



Photo: L-r: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, President Bill Clinton, PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat, Washington, September 13, 1993

The Securitization of the Bi-National State: The Oslo Accords, 1993-1995

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While military measures are the most prevalent means for confronting security threats, non-military means such as diplomacy and peace agreements offer an alternative recourse for countries as they seek to overcome existential threats. This article contends that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's decision to promote the Oslo Accords was essentially a security move to counter the threat of a bi-national state. Using securitization theory, which explores the process of how issues transform into security threats, the article analyzes how Israel chose a peace process to tackle an existential threat to its future as Jewish and democratic state. Although the Oslo Accords are widely perceived as a peace process, the article argues that the desire to create a demographic separation between Israel and the Palestinians was the main consideration driving the agreement. Departing from the literature that discusses Israel's national security through conventional historical and descriptive analytical lenses, the article proposes examining decision making processes relating to Israel's national security using theoretical tools, in this case, securitization theory.

Keywords: securitization theory, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Oslo Accords, diplomacy, existential threats

Introduction

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has faced numerous security challenges, including security threats that jeopardized the very existence of the state. According to Michael, this kind of threat “can be defined as a trend, process or development that substantially endangers the existence of the State of Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people” (Michael, 2009, p. 689). To overcome these threats, Israel has chosen to act against them in various ways. Over its 73 years of existence, Israel has engaged in wars, limited military operations, and targeted military attacks, such as the destruction of nuclear reactors in Iraq and Syria, the clandestine effort to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and the inter-war campaign aimed at preventing advanced weapons from Hezbollah known as the “campaign between wars.” While in most cases Israel chose military force in order to confront a security threat, in other cases the Israeli leadership chose to act by different means, as in the case of the Oslo Accords.

Countering the widespread claim that the Oslo Accords were the first stage of an Israeli-Palestinian peace process, this article argues that the three agreements signed in 1993-1995 between Israel and the PLO were essentially a security move to contain the threat of a bi-national state.

Twenty-eight years after the well-publicized handshake between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993, the Oslo Accords remain a controversial issue. While there are those who describe the Oslo Accords as a historic breakthrough toward resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Waxman, 2019, pp. 116-117), others portray the Israeli decision to sign the agreements with the PLO as a strategic mistake stemming from the illusion that Arafat and the PLO were partners for peace with Israel (Karsh, 2016, p. 7; Schueftan,

2011, pp. 762-763; 2020, p. 42). However, while others have analyzed and presented the Oslo Accords both as part of an Arab-Israeli peace process (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996; Barak, 2005), and as a cultural shift among Israeli decision makers (Rhynold, 2007; Barnett, 1999), this article introduces a different approach to Rabin’s decision to promote the process with the PLO. Countering the widespread claim that the Oslo Accords were the first stage of an Israeli-Palestinian peace process, this article argues that the three agreements signed in 1993-1995 between Israel and the PLO were essentially a security move to contain the threat of a bi-national state. While Rabin’s concern about the demographic issue has been noted in the context of the Oslo Accords and his decision to promote the Oslo process (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 67; Even, 2013, p. 74), the demographic and bi-national state threats deserve further attention. This allows exploring the Oslo Accords as a security move within an overall national security perspective.

Adopting a theoretical perspective of securitization theory, a leading theory in international relations and security studies that explores the process of how issues transform into security threats, this article examines how the State of Israel confronted existential security threats to its future as Jewish and democratic state with diplomatic measures. In this context, the article contends that the desire to create a separation between Israel and the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and thereby secure the future of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, was the main consideration driving Israel’s support for the Oslo Accords. In order to securitize the bi-national state option, in which Israel would lose its Jewish majority, Rabin promoted the Oslo Accords with the PLO with the aim of establishing independent Palestinian autonomy for the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. By seeking a separation between the Palestinians and the State of Israel, Rabin opted to ensure a solid Jewish majority in Israel and

thus ensure the future of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

Departing from the literature discussing national security through conventional historical and descriptive analytical lenses, this article proposes examining decision making processes relating to Israel's national security from a theoretical perspective. The article contains three main sections. The first introduces securitization theory, which offers an alternative approach to describe how "normal" issues are transformed into security threats. The second section examines how the State of Israel confronted security threats with non-military measures, as emphasized by the case of the Oslo process during 1993-1995. Finally, in the third section, while critically analyzing the Oslo Accords and their implications in retrospect, the article presents how securitization theory can be used as a theoretical tool for understanding and analyzing national security decision making.

