drafters of the political programs used fear messages due to the personal fear which they had experienced or whether this was done only for utilitarian reasons. However, as the aim of the interviews was to investigate their positions with regard to the use of fear messages, the important conclusion from the standpoint of this research is that these messages were used out of awareness of their power of persuasion, whether this was done for manipulative purposes or as a reflection of reality.

In a summary of the research findings, we see from the documents of the three political programs that although the security threat was widely used, differences can be distinguished in three areas: in the

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<sup>2</sup> It appears that, against the backdrop of this disagreement, Mor-Yosef resigned from the Yesha Council in January 2005 (see Glickman 16 January 2005).

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categories of the threats; in the content of each category, and in the frequency of appearance of fear messages. The interviews supplied additional reinforcement to the findings relating to the categories used by each program. But beyond that, the findings of the analysis of the interviews indicate the method chosen to present it to the public and the reasons which led the designers of each program to choose the methods they did. In the discussion of the research findings, I will examine the hypotheses of the research and offer some possible explanations for them.

## V. Discussion

The results of the research reinforced the hypothesis that fear would be common among the three programs as a means of persuasion, both in their documents and in interviews with their representatives, despite the clear ideological differences among them and in spite of the difference in the nature of the solutions proposed by each of them to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As mentioned, medium level fear messages have been found to be an effective tool of persuasion in many studies. In research conducted by Halperin (2007) it was even found that voters for whom the Seventeenth Knesset election campaign aroused fear tended to change their political positions more than others. Representatives of the principal political programs today in Israel have also discovered the effectiveness of fear, as Yehoshua Mor-Yosef and Gadi Baltiansky explained in the interviews with them:

We examine this with professional tools, with surveys, focus groups [...] and as for the present, it's the story of the national rift that's the most effective thing (Interviewee Mor-Yosef 28 November 2004).

We appear in many places; we meet many communities. In the end, we get some kind of representative population model. You do this by trial and error. (Interviewee Baltiansky 6 December 2004).

The manner in which each of the programs used fear was expressed both in the threats they made great use of and in the goals of the programs, as presented by their documents and by their interviewed representatives. The rightwing program used fear as a barrier against resolution of the conflict, since its top priorities were the promotion of the settlement project in the occupied territories and its reinforcement, maintaining the political status quo, and prevention of political agreements which might harm the integrity of Greater Israel. Accordingly, its documents made great use of threats of violence by Palestinians and the threat to the integrity of Greater Israel, and stressed the risks involved in moves directed towards the Palestinians.

The leftwing program actually made use of fear messages as a means to encourage the public to support its proposals for a comprehensive settlement with the Palestinians, intended, *inter alia*, to supply a response to the these threats. Thus, the common threats which were raised in its documents were: the danger in continuing the mutual violence of the conflict, the loss of a Jewish majority if a two state solution was not adopted, and the harm to the moral and democratic foundations of Israel, implicit in the continuation of the occupation.

With regard to the center, the use of fear both as an opportunity and as a barrier in the documents of its program and in the interview with its representative reflects the attitudes of its initiators. Given these positions, on the one hand, the political situation must not be left as it is at present, so the constant friction with the Palestinians should be reduced by unilateral moves, such as leaving certain parts of the West Bank and the entire Gaza Strip, and establishing a physical obstacle between Israel and the Palestinians;



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but on the other hand, political negotiations must not be opened with the Palestinians regarding an end to the conflict for as long as violent tactics are used by them, as this will be considered legitimization of terror as a means of political pressure. Therefore, its documents warned of acts of terrorism by the Palestinians and, simultaneously, cautioned against the possibility of resolving the conflict by negotiation.

Finally, the research revealed that the weight of fear messages in documents of the programs becomes significantly more moderate to the extent that the program intends to mobilize the public to support moves towards a resolution of the conflict or to deescalate it. This finding supports the hypothesis according to which messages using fear as a barrier will increasingly integrate fear-arousing messages while messages which try to exploit it as a possibility to find a solution will limit its use to a moderate level.

### ***Not by Fear Alone***

The research clearly shows that, in the view of political initiators, fear messages are an effective means of political persuasion in the context of a violent and protracted conflict. Use of these arguments is natural and even expected in a society in which individuals anticipate that threats which have been hovering over their heads may be realized, as violence breaks out in the conflict, and when they continually perceive the reality surrounding them as dangerous. In their interviews, Baltiansky and the representative of the unilateral program of the center even expressed a sense of despair which prevailed among the Jewish-Israeli public at the time, a sense that this atmosphere did not make it possible to appeal to the population using messages expressing the prophecy of a better future:

The public does not understand abstract values like a political horizon. The public here is dealing with the ravages of the intifada on a daily basis, of people who are killed, of sorrow, of the wounded, of economic crises, of suffocation. The public goes abroad and encounters malicious graffiti; scholars slowly discover how they have been tossed aside (Interviewee No. 3 13 December 2004).

