

In This Edition

Israel, Europe and the Peace Process

Mark. A. Heller

Heller analyzes the factors that motivated Israel to ward off European involvement in the Israeli-Arab conflict and asserts that Europe's potential contribution in the economic sphere and the regional committees justify settling Israel- European Union differences and allow the EU to strengthen the peace process in the Middle East.



The Motivation for Serving in the IDF - in the Mirror of Time

Reuven Gal

Gal presents the range of motivation among Israeli youth for joining the Israel Defense Forces. He lists four types of motivation - survival, ideological, normative, and individualistic - and describes how the changes in social and political circumstances brought about the adoption of the respective forms of motivation.



The Hamas and Terror: An Alternative Explanation for the Use of Violence

Uri Slonim

Slonim describes the effects of the peace process and the Palestinian Authority on Hamas and asserts that the organization has become increasingly unstable. He envisions a split within Hamas and splinter groups launching a terrorist campaign against Israel as the peace process advances.

The Negotiations with Syria: Quo Vadis?

Shlomo Brom

After a break of nearly five years, formal negotiations with Syria were resumed under U.S. auspices on Dec. 15 in Washington in an effort to complete a peace accord by the end of 2000. The debate in Israel regarding peace with Syria contains numerous assumptions regarding the negotiating process and the positions of each side. Although many of these assumptions have little basis in fact, they influence Israeli public opinion and the leadership. Thus, it is crucial to understand past negotiations to gauge the prospects for the success of the current renewal of peace talks as well as determining Israeli policy.

This has been the third effort over the last decade to launch peace negotiations between Israel and Syria. The talks began after the Madrid Conference in November 1991 and during the first stage, which took place during the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, official

bilateral talks were held in the U.S. State Department. These talks were polemical, reflecting Syria's disbelief that an agreement could be reached and Israel's unwillingness to conduct negotiations that might lead to an accord. In a newspaper interview some years later, Shamir acknowledged that he had no intention of reaching a peace agreement.

During the subsequent government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the nature of negotiations gradually changed. The negotiations reflected a sincere intent to achieve a peace agreement. During 1994-95, the peak of the talks, negotiations were conducted by the ambassadors and military chiefs of staff of Israel and Syria. At certain points, President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher were also involved. Clinton held two meetings with Syrian President Hafez Assad and several with Rabin. Christopher conducted

several shuttle missions between Jerusalem and Damascus.

From the start, negotiations with Syria were fraught with difficulties. Some of the reasons include the following:

Assad's personality: The president of Syria has been extremely cautious, slow, closed, hesitant, and suspicious. He provides no room for maneuver for his negotiators. He changes his positions gradually, if at all, and rejects the need for compromise during negotiations. By the same token, Assad does not understand the Israeli system, the value of public diplomacy and its influence on Israeli public opinion. His consent to allow Foreign Minister A-Shaara to meet Prime Minister Barak in Washington may indicate that Assad is starting to understand the significance of public diplomacy. But the behavior of A-Shaara during the opening ceremony shows that this understanding remains very limited. A-Shaara refused to shake hands with Barak even when they were out of view of reporters

Assad's unwieldy negotiating style: The Syrian president prefers to limit contacts to intermediaries and U.S. mediators. Assad shuns direct contacts with Israel, regarding this as a concession to Israeli demands for normalization. During the opening of talks in December 1999 Assad ordered his foreign minister to present a polemical statement. For his part, Assad refused to attend the opening, maintaining that a meeting with Israeli

leaders should be accorded only at the successful completion of talks rather than as a tool to achieve agreement. This policy has resulted in a slow negotiating process given to misunderstandings as communications were relayed through emissaries and mediators.

During his government, Rabin was inhibited in negotiations with both Syria and the Palestinians by a vociferous Israeli political opposition. This prevented Rabin from presenting the Israeli public with the painful concessions he believed were required to reach agreement on both tracks.

U.S. shortcomings in mediation efforts: In its eagerness to achieve gains, the Clinton administration tended to blur differences between Syria and Israel in key areas. As a result, U.S. officials were sometimes imprecise in transmitting messages between the sides. This approach damaged negotiations and created distrust between Syria and Israel.