Securitization Theory: The Construction of Security Threats

One of the well-known puzzles in the field of international relations (IR) and security studies is how and why particular issues are labeled security threats to a country and its citizens, while other issues are not perceived as such. This conundrum also relates to the broad academic discussion regarding what is "security," and how it is perceived by the various disciplines in the field of social sciences. Security, in any objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values; in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked (Wolfers, 1962, p. 150). Traditionally, security was sought through military power, and the referent object, what was to be secured, was the state (Collins, 2016, p. 2). Thus, in historical terms, "security" is the field where states threaten each other, challenge each other's sovereignty, try to impose their will on each other, and defend their independence (Waever, 1995, p. 50). Yet after the end of the Cold War, as the term

security and the core assumptions about the referent object started to engage academic thinking, alternative approaches to security that offer different referent objects began to emerge (Collins, 2016, p. 2). Accordingly, there are other issues that are perceived as existential threats that are not related to the military realm, for example, migration (Leonard & Kaunert, 2019; Baker-Beall, 2019), lack of water sources (Stetter, Herschinger, Tiechler, & Albert, 2011), and diseases (Elbe, 2006; Sjostedt, 2011; McInnes & Rushton, 2011; Kamradt-Scott & McInnes, 2012; Hanrieder & Kreuder-Sonnen, 2014). Securitization theory, which explores the process in which social entities transform issues into security threats, was developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde from the Copenhagen School (CS) in a broader attempt to redefine the concept of security. Thus, securitization theory introduces a wider security perception, which comprises not only military security but also political, societal, economic, and environmental security (Waever, 1995; Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998).

There are three key main components in securitization theory: (1) *referent object*: the entity that is seen to be existentially threatened and has a legitimate claim to survive; (2) *securitizing actor*: an actor that securitizes issues by declaring something (a referent object) existentially threatened; and (3) *audience*: the target that must be persuaded that the referent object is existentially threatened. Thus, during the securitization process, the securitizing actor points to a development or potentiality claiming that the referent object is existentially threatened, and therefore aims to obtain the audience's acceptance that extraordinary measures are justified for confronting that threat (Waever, 1995, 2004; Buzan et al., 1998).

One of the significant contributions of securitization theory is how the concept of security is perceived. In contrast to the realist concept that perceives threats objectively (there is a "real" threat), securitization theory adopts a constructivist approach to security. Hence,

arguing that threats are not necessarily “real” but “perceived,” securitization theory focuses on the process of how issues inter-subjectively transform into security threats. In other words, an issue becomes a security threat not only or necessarily because it constitutes an objective threat to the referent object, but rather when an audience accepts the securitizing actor’s position that the issue constitutes an existential threat to the referent object. In that sense, it is impossible to verify fully whether a threat is “real” or not, as securitization theory focuses on the process of how issues transform into security threats and how those issues are perceived.

Securitization theory adopts a constructivist approach to security, arguing that threats are not necessarily “real” but “perceived.”

According to the CS, security can be regarded as a “speech act.” Based on the argument that in some instances language does not simply describe objects or states of affairs but also creates through its very utterance (Austin, 1962), the CS scholars argue that there is a “social magic power” of language, as the word “security” constitutes an act, and by saying it, something occurs (Waever, 1995, p. 55). Although it seems that the move from routine to emergency mode is immediate, in most cases, securitization is in fact a very gradual process and it is very rare that an issue moves directly from routine, or normalcy, to emergency (Abrahamsen, 2005). Moreover, securitization occurs even when the security issue is located at the lower level of the normalcy/existential threat spectrum, and thus securitization does not necessarily incorporate aspects of emergency and exceptionalism (Leonard & Kaunert, 2019, pp. 23-29).

In summary, securitization theory, one of the prominent theories in the fields of IR and security studies, analyzes the process of how

an issue is defined as a security threat and how decision makers decide to confront it. Yet while Israel, a good case study for security studies, does not occupy a broad place in securitization theory discourse (Lupovici, 2014), a number of scholars have used securitization theory to demonstrate how Israel has confronted security threats. For instance, in illustrating how the legalization of laws was the tool used to securitize the Arab population in Israel, Olesker (2014, p. 387) asserts that securitization theory, which enables Israel’s political elite to articulate ethnicity as an issue of national security, helps us understand how laws develop the concept of national security and strengthen Israel’s Jewish character. Other examples for issues that were securitized in Israel are the Iranian nuclear threat, especially in 2009-2012 during Netanyahu’s second government (Lupovici, 2016), and Iran’s hybrid proxy warfare through the Lebanese terror organization Hezbollah (Kaunert & Wertman, 2020). Another scholar who used Israel as a case study to explore securitization theory is Abulof (2014), who claims that the “threat culture” of the Zionists provided fertile ground for the securitization of issues such as terrorism, Arab infiltration, and the Iranian nuclear program. In this context, Abulof (2014, p. 408) claims that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon securitized the demographic issue in order to give legitimacy to the disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2005. But despite his claim that the Oslo process was driven in part by the demographic incentive (Abulof, 2014, p. 406), the Oslo Accords are not portrayed as a securitization act. Against this background, using securitization theoretical tools and arguing that the agreements with the PLO can be labeled a security move, this article analyzes how the State of Israel chose to address another existential threat, the potential loss of the country’s Jewish and democratic character, by signing agreements with the PLO during the Oslo process, 1993-1995.

