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Religious Fundamentalism vs. Security: What Really Drives LIKUD's Policies Towards Israeli Settlements?

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RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM VS. SECURITY: WHAT REALLY DRIVES LIKUD'S
POLICIES TOWARDS ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS?

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

By

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   I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Claudio V. Santo ENTITLED Religious Fundamentalism vs. Security: What Really Drives Likud's Policies Towards Israeli Settlements? BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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This research challenges the general claim that religious fundamentalist groups exercise great influence in Israeli policies regarding settlements in the Palestinian disputed territory. It proposes an alternate hypothesis that security considerations, rather, are the driving factors underlying the government's decision process. These two propositions are evaluated by assessing three settlement decisions made under a Likud led government – a common factor purposely chosen given the known symbiotic relation between religious fundamentalist groups and the Likud's right wing political movement. Upon assessing the return of Sinai to Egypt, the annexation of the Golan Heights, and the unilateral disengagement from Gaza Strip, this work concludes that Likud's leaders based their decisions mainly on security considerations, and that the fundamentalist agenda was ignored time and again despite massive protests and threats to the Likud coalition.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1

Introduction to the Question

Do Jewish religious groups actually influence the political process in determining Israeli settlement policies? Or does the government consider other aspects more relevant when making its decisions? This research will address these questions by assessing the developments leading to some of the key Israeli settlements decisions while testing two hypotheses: First, religious fundamentalist groups' pressure is a key driver of settlements policies. Second, security is the main motivation for the decisions put in place so far. But what really motivates this inquiry?

In 1979, immediately after Prime Minister Menachem Begin's signing of the peace treaty with Egypt, Zevulun Hammer, a leader of the young guard of the National Religious Party, publicly manifested his party's discontent based on rumors that the treaty would create a moratorium on settlements. In his public address, he claimed that if Israel "will not continue to settle or decides to remove settlements from Judea and Samaria – we will regard this as crossing over the red line we have set for ourselves on this issue" and "will affect our attitude to the government" (Hertzberg, 1986, p. 90). He concluded by threatening to resign from the coalition government, thereby bringing it down.

Moving a few decades ahead, as Israeli Prime Minister Sharon prepared to implement the Gaza Disengagement Plan in 2005, his policy of unilaterally removing settlers from the Gaza Strip faced strong public resistance. Groups of Jewish religious fundamentalists, along with affected settlers, organized massive street protests aimed to block any government compromise of territory, restricting settlements, or other activity contrary to their messianic view of a "Grand Israel" (Newman, 2005, p. 202).

These are only two of many examples that scholars present when defending the relevance of religious movements in shaping Israeli policies regarding its disputed territories. Throughout the literature addressing this topic, it is common to find statements such as Sprinzak's claim that fundamentalists groups "introduced a new component to the life of the nationalist right – operational messianism," (1989, p. 173). Another example is Hellinger's portrayal of the Merkaz HaRav school of thought as a "decisive factor through its impact on the cultural and political process taking place in Israel" as well as asserting that "religious Zionists…carried significant weight in leading the opposition to Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's Oslo Agreement…and to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's …Gaza disengagement" (2008, p. 533; 546). Or Lustick's even more direct claim that, "despite divisions on the Arab side, and the intransigence of many Palestinians, it is the Jewish fundamentalist movement that has emerged as the greatest obstacle to meaningful negotiations toward a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace settlement" (1988, p. 3).

Without a doubt there is a well established network of Israeli groups motivated by a messianic fundamentalist agenda. Moreover, it is undeniable that these groups work furiously to push the government to comply with their demands and adopt their views of the holy land of Israel. Nevertheless, the fact that there is pressure on the government does not necessarily mean that policies are being established based on these efforts. Testing this relationship and proposing an alternate causality are the goals of this work.

Therefore, this thesis will address this topic in three parts. Initially, it will assess the literature on the question of religious influence in Israeli politics, focusing on the main trends and evidence that scholars tend to address. Next, it will test the two hypotheses by analyzing three significant case studies related to settlement decisions. Lastly, it will evaluate the

implications of the findings, and the consequences of such, in implementing future policies on this subject.