The gap between Syrian and Israeli positions: Part of the gap stems from the precedents set during previous Israeli negotiations with Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Assad has insisted that he obtain no less than that which Israel conceded to its other two Arab neighbors. In the peace accords with Amman and Cairo, Israel withdrew from all territories captured during and after the 1967 Six Day War. The exception was the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which belonged to Jordan and Egypt, respectively, in 1967 and now

the basis of talks with the Palestinians. Another precedent Assad insists on following is the 1974 separation agreement on the Golan Heights, which sets a ceiling on the number of troops in a zone equal in size on both the Israeli and Syrian sides of the ceasefire line. Assad wants the same symmetry in any Israeli demand for the demilitarization of the Golan Heights, which is 60 kilometers from Damascus. This short distance makes it difficult for the Syrians to accept a large demilitarized zone.

By contrast, Israel must condition full withdrawal from the Golan Heights on deep and asymmetrical security arrangements similar to those agreed between Israel and Egypt to reduce the security risks emanating from such a withdrawal. The limited geographical dimensions of the Golan Heights and the proximity of Damascus make any compromise between the two opposing positions very difficult.

Israeli negotiations in 1994-5 dealt with four main issues: Withdrawal from the Golan Heights, withdrawal timetable, normalization, and security arrangements. From the start, the Syrians demanded full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. It later specified a return to the June 4, 1967 lines. Syria's willingness to intensify the talks came only after Christopher assured Damascus that Israel was prepared to withdraw completely from the Golan Heights. Regardless of whether Israel actually did

communicate such a message to Assad, or Christopher on his own initiative told Assad of Rabin's purported agreement to a full withdrawal, based on the U.S. secretary presenting a hypothetical question to the prime minister. Actually, Israel stressed that its willingness to withdraw depended on fulfillment of its demands on such issues as security and normalization.

Syria agreed to discuss Israeli concerns once Damascus understood that it had obtained a commitment for a withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights. The first discussions began on such issues as a withdrawal timetable and elements of normalization. In late 1994, once progress was made on these two issues, negotiations began on security arrangements. The first Israeli delegation was headed by Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Ehud Barak, today prime minister. The Syrian side was headed by Syrian Chief of Staff Gen. Hikmat Shihabi. Quickly, the two sides realized how far apart they were in defining their security needs.

Israel presented several demands during the first meeting of the military chiefs in December 1994. These included a reduction of the Syrian army, a wide demilitarized zone, an asymmetric reduction of forces along the Israeli-Syrian border with Damascus bearing the brunt of responsibility, continued Israeli presence in its early-warning station on the Golan Heights. The Israeli demands were rejected by Damascus, which ended direct contacts.

The negotiations were renewed only after the United States mediated a so-called non-paper, or non-binding document, on the subject of security arrangements. The first section of the document satisfied Israeli interests in that it detailed the aims of the security arrangements. The second section served Syrian interests by pointing to the need for symmetry and limiting the areas where security arrangements would apply, although it left some opening to asymmetric arrangements when the geographic reality justifies it. The document appeared acceptable to both sides.

Agreement over the non-paper led to a second meeting between the Israeli and Syrian chiefs of staff in June 1995. This time the Israeli chief was Lt. Gen. Amnon Shahak. At this meeting, Israel abandoned its demand for a reduction of the Syrian army but reiterated the need for large-scale and asymmetrical security arrangements. The Israeli concession on the reduction of the militaries resulted from both Syria's harsh reaction as well as a realization that this would not benefit Israel, perceived as having a clear military advantage over Syria. Therefore, Israel decided to table the issue for the multilateral regional security talks, which Syria was boycotting. The meeting proceeded without incident and the two sides launched preparations for subsequent detailed negotiations by the military working groups.