Securitization and Peace: The Oslo Accords, 1993-1995

The Oslo Accords is a case study that illustrates an Israeli securitization act, in which Israel chose what was defined as a peace process in order to securitize an existential threat. These agreements, signed between the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) during 1993-1995, emanated from the pragmatic approach of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who thought that the Arab-Israeli conflict did not benefit Israel's national security. Contending that the continuation of the conflict could lead to a scenario that would endanger the existence of the State of Israel, Rabin believed that time was not on Israel's side and that peace had to be promoted urgently (Aronoff, 2014, p. 101; Even, 2013, p. 74). Thus, he acknowledged two factors with substantive potential to threaten the State of Israel.

First, Rabin, who was a proponent of the "separation approach" between Israel and the Palestinians (Schueftan, 1999, p. 45), perceived the bi-national state solution, in which there would be no solid Jewish majority within Israel, as an existential threat to Israel as a Jewish state (Sheves, 2020, pp. 661-662; Sneh, 2020). In fact, until the outbreak of the first Palestinian intifada, Rabin supported the so-called Jordanian option, whereby Jordan would be the partner in an agreement with Israel to resolve the Palestinian issue (Goldstein, 2006, pp. 354-356). However, the intifada led Rabin to realize that Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was damaging to Israel's national security. He assumed that in order not to be considered by the international community as an apartheid state, Israel would need to grant full citizenship rights to the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, an act that would eventually end Israel's existence as a Jewish state (Peri, 2006, pp. 34-35; Aronoff, 2014, p. 116; Clinton, 2005; Goldstein, 2006, pp. 366-367). Consequently, Rabin wanted to ensure a solid Jewish majority of approximately 80 percent among the Israeli population:

I belong to those who do not want to annex 1.7 million Palestinians as citizens of the State of Israel. Therefore, I am against what is called Greater Israel...In the present circumstances, between a bi-national state and a Jewish state, I prefer a Jewish state... The exercise of sovereignty over the entire Mandatory Land of Israel means that we will have 2.7 million Palestinian citizens in the State of Israel...This may be a Jewish state within its borders, but bi-national in its content, demography, and democracy...That is why I am against annexation. (Quoted in Neriah, 2016, pp. 25-26)

Given his belief that the Palestinians were at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Rabin was convinced that an agreement with the Palestinians must be reached first. Rabin posited that an Israeli-Palestinian peace pact would counter the Arab states' motivation to go to war against Israel in order to retake the territories conquered in 1967 (Neriah, 2016, pp. 26-27). Furthermore, Rabin argued that in an era of ballistic missiles, most of the territories were not essential to Israel's security (Clinton, 2005). Hence, depicting settlements located in the heart of the West Bank as not essential to Israel's security, Rabin contended that it would be enough to defend Israel from the Jordan Valley (Neriah, 2016, p. 28).

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The second factor Rabin perceived as a threat to the State of Israel was continuation of the arms race in the Middle East, which would eventually lead to an acquisition of nuclear

weapons by enemy Arab states. In that sense, Rabin believed that an Israeli-Palestinian agreement would not only ensure the future of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, but would also reduce threats posed by Israel's close neighbors. Thus, Rabin argued that if Israel lived in peace with its neighbors, the likelihood of an attack by other states, such as Iraq and Iran, would be greatly reduced, even if they were under the control of Islamic fundamentalist elites (Ross, 2015, pp. 256-257; Kurtzer et al., 2013, p. 34; Aronoff, 2014, p. 116).

In March 1992, Rabin stated: "I believe that if we succeed in reaching peace or near peace with the Palestinians, with Jordan, and then with Syria, in the next five to seven years, we will reduce a large part of the motivation for an arms race" (quoted in Inbar, 2004, p. 188). In this context, Rabin's vision was primarily based on a traditional security aspect, especially on preventing situations that could endanger the security and existence of the State of Israel (Neriah, 2016, p. 29). Rabin was worried that Russia might rise out of the ashes as a pro-Arab world power, and that Iran and Iraq might develop nuclear weapons and demonstrate their power and their policy of denying peace to the other countries in the region. Thus, recognizing that there was a temporal window of opportunity, in which the United States is the only superpower and that Israel is stronger than its enemies in the Middle East, Rabin believed that it was a ripe moment to pursue a peace agreement with Israel's Arab neighbors, which must be exploited before the opportunity vanishes. In other words, given his sense that the international window of opportunity would be closed in five years, Rabin contended that time was working against Israel (Rabinovich, 2017, pp. 198-199; Inbar, 2004, p. 187; Morris, 2003, p. 573; Ross & Makovsky, 2020, pp. 882-887).