As established in the title, this work will limit its assessment to a single political party: Likud. The reason for adopting this condition is the generally accepted view among scholars that the Likud counts religious fundamentalists as a significant part of its constituency. As Lustick puts it, "a large measure" of some fundamentalist groups' "success has been due to the symbiotic relationship" those entities, especially the Gush Emunin, "forged with the Likud, Israel's major right-wing political party" (1988, p. 8). Given the expectation that if there is a religious influence taking place, it would almost certainly have happened under Likud control, this translates into a case selection focused on most-likely cases in relation to the hypothesis being challenged – the influence of religious pressure.

There is also a need to clarify how this research will approach the concept of Jewish fundamentalism. There are many interpretations as to what one may consider a fundamentalist movement, although in general such perceptions are related to their implications for politics. Groups such as Haredim (God-fearing ones) and the Mizrahi (national religious movement) might fall under the category of what is generally considered religious fundamentalists, but extremely contradictory values are found among such. The Haredim, for instance, does not engage actively in politics. Its members' lives focus on carefully fulfilling the countless rules of the Halacha, self-segregation from the general society, obsessive ritualism, and most importantly, indifference or opposition to Zionist goals. On the other hand, despite also seeking strict observance of the Halacha, the Mizrahi does so with the intent to "integrate [it] with full participation in modern, Zionist society," and significantly exercises its power through its political arm – the National Religious Party – seeking the "enforcement of the religious status

quo" and the "establishment of Jewish sovereignty over the whole Land of Israel" (Lustick, For

the Land and the Lord, 1988).

For the purposes of this work, however, fundamentalism is taken as a "style of political

participation characterized by unusually close and direct links between one's fundamental beliefs

and political behavior designated to effect radical change" (Lustick, 1988, p. 5). As Lustick puts

it, this approach allows this research to categorize the level of fundamentalism of agents based

on the extent of their unwillingness to compromise, the transcendental authority guiding their

behavior, and their political engagement to "bring a rapid and comprehensive change" (1988, p.

6). Perhaps, the best group to represent this fundamentalist description would the Gush Emunin,

whose agenda will be further explored in this work. Although such specific characterization of

fundamentalism might narrow the applicability of this research's conclusions, it will on the other

hand test the hypothesis of security consideration against the type of religious movement that

actively exercises its political power to advance its messianic aspirations.

Lastly, it is relevant to contextualize Zionism as a strong influence driving both the

fundamentalist and the security agenda regarding the Jewish people's connection to the land of

Israel. From the religious viewpoint, Zionism helped justify and materialize the vehicle to

advance fundamentalist messianic goals. As scholar Moshe Hellinger rightfully stated, the

Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva – a religious-Zionism college in Jerusalem – has "created the most

political theology in our time," which used the Theodore Herzl's secular Zionism as the first step

of the redemption of Israel." According to Hellinger, to achieve the next "deterministic stage in

Israel's redemption, it [was] necessary to create a deep synthesis between the holy and the

secular, between the spiritual and the earthly-political dimensions of reality – a synthesis that

would take into account the uniqueness of the Jewish people and its land" (2008, p. 534). Based

on this type of view regarding the role of the Zionist ideology, religious fundamentalists find it impossible to accept Jewish compromise of "sacred" land to appease Palestinian's demands (Lustick, Israel's Dangerous Fundamentalists, 1987).

As mentioned above, not all religious groups shared the same views on this matter. In his research regarding settlements in the West Bank, scholar Moshe Amon refers to professor Leibovitz as a perfect example of this contradictory view: "Religious arguments in favor of annexing the occupied territories are just hypocritical expressions of turning he Jewish religion into a disguise for Israeli nationalism…the mere idea that a certain state or place could be sacred is idolatry" (2004, p. 53).

On the other hand, Zionism takes a different shape when related to matters of politics. As stated by Benyamin Zeev Begin - son of former Prime Minister Menachem Begin, a Likud member of the Israeli Knesset and chairman of the National Security Policy – "our Zionist stand is based on the Zionist goal of the creation of a safe haven for the Jewish nation in the land of Israel." He continues its argument claiming that such a stand "rests on two pillars: the right of the Jewish nation to the land of Israel and the right of the Jewish state to national security, to allow its sons and daughters to live in freedom" (2004, p. 21). Such a commitment to this political view of Zionism, however, can be revised given the right constraints. A good example is found in the decisions that Menachem Begin eventually had to make. As a Prime Minister, Begin found himself changing his view regarding clinging to the disputed territories "as he approached a position where he was required to make government decisions," consequently overcoming "the dissonance caused by the contradiction between ideology and reality." (Naor, 2000, p. 184). Based on this view, the ideology becomes a medium to achieve political goals.