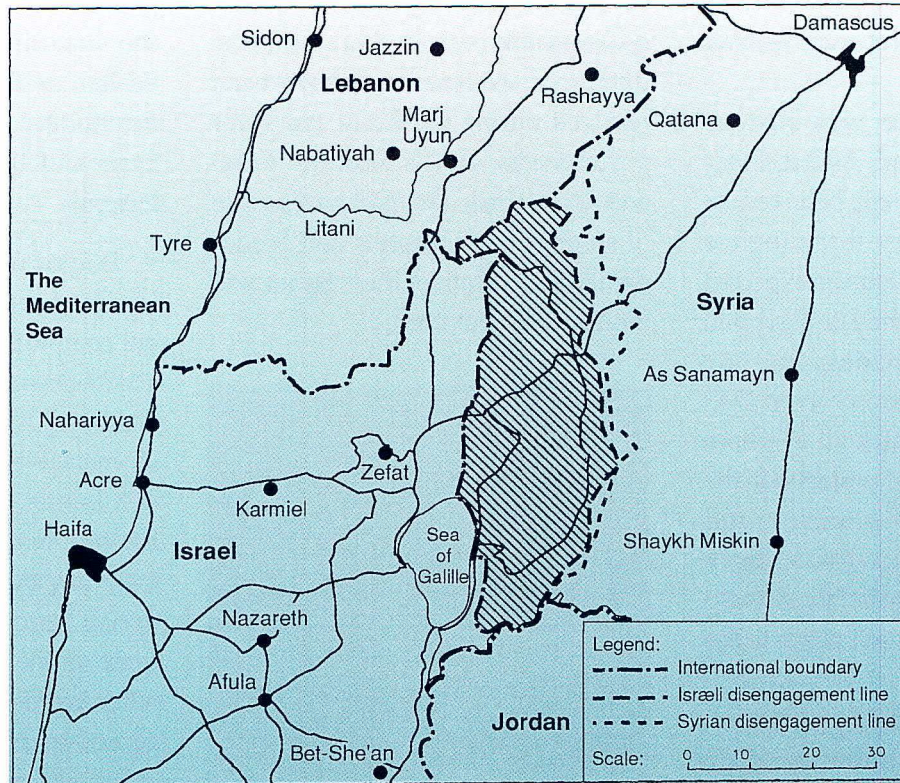
The assassination of Rabin in

November 1995 suspended the process for some time, but his successor, Shimon Peres, was determined to accelerate the pace of negotiations with Syria. The new Israeli premier accorded greater weight to the components of normalization and economic cooperation and less to the issue of the timetable for implementing the agreement. Peres also wanted to discuss water and tried to meet Assad in an attempt to prepare Israeli public opinion for withdrawal from the Golan Heights. The Syrian president refused the Israeli attempt at public diplomacy without a completed agreement. In the meantime, under U.S. auspices, both sides agreed to conduct intensive talks on non-territorial issues at Wye River Plantation in Maryland.

At the beginning, the Wye discussions dealt with normalization and the Syrians appeared ready to accept many of Israel's demands concerning full relations. This did not mean that Syria was ready to turn into an open and democratic country and agree to a warm relationship with Israel. At the next stage, security arrangements were discussed, with the two sides again being far apart. Peres realized the negotiations would not be concluded before elections and, amid a wave of Palestinian terrorist attacks in February and March 1996, decided to suspend the talks and call for early elections. Peres's aim was to renew negotiations after early national elections called for June of that year.

Peres, however, lost the June 1996

The Golan Heights: between Damascus and Haifa



Aryeh Shalev, *Israel and Syria: Peace and Security on the Golan*. Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies at Tel Aviv University and Papyrus Publishing House, 1993 (Hebrew). Map No. 6, p. 112.

elections and his successor, Benjamin Netanyahu, failed to renew direct contacts with Syria. Netanyahu used private mediators to send messages to Syria, details of which have remained unclear. But it appears that both countries stuck to their basic positions. Assad ended the indirect contacts once he realized that Netanyahu - despite initial hints - would not agree to a withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights. Still, it appears that Netanyahu extracted a Syrian agreement for an Israeli presence in a U.S. early-warning station on Mount

Hermon. Peres had considered such a proposal when he was prime minister, but did not manage to submit the compromise offer. One reason Peres hesitated was doubts by the military whether this would satisfy Israel's security needs.

Both Israel and Syria have been disappointed with the results of the negotiations during the Rabin, Peres and Netanyahu administrations, and trust between the two countries has deteriorated. Assad feels the Israeli side deceived him. He was led to believe that Israel regarded peace with

Syria as a priority. Instead, Israel appeared to prefer an agreement with the Palestinians and Jordan, which further isolated Syria. Assad also claimed that Israel had agreed to full withdrawal only to later deny such a commitment. Meanwhile, the Syrian president pointed to what he felt were such goodwill gestures as allowing Jewish emigration from Syria, helping to search for the Israeli soldiers missing in action, and ordering his foreign minister to give an interview to Israeli state television. Israel, Assad believes, gave nothing in return. In the end,

Assad feels he was used by Israel to improve its position in the Arab world by creating an illusion of peace without conceding anything.