Returning to the bi-national state scenario: in terms of securitization theory, Prime Minister Rabin, performing the role of the "securitizing actor," perceived the bi-national state as an existential threat to Israel as a Jewish and

democratic state (referent object). In order to eliminate this threat, Rabin argued, Israel must achieve peace with the Palestinians. Therefore, he promoted the Oslo Accords (extraordinary measures) for providing the Palestinian people autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which would thereby separate Israel from the Palestinians. In essence, the Oslo peace process was a gradual securitization process comprising three main agreements signed between the State of Israel and the PLO during 1993-1995. In order to securitize the bi-national state option successfully, Rabin needed to obtain the support of the Israeli government and the Knesset, both performing the role of "audience." Without the support of the government and the Knesset, which had the legal authority to approve an Israeli withdrawal from territory, the Oslo Accords would not have any legal validity and the State of Israel could not actually execute and implement any agreement.

Phase One: Declaration of Principles

Early in his term, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin announced that he intended to complete the negotiations for granting autonomy to the Palestinians in the territories within six to nine months. Thus, Rabin contended in front of the Knesset that peace agreements with the neighboring Arab countries would enhance Israel's security:

The intention of the government, which I have the right and the honor to lead, is indeed to maximize the chances of advancing peacemaking with the Arab states and the Palestinian residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip...In my opinion, peace is an important element that guarantees the security of the State of Israel...A peace without any security does not mean anything to me, but real peace increases the security of the State of Israel. (Rabin, 1992)

Despite his argument that a peace agreement with the Palestinians was essential for Israel's security, Rabin rejected any negotiation with the PLO, which was the official representative of the Palestinians. Perceiving the PLO as a purely terrorist organization, Rabin preferred to negotiate with a Palestinian leadership from the territories. Thus, Rabin continued to ignore the PLO and its chairman, Yasir Arafat (Ramon, 2020, p. 1325; Bar-Zohar, 2006, pp. 604-605; Yatom, 2009, p. 300; Pundak, 2013, p. 16; Inbar, 2004, p. 199; Kurtzer et al., 2013, p. 38).

At that time, talks were underway in Washington between an Israeli delegation and a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, which comprised local representatives from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In practice, however, the Palestinian team in the joint delegation was controlled by and received instructions from the PLO leadership in Tunisia, headed by Arafat (Khalidi, 2013, p. 48). In fact, these talks were futile and did not yield any significant outcome. Arafat, who wanted to prove to the Israeli side that any progress with the Palestinians could be reached only through direct negotiations with the PLO, did not grant the Palestinian delegation in Washington any mandate (Bar-Zohar, 2006, pp. 614-615; Kurtzer et al., 2013, p. 32; Indyk, 2009). Indeed, Arafat and the PLO leadership in Tunis were concerned about the strengthening of the Palestinian leadership in the territories, both from PLO supporters such as Faisal Husseini, and from Hamas, whose militant line vis-à-vis Israel gained popularity among the Palestinian public. Fearing that an alternative local Palestinian leadership would be established at his own expense, Arafat hoped to conduct direct negotiations with Israel (Inbari, 1994, pp. 172-178). In fact, already in September 1992, senior PLO official Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) submitted a proposal to Israel through Egypt to open secret negotiations with the PLO (Makovsky, 1996, p. 22). Another proposal to Israel by Abu Mazen's emissaries was sent in October to Rabin's associate, MK Ephraim Sneh (Sneh, 2002, p. 23). But Rabin, for his

part, was adamant on not negotiating with the PLO, preferring the format of the Washington talks in which a local Palestinian team was a constituent member of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

In parallel with the Washington track, a channel of secret talks began in January 1993 in Oslo between Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundak, two Israeli academics linked to Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, and senior PLO official Ahmed Qurie, known as Abu Ala (Hirschfeld, 2000, pp. 92-96; Pundak, 2013, pp. 38-65). After two meetings during January-February 1993, at the end of which both parties proposed a draft interim agreement on the idea of "Gaza first" (Beilin, 1997, pp. 79-87; Pundak, 2013, pp. 90-128; Qurie, 2008, pp. 40-96; Hirschfeld, 2000, pp. 111-112), Beilin realized that it was time to involve Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. Thus, on February 14, Beilin disclosed the secret channel in Oslo to Peres and presented him with the draft as a document that could serve as a basis for American mediation between the parties. A few days later, Peres showed the draft to Rabin, who for his part did not object to continuation of the Oslo channel. In addition, while skeptical of what was underway in Norway, the Prime Minister stressed that he feared that it could harm the Washington talks. Therefore, Rabin demanded to continue the channel as private academic talks and not create the impression that he himself was behind it (Beilin, 1997, pp. 87-89).