For the purposes of this work, therefore, Zionism acts as a common link between these two competing arguments. The key difference is how its ideology is applied to support either argument's goal. More specifically, while groups advancing an agenda based on security considerations are willing to compromise in order to achieve its goals, groups subscribing to a religious fundamentalist view are not.

Research Design

The question next is whether the religious influence is actually significant when Israel's government determines its settlements policies and, if it is, to what extent. The approach of this research is to address these questions by testing two hypotheses: 1) religious movements and their messianic plans are key drivers in establishing settlements policies, or 2) Israel's security concerns derived from the regional hostility toward the Jewish state is the actual reason. In doing so, this work will evaluate the two independent variables, religious influence and security considerations, in relation to the dependent variable, decisions on settlement policies, under the constant variable, the Knesset operating under a Likud led coalition.

The main objective of this research is to challenge the prevailing perception that religious groups' influence has significantly guided Israeli decisions on settlement policies. Moreover, this work singles out governments under the Likud party control, given the relation between these groups and the right wing political movement (Lustick, For the Land and the Lord, 1988) (Sprinzak, 1989) (Hellinger, 2008). The importance of this question lies in better understanding the decision process that has led and will likely continue to lead the Knesset to determine its decisions towards the disputed territories, which is undeniably crucial to pursuing a peace agreement among the parties involved.

Given this research's main objective - challenging a perception - its two hypotheses will attempt to fairly address two different perspectives simultaneously when examining its case studies. First, it will evaluate whether the religious influence perception is valid. Second, it will propose and test an alternate explanation for settlements policies.

Hypothesis 1: *Likud shapes its policies towards Israeli settlements based on pressure from religious groups*

This first hypothesis is based on the conclusions of the literature reviewed up to this point. As previously mentioned, several scholars consider religious influence as being significant to the settlements policies decision process. Statements such as Lustick's claim that "friendly ties that fundamentalists leaders enjoyed with the highest echelons of government, and the public sympathy…that Likud ministers…displayed toward Gush Emunim settlers…helped to legitimize fundamentalist ideas in the national debate" are strong examples of this view (1988, p. 9). While testing this hypothesis during the case studies, this research will not only evaluate what type of actions were employed and whether they had any effect, but also, and most importantly, whether the government was in fact conceding to the pressures, or whether the government's decision only appeared to be a concession because it happened to match the religious fundamentalist agenda. The relevance of this distinction is that if the former is correct, it would validate the hypothesis, but if the latter is true, it would show that this proposition was no longer compelling and would likely support hypothesis two.

Hypothesis 2: *Likud shapes its policies towards Israeli settlements based on security concerns*

Among the factors that motivated this research to challenge the religious influence argument are cases in which Likud led governments made significant decisions directly contrary to some of the most important areas of the Jewish fundamentalist religious agenda: concession of

land. One good example of such is the accords with Egypt, in 1978, when Menachem Begin signed the agreement to return all of Sinai to the Egyptians (Sprinzak, 1989). Besides not being the only instance of conflicting views between Likud and its religious supporters, this decision implied higher priorities in the Likud's agenda. As this research tests this hypothesis, it will attempt to assess whether Likud abides by its security needs, rather than the pressure of its religious constituency, when deciding whether to expand or withdraw its control over disputed territories.

Regarding the variables being explored, this research will rely on two independent variables, considered as possible causes, one dependent variable, the expected outcome, and a constant, to serve as a parameter. The independent variables are (1) the religious pressure to shape Likud's policies and (2) security considerations as settlement decisions criteria. As described above, each hypothesis will test a different side of the argument.