The Israeli side was just as disappointed in Assad. As Israel saw it, the Syrian president behaved so stubbornly, so ornery that progress was impossible. The Israelis expected Assad to behave as the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, the late Jordan's King Hussein, or even PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, all of whom met Israeli leaders and understood the value of public diplomacy and goodwill gestures. Assad was simply not prepared to engage in this and help the Israeli leadership sell peace to the public.

In short, the root of the problem has been a deep misunderstanding between the two sides. Building such trust during the current talks will not be easy and requires courageous decisions by the leaders. One way to gain Syrian goodwill would be a public acknowledgement by Prime Minister Ehud Barak that the price of peace with Syria is full withdrawal from the Golan Heights. Barak could say that he is prepared to grant this in return for peace, normalization of relations and security arrangements. Such a move could elicit a Syrian declaration of its willingness for full peace with Israel. On one hand, such a declaration by Barak would quickly endanger his government coalition. On the other hand, many Israelis would welcome the prime minister's announcement.

Simply put, there are no shortcuts in Israeli-Syrian negotiations. Syrian spokespeople reiterate that most of the details of an agreement have been resolved during the Rabin and Peres governments. This is incorrect. Israel and Syria remain far apart on the issue of security arrangements and border demarcation. Both of these issues will require plenty of time.

The Israeli public should not be deluded regarding the parameters of any peace agreement with Syria. The public should be told clearly that Syria will not grant peace without withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights.

There are other questions that pertain to the lessons learned from the previous talks:


- **Is Assad afraid that normalization with Israel will endanger his regime?** Judging from negotiations during the Rabin and Peres governments, the answer appears to be no. Israeli demands for normalization did not result in a crisis and the positions of both sides appeared to narrow. The crises in the talks concerned issues of territory and security arrangements. Therefore, Assad has apparently taken the strategic decision to achieve full

peace with Israel. The Syrian president's main reasons are to ensure the smooth succession of his son, Bashar, as the elder Assad's health deteriorates, U.S. and Western aid to Syria and the return of the Golan Heights.

- **Is Syria willing to compromise on issues of territory?** The Syrians will not compromise on their demand for a withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights. But there could be some room for maneuver on the demarcation of a new border. The reason is that unlike the case with Egypt and Jordan (not including the West Bank), the Israeli-Syrian armistice lines were not the same as the international border. In other words, Syria and Israel never agreed to any boundary - however informal - before the 1967 war. The need for delineation of such a border could lead to some flexibility in Syria's insistence for a return to the June 4, 1967 lines, which had been the source of violent disagreement between the two countries.

- **Will the water issue prevent a peace agreement?** The answer appears to be no. The Syrians have made it clear that they don't want to harm Israel's water sources. If agreement is reached on all other points, the Syrians have indicated that they are ready to accommodate Israeli demands on the issue of water.

In principle, Israel and Syria have agreed to renew negotiations from the



point at which they had been suspended in 1996. Given the good will of the two sides, it is likely that both sides will succeed in specifying that point during the negotiations.

In the current negotiations, Israel should insist on the continuation of direct talks to prevent misunderstandings relayed by intermediaries. Israel must also focus on security arrangements, making them the test of Syria's willingness to achieve a peace agreement. The United States should be involved in these talks as Washington will be expected to provide financial assistance and security guarantees.

Negotiations can be accelerated by the formation of working groups that will focus on separate issues. It is not clear, however, whether the Syrians will agree to this. Assad - the

archetypical micro-manager - will likely be concerned about losing control.

Meanwhile, the Israeli public should not be deluded regarding the parameters of any peace agreement with Syria. The public should be told clearly that Syria will not grant peace without withdrawal from the entire Golan Heights. Opponents argue that such a government declaration amounts to a key concession and the relinquishing of Israel's main bargaining chip. This argument might have been valid in the beginning of negotiations but is no longer true after seven years of negotiations and contacts. The contours of a future agreement are clear to both sides and they include full withdrawal from the Golan Heights in return for security arrangements; normalization; water

arrangements and a timetable acceptable to Israel. The Israeli government must now send the same message to the Israeli public as to Syria.

It will be difficult to reach agreement with Syria. Negotiations are expected to be lengthy and tedious, and they will probably exceed assessments that the talks will be completed within months. It means that by June 2000 - Barak's deadline for full withdrawal from South Lebanon - he will not reach agreement with Syria and will have to consider unilateral withdrawal. Still, Israel and Syria are capable of narrowing the gap in their positions and signing a treaty that will return the Golan Heights to Syria and provide Israel with suitable security guarantees without a major infringement on Syria's sovereignty.