Meanwhile, with negotiation tracks in both Washington and Oslo ongoing, Rabin continued to warn implicitly of the threat of a bi-national state, and argued that a separation from the Palestinians must be created to ensure Israel's security:

The main question around which there are differences of opinion is what the solution is...whether to annex the two million Palestinians living in the territories and turn them into Israeli residents, or to find a way

of coexistence while preserving the Jewish uniqueness of the State of Israel as the state of the Jews...We must bring separation to provide security... Without separation, there will be no personal security...The sharper the separation, the more security will be restored. (Rabin, 1993)

In May, Rabin agreed to Peres's proposal to raise the level of the Oslo talks by sending an official representative of Israel, Foreign Ministry Director General Uri Savir. However, Rabin conditioned continuing the Oslo track on the continuation of the Washington talks, maintaining the secrecy of the Norwegian channel, and not raising the issue of Jerusalem in the talks (Beilin, 1997, pp. 100-101; Gil, 2018, pp. 127-128).

During June and July, the two sides continued to meet secretly in Oslo and held five rounds of talks (Beilin, 1997, pp. 111-119; Pundak, 2013, pp. 250-314; Savir, 1998, pp. 53-72). In parallel, Rabin used Health Minister Haim Ramon's connections to Arafat adviser Ahmed Tibi in order to advance the negotiations. Rabin's aim was to define the Palestinian positions accurately and identify whether it was possible to conclude a deal that would meet his basic demands, namely: engagement in a gradual process with interim agreements; the final status of Jerusalem would only be decided during the permanent status talks; all of the settlements would stay in place during the interim period; and security authority in the territories would remain under Israeli control. On August 16 Rabin received Arafat's positive reply to his conditions through the Ramon-Tibi channel, and thus decided that the moment was ripe to close a deal with the PLO (Neria, 2016, pp. 63-66; Ramon, 2020, pp. 1327-1335). That day Rabin met with Peres and gave him the green light (Pundak, 2013, p. 356), and four days later, on August 20, both sides initialed the agreement in Norway (Gil, 2018, pp. 138-140; Pundak, 2013, pp. 363-367; Beilin, 1997, p. 135; Savir, 1998, p. 78).

On August 30, Rabin presented the secret agreement to his government. The 18-member government (13 from Labor, four from Meretz, and one from Shas) would clearly support Rabin's policy, and indeed, the agreement with the PLO was approved with sixteen in favor and two abstaining (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 85). After the Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement was accomplished through an exchange of letters on September 9-10, the Declaration of Principles (DOP) was signed between the Government of Israel and the PLO on September 13 in Washington. According to the accords, the PLO acknowledged the State of Israel and pledged to reject violence, while Israel recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and as a partner for negotiations. Furthermore, both sides agreed that the aim of the negotiation was to establish a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, an elected Council for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, for a transitional period not exceeding five years, leading to a permanent settlement based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. On security, both sides concurred that during the interim period, Israel would maintain all the security responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including the issues of external security and border crossings (Declaration of Principles, 1993; Singer, 2021a). Both sides agreed that the interim period would maintain the status quo of East Jerusalem and the Israeli settlements, meaning that East Jerusalem would remain under Israeli sovereignty and the settlements would not be evacuated. Thus, Israel and the PLO agreed that the future of the two issues would be discussed during the permanent status negotiation talks (Singer, 2021a; Morris, 2003, p. 578).

On September 23, ten days after signing the DOP in Washington, the agreement with the PLO received the support of the Knesset with 61 in favor versus 50 opposed (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 85). In terms of securitization theory, Prime Minister Rabin (securitizing actor), who

contended that the bi-national state option posed an existential threat to the State of Israel (referent object), obtained the support of the government and Knesset (audiences). Thus, Rabin's first phase of securitization was completed.

Phase Two: Gaza-Jericho Agreement

The next step after signing the DOP was to reach an agreement with the PLO, in which the Gaza Strip and Jericho area would be transferred to the Palestinians. On October 13, negotiations began in Taba on the Gaza-Jericho agreement. The Israeli delegation was headed by Deputy Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, an appointment that illustrated that the security aspect was paramount for Prime Minister Rabin in negotiations with the Palestinians (Savir, 1998, pp. 120-122).

However, not everyone in the Knesset shared Rabin's securitization policy, namely, that the agreement with the Palestinians was the way to deal with an existential threat. Rabin's most prominent critic was opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who delivered a clear message against the Oslo Accords with Arafat and the PLO. In essence, Netanyahu asserted that the Oslo Accords constituted a security threat to the State of Israel, since they would lead to an Israeli withdrawal to 1967 borders and the establishment of a Palestinian state. For the Palestinians, Netanyahu argued, the Oslo Accords are part of the PLO's "phased plan" adopted in 1974, whereby all the territories of Palestine, from the sea to the river, will be liberated in stages (Netanyahu, 1993). Thus, in parallel to the negotiations between Israel and the PLO, the opponents of the peace process in the Israeli political arena increased their protest against the upcoming Gaza-Jericho Agreement. The settler leadership, Likud, and other right wing opposition parties, which rejected the negotiations with the PLO, continued their protest by conducting mass demonstrations, hoping to persuade the Israeli public to oppose

the peace process with the PLO (Goldstein, 2006, pp. 419-421; Sprinzak, 2001, p. 70).