Because of our nature, because of history, because of present reality, because of the cruelty of the struggle, because the home front has become the battle front, because the victims are children who get on buses and not only soldiers in a tank, it is terribly difficult to look beyond the horizon. It is much easier to buy into explanations of how to prevent a worse future (Interviewee Baltiansky 6 December 2004).

In contrast, it is actually Yehoshua Mor-Yosef, the representative of the rightwing program to maintain the settlements in the territories who, in the interview, argues that the public is not in despair about the hope for peace, and in spite of everything, is still ready to pay a heavy price in order to achieve it:

These people [those who traditionally vote for the Likud] believe in the right to the Land of Israel; they want their right to the land, but they say that we must take a chance for peace, that we must [...] It is especially the story of hope that captivates them anew, time after time. For that hope, they are also willing to pay a heavy price (Interviewee Mor-Yosef 28 November 2004).

According to him, it is actually this hope, and the willingness for compromise which are implanted in a person almost irrationally. Although he feels that, considering the situation, the public would be expected to oppose any program which includes compromises, the Yesha Council finds it difficult to convince the Jewish-Israeli public of the futility of compromise. The very "stubborn" need for hope, to which Yehoshua Mor-Yosef is referring, can also be seen in the words of the other two interviewees:

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The Geneva Initiative, which I said, we want to lead to an agreement, to be a model for an agreement, we wanted to have proof that we also have a partner; in the end, what we actually brought, more than these two things, was hope (Interviewee Baltiansky, 6 December 2004).

[This is] the first time that the public sees a development on the Israel-Palestinian track which comes from our initiative. It is accepted by most of the public; people are pinning their hopes on it (Interviewee No. 3 13 December 2004).

It appears that despite the effectiveness of fear messages, there are cases in which they are unable to persuade the public politically and to overcome the human need for hope. Messages which are intended to arouse hope inherently demand conditions like emotional representation of future situations, creativity, cognitive flexibility and readiness to take risks (Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal 2006). The existence of these conditions is unlikely in a society involved in a difficult and protracted conflict. But even in Jewish society in Israel, after four years of severe violence and political stagnation, surprising tendencies of growing support for compromise are apparent in order to achieve peace, and political programs are developing in a variety of directions which include concessions (Arian 2003). The aspiration for hope is also expressed in the value of peace, which is one of the two most important values for the Israeli public. This value has been expressed in political declarations from the Declaration of Independence to today, and in songs expressing the longing of the Israeli public for peace (Shamir and Shamir 2000).

It can thus be suggested that the combination of hope-arousing and fear-arousing messages may be used as a persuasive factor for resolving conflicts peacefully and in favor of the concessions which may be required. Researchers in political science suggest a similar mode of thought: Blight (1990) asserts that foresight and political responsibility together with fear lead to an adaptive reaction. Nadeau and his colleagues (1995) claim that only the combination of threat perception and sense of hope may lead to perceptual change and constructive coping, as threats alone will lead to withdrawal while hope alone may lead to wishful thinking. The role of hope combined with fear has also appeared in Ripeness theory (Zartman 2000), according to which the sides in a conflict will be ready to negotiate only when, alongside the fear of approaching catastrophe and the perception of a mutually damaging stalemate, there is also a sense of hope of achieving a negotiated settlement. In order to provide a basis for this way of thinking, empirical studies should investigate the combined effects of messages of fear and those of hope on individuals in a society involved in a violent and protracted conflict.

## VI. Epilogue

As proved in research conducted in Israel as well as in other societies involved in difficult conflicts, fear indeed aids in dealing with the violent reality of the conflict but, under certain conditions, it is liable to pose a difficult barrier, obstructing a resolution of the conflict. The persuasive power of fear messages has been further supported in this study, which has also indicated the awareness of the political actors of their ability to mobilize fear for their own needs. The ease with which fear is operated and its great effect on human consciousness make it an available tool to be exploited by political actors. However, discourse based completely or primarily on fear messages implicitly conceals a difficult moral problem. This is especially true with regard to a society which has been embroiled in an intractable conflict for many years, a conflict in which dominant fear messages, accompanied by loss of hope and a sense of despair, are liable to contribute to social deterioration into the darker regions. Considering these insights, it is possible not only to oppose and to reject the use of fear, but also to examine ways of using it moderately in political discourse in order to promote conditions which enable conflict resolution.

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## Appendix

**Table 1: Frequency of threat categories in the documents**

	<i>The leftwing program for a comprehensive settlement</i>	<i>The unilateral program of the center</i>	<i>The rightwing program for maintaining the settlements in the occupied territories</i>
Security threat	84%	100%	90%
Threat to Israel's Jewish existence	70%	20%	22%
Threat to Israel's democratic-moral character	32%	4%	15%
Threats to Israel's international status	5%	36%	27%
Threat to the well being of the Israeli nation and its society	30%	20%	27%
Economic threat	8%	20%	10%
Threat of undesirable results for Israel in negotiations	27%	52%	29%
Threat of loss of territorial resources	3%	28%	59%
Threat to world Jewry	—	4%	14%
General threat	14%	12%	5%

**Diagram 1: The dominance of fear messages in the documents**