On the Palestinian side, there were also elements that opposed the peace process. For Hamas, the largest Palestinian group opposing Arafat and Fatah, as well as for Islamic Jihad, any compromise and negotiation with Israel was considered a betrayal of the Palestinian interest and Islamic heresy (Gunning, 2007, p. 199; Bartal, 2012, pp. 96-97; Mishal & Sela, 2006, p. 83). Furthermore, Hamas leaders understood that the peace process with Israel completely distanced them from participating in the institutions of the future Palestinian state (Eldar, 2012, p. 70). Therefore, in order to sabotage the peace process, Hamas and Islamic Jihad began to execute terror attacks against Israeli targets, murdering twelve Israelis during October-December 1993. Despite the terrorism, which raised doubts among Israelis about the peace process with the Palestinians, Prime Minister Rabin decided to continue with the negotiations with Arafat and the PLO. However, there were wide gaps between Israel and the PLO regarding how to implement the DOP, mainly on issues of security and border control that according to the agreement were expected to remain under Israeli control. The breakthrough eventually was reached in February 1994, after the Palestinians had no choice but to accept the Israeli security demands. Given the lack of compromise regarding security control among the Israeli side, the Palestinians would otherwise not have been able to reach any agreement with Israel (Savir, 1998, pp. 119-144; Neriah, 2016, pp. 104-305).

Meanwhile, after an Israeli conducted a terror attack in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron in February 1994 and murdered 29 Palestinians, Palestinian terrorism intensified. Hamas and Islamic Jihad began to conduct suicide terror attacks, especially inside buses crowded with civilians, murdering fifteen Israelis during April (Steinberg, 2008, pp. 279-280; Chronology, 1994a; Chehab, 2007, pp. 55-56; Hroub, 2006, p. 52). Israel responded directly against the

Palestinian terror organizations by arresting hundreds of their activists. Nevertheless, despite the continuation of the Palestinian violence, Rabin decided not to halt the negotiations with Arafat and the PLO (Inbar, 2004, p. 206; Chronology, 1994a).

At the end of April 1994, Israel and the PLO reached the Gaza-Jericho Agreement. The accord stipulated that Israel would withdraw from the Jericho area and 83 percent of the Gaza Strip and Jericho (Arieli, 2018, p. 162), and transfer the responsibility for public order and internal security to the PA, while the IDF would control both overall security of Israelis in these areas and the borders with Jordan and Egypt. Furthermore, both sides agreed on the establishment of the PA and its security forces, and on the release of 5000 Palestinian prisoners (Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, 1994). On May 1, the Israeli government unanimously approved the Gaza-Jericho accord, and thus authorized Rabin to sign it three days later, on May 4, in Cairo (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 85). On May 10, the agreement was submitted to the Knesset for its approval.

After the right-wing opposition in the Knesset decided not to attend the vote by claiming that most of the Israeli public rejected the agreement with the PLO, the Knesset voted in favor of the Gaza-Jericho agreement with 52 supporters and no opponents (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 85). Hence, Rabin's securitization policy managed to pass the second stage, creating a partial separation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Phase Three: Interim Agreement

After signing the Gaza-Jericho Agreement, Israel began to implement the accord with the PLO, transferring control of the territories to the PA. Moreover, as agreed, Israel released 4000 Palestinian prisoners (Chronology, 1994b). One of the significant outcomes from the agreements with the Palestinians was the peace accord signed with Jordan on October 26, 1994: despite his informal relationship with Israel, Jordan's King Hussein was unable to sign a peace treaty

with it until some progress was made in relations between Israel and the PLO (Goldstein, 2006, pp. 429-432; Shlaim, 2009, pp. 456-467; Inbar, 2004, pp. 209-211).

While Rabin's expectation was that the return of Arafat and the establishment of the PA would decrease Palestinian terrorism, the reality on the ground proved otherwise. Hamas and Islamic Jihad continued to execute terror attacks against Israelis, in October 1994, murdering 23 Israeli civilians in Tel Aviv, and in January 1995 at the Beit Lid junction, killing 21 Israelis (Morris, 2003, pp. 583; Chronology, 1995a). Rabin urged Arafat to disarm Hamas and the rest of the Palestinian terror organizations, but Arafat refused to confront them. Moreover, Arafat's remarks that compared the Oslo Accords to the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, in which the goal is to eliminate the Jews, also encouraged doubts on the Israeli side whether the PLO leader was a true partner for peace (Karsh, 2004, pp. 74-75). Yet despite the severe terror attacks and Arafat's poor effort to combat terrorism, Rabin decided to continue with the peace process, aiming to expand Palestinian control on the West Bank (Savir, 1998, p. 176). Eventually, Rabin instructed the Israeli negotiation team to present his basic security positions, whereby Israel would control the external security and borders, settlements, and bypass roads on the West Bank (Savir, 1998, p. 200).

In May, during a debate in the Knesset, Rabin reiterated his securitization policy by warning against a bi-national state:

We are in the process of resolving the conflict between us and the Palestinians. There are indeed differences of opinions in this house between two worldviews. We believe that the dream of generations of Jews since the destruction of the Second Temple and their prayer to return to Zion are not for the establishment of a bi-national state. The dream of generations of Jews in today's reality

is to establish a Jewish state with Jerusalem as its capital...not a bi-national state but a Palestinian entity on our side. (Rabin, 1995a)

In the meantime, the negotiation saw progress, as both sides agreed that the West Bank would be divided into three areas. Within each area, the security control and public responsibilities would be divided between Israel and the PA (Area A: full Palestinian control; Area B: full Palestinian civilian control with full Israeli security control; Area C: full Israeli control). Rabin also promised that by mid-1997, Israel would transfer to the Palestinians all the areas that were not of security importance to Israel, but he did not mention what would be the size of the territory (Savir, 1998, p. 219).

Although the negotiations continued and both sides were on the verge of finalizing an agreement, Hamas launched two suicide terror attacks during July-August, murdering nine Israelis (Chronology, 1995b). In order not to allow Palestinian terrorism to dictate the agenda, Rabin ordered to suspend the talks for a week, after which the negotiations were resumed (Savir, 1998, p. 248). Realizing that Arafat was not making enough of an effort to fight Palestinian terrorism, Rabin decided that it would be possible to judge Arafat's actions only after the election. Assuming that it would be difficult for Arafat to fight against Hamas and the rest of the Palestinian terror organizations prior the elections, Rabin believed that the PLO chairman would be able to comply with Israel's demands after receiving a mandate from the Palestinian public (Ya'alon, 2018, pp. 83-84).

In late August, both sides agreed that Israel would transfer the PA 26 percent (3 percent of Area A and 23 percent of Area B) of the West Bank (Arieli, 2018, p. 165), and that the status quo in Jerusalem would remain until the permanent status agreement (Chronology, 1996a). Eventually, the Interim Agreement (Oslo II) was signed on September 28, 1995. The accord stipulated that Israel would withdraw from the

Palestinian cities and villages during October-December 1995, and that all the security and public responsibilities in those areas would be transferred to the PA. Moreover, both sides agreed that elections for the Palestinian Council and for the chairmanship would be held during January-April 1996, and that the permanent status negotiation would start in May 1996 and be completed no later than in three years (Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement, 1995).

“We prefer a Jewish state, even if not in all parts of the Land of Israel, over a bi-national state that will emerge if 2.2 million Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are annexed.”

After the Israeli government unanimously approved the Oslo II agreement (with eighteen who supported and two who abstained), Rabin also needed the support of the Knesset (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 86). On October 5, the Knesset convened to decide whether to support the agreement with the Palestinians. During the session, while asking the Knesset to endorse the accord, Rabin reiterated his warning concerning the bi-national state threat, claiming that unless a full separation from the Palestinians is implemented, the existence of Israel as a Jewish state would be under a significant peril:

Today, after countless wars and bloody events, we control more than two million Palestinians through the IDF and run their lives through a civilian administration...The government has decided to give a chance for peace... In the framework of the permanent solution, we aspire primarily to establish the State of Israel as a Jewish state, at least eighty percent of its citizens will be Jews...Even before the elections for the present Knesset, we have made it clear to the electorate that we prefer a Jewish state, even if

not in all parts of the Land of Israel, over a bi-national state that will emerge if 2.2 million Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are annexed...We had to choose between Greater Israel, which means a bi-national state with a population of 5.4 million Jews and more than three million Palestinians...We have chosen a Jewish state because we are convinced that a bi-national state with millions of Palestinian Arabs will not be able to fulfill the universal Jewish destiny of the State of Israel, which is the Jewish state...We call sincerely to all the citizens of the State of Israel, as well as the Palestinian residents, to give the opportunity to establish peace. (Rabin, 1995b)

Yet again, not all Knesset members agreed with Rabin's securitization policy. After Rabin's remarks, Netanyahu warned against the imminent agreement with the PLO:

And here lies before us the Oslo II agreement...What emerges from it is not your intention to establish a Jewish state, but to jeopardize the one that already exists; not to be separated from the Arabs living in Judea and Samaria, but to relinquish the security that the areas of Judea and Samaria give us. You abandoned Greater Israel in favor of a tiny, dwarfed and shrunken state whose security depends on your friend Arafat...You are creating an immediate threat, a terrorist threat, a strategic threat, and a threat to the very existence of the state...You are endangering the security of the State of Israel and its citizens. (Netanyahu, 1995)

Eventually, the majority of the Knesset agreed with Rabin's securitization policy, and on October 6, 1995, the Knesset approved the

Interim agreement with 61 supporters against 59 opponents (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 86). Thus, Rabin successfully completed the third stage of his securitization policy, creating a separation between Israel and the Palestinians.

The Oslo Accords as a Security Instrument

In retrospect, 28 years after the signing of the DOP and the launching of the Oslo process, it seems that Rabin's security move to curb the bi-national state threat was successful, if only in part. Contrary to Peres's idyllic vision of a new Middle East, it seems that Rabin's security vision of creating a political separation between Israel and the Palestinians, as illustrated by the securitization theory, has stood the test of time. In practice, the agreements signed between Rabin's government and the PLO led to the establishment of the PA and the creation of an almost complete political separation between Israel and the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a status that significantly blocked the threat of a bi-national state. True, an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement is not in sight at this stage for many reasons. But in terms of Rabin's security vision, as expressed in his speech in the Knesset on October 5, 1995, the Palestinians have since had an entity that is less than a state, while Israel has retained all its security assets such as the Jordan Valley, settlements, and Jerusalem (Even, 2013, p. 78). Thus, the securitization process led by Rabin, who strove to separate Israel from the Palestinians, helped to overcome the threat of a bi-national state.

It is difficult to say how Rabin envisioned a permanent agreement with the Palestinians. But if his October 1995 Knesset speech did reflect his views, it is very likely that a permanent Israeli-Palestinian agreement would not have been signed. It is possible that Rabin even understood that the difference in positions between the parties did not allow a permanent agreement to be reached, and consequently saw the Oslo Accords as an instrument for creating

a separation. The fact that he continued the Oslo process even when he realized that Arafat had made no substantial endeavor to fight Palestinian terror organizations only reinforces the claim that eliminating the threat of a bi-national state and creating separation was Rabin's top strategic goal in adopting the Oslo Accords.

When it comes to the theoretical analysis of national security decision making, securitization theory and the analysis of Rabin's speech help us understand his broad set of considerations and his view of the Oslo Accords as a security move to create a political separation between Israel and the Palestinians. In addition, the examination of the Oslo Accords through securitization theory lenses provides a different angle to this historic event: not only as peace agreements and a reconciliation process with the Palestinians, but as a security move whose main goal is to curb the threat of a bi-national state, thus securing Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state. Similar to military force, diplomacy and political agreements are also tools in the hands of the decision makers to achieve security, as the Oslo Accords well illustrate. There is no doubt that Rabin's set of considerations must have included other incentives for his decision to adopt the Oslo Accords. But viewing the Oslo Accords through securitization theory helps to focus on the main considerations before Rabin's eyes when he embraced the Oslo track, which were first and foremost to ensure the security and future of the Jewish state.

Conclusion

While military measures are the most prevalent recourse to confront security threats, non-military means such as diplomacy and the pursuit of peace are other ways in which countries can overcome existential threats. Through the prism of securitization theory, this article examines how the State of Israel, which has experienced security challenges since its establishment, tackled an existential threat

with methods of peace. Perceiving that the continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip poses an existential threat to the future of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, the Rabin government decided to sign agreements with the PLO, whereby a Palestinian entity would be established in those territories. Thus, by separating between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Rabin and his government wished to securitize this imminent danger of a bi-national state. In terms of securitization theory, Rabin, who performed the role of the securitizing actor, perceived the bi-national idea as an existential threat to the State of Israel (referent object). In order to securitize this perceived danger, Rabin needed to obtain the support of the Israeli government and Knesset, which both performed the role of the audience.

Nevertheless, not everyone agreed with Rabin's securitization policy, which underscores that threats are not necessarily "real" but "perceived," as securitization theory suggests. Thus, while Rabin perceived that the agreements with the PLO were the measures needed to deal with an existential threat in the form of a bi-national state, Netanyahu asserted that these pacts themselves constituted an existential threat to the State of Israel. Eventually, this debate was decided by the audience, as at the end of the securitization process, the government and the Knesset supported Rabin's securitization policy.

This article, using a theoretical perspective of securitization theory, thus introduces a different approach to the Oslo Accords, viewing them as a security move led by Rabin to securitize the bi-national state threat. Departing from academic literature discussing Israel's national security through conventional analytical lenses, this article proposes examining decision making processes in the field of national security from the perspective of securitization theory. For example, it would be constructive to analyze other events (e.g., the Abraham Accords), from perspectives other than peace and reconciliation.

The securitization process led by Rabin was a necessary move, to prove to the Israeli public and to the international community that Israel made an effort to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, but above all, to counter the bi-national state threat.

In this context, while under optimal conditions the Oslo Accords could have ended in Israeli-Palestinian peace, in practice they were used by Rabin, who sought to overcome the threat of a bi-national state, as an instrument for creating a political separation, even partial, between Israel and the Palestinians. Thus despite justified claims about the failure of the Oslo process (Karsh, 2016; Schueftan, 1999), and notwithstanding its shortcomings, the securitization process led by Rabin was a necessary move, to prove to the Israeli public and to the international community that Israel made an effort to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, but above all, to counter the bi-national state threat and secure Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state.

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