The dependent variable is represented by the decisions that Likud led coalitions governments made in either establishing or retracting settlements. For clarification purposes, this research will be defining settlements not necessarily as the building of new housing for the Jewish people in the disputed territories. Instead, its focus will be on the acquisition or concession of land that would serve or is currently serving as location for Jewish housing.

Lastly, all the cases being reviewed fall under a constant: the political party in control at the time. For the case selection, which will be addressed in the next section, all the settlements decisions studied took place under a Likud led coalition. Again, given the generally accepted view that religious movements and right wing politicians have a symbiotic relationship, this factor provides for stronger evidence for the alternate hypothesis because it leads to a case

selection that relies solely on most-likely cases, rather than if studying the religious influence under Labor control.

Methodology

In comparing the forces influencing Likud's settlement policies, this research will test its hypotheses through the study of cases relevant to the question. As George and Bennett put it, given that evaluating the relationship among the factors affecting these policies depends much more on "finding the condition under which specified outcomes occur, and the mechanism through which they occur, rather than uncovering the frequency with which those conditions and their outcomes arise," coupled with somewhat limited sources of instances to be compared, the case study seems as the best option (2005, p. 31).

The three cases being evaluated have three main characteristics in common, which also reflect the criteria for their selection: first, they all symbolize substantial decisions in expanding or decreasing control over disputed lands; second, they all are deeply related to the concept of Greater Israel, therefore relevant to the religious movement; and third, all or some of their main decisions took place under a Likud led government.

The first case in this study is the Camp David Accords of 1978, when Likud's Prime Minister Menachem Begin agreed to return the Sinai to Egypt. The main significance of this case lies in how this decision affected the future developments related to settlements in Israeli politics. As Sprinzak puts it, "the Israeli radical right was born on September 17, 1978. On that day, when Menachem Begin signed the famous accords with Egypt, he gave the kiss of death to the unity of the right" (1989, p. 172). The concession of such a large piece of land, coupled with the initiation of the autonomy plan for the West Bank Palestinians surprised many of Begin's supporters, who in the past perceived the Prime Minister as a grand "champion of undivided

Eretz Israel" (Sprinzak, 1989, p. 173). Nevertheless, choosing a land-for-peace compromise made Begin a "traitor, an imposter who either could not stand the pressures of the Gentiles or was never truly loyal to the nationalist legacy…Gush Emunim were literally stunned…Camp David signified for them a religious affront of the first degree" (Sprinzak, 1989, p. 175).

The second case addresses the issues involving the Golan Heights. The relevance of this case lies in presenting an instance in which, despite being pressured, the Israeli government decided to hold onto the territory conquered during the Six Days War. Given that this region still faces a controversial status quo, this research will focus its assessment on the first few years of its occupation, from its invasion in 1967 to its formal annexation by Israel in 1981. Again, Prime Minister Begin becomes a key figure in this case study due to his role as the head of Likud - which in 1977 significantly expanded its power in the Knesset by a landslide election - in the implementation of the Golan Heights law of 1981 (Regions and territories: The Golan Heights, 2010).

Lastly, and probably the most controversial settlement decision so far, the Gaza Disengagement of 2005. Led by then Likud's Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, who was known as the "father of the settlements," this Israeli decision marked the end of a 38-year military rule over that area and involved the evacuation of more than 8,000 Israeli settlers from all settlements of Gaza and four from the West Bank (Rynhold & Waxman, Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza, 2008, p. 11). The significance of this case lies in its being the first time that Israel had "dismantled and evacuated settlements in the West Bank and Gaza" (Rynhold & Waxman, Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza, 2008, p. 11). Controversial was also the reaction of the religious movement to the disengagement. In a use of "the most extreme form of imagery," settlers portrayed this decision "in terms of 'forced

expulsion', 'transfer of Jews', and 'ethnic cleansing', reminiscent of terminologies which have

been associated with Nazi period" (Newman, 2005, p. 202).

As mentioned above, these three instances of settlement policies resolutions represent

significant examples when analyzing the key factors that the Likud leaders took into

consideration when reaching their decisions. Moreover, the inclusion of at least one case that one

might expect to have found the support of religious fundamentalists – maintaining control over

the Golan Heights – provides for a more neutral case selection and an opportunity to also study

why in that case the Likud opted for retaining that portion of the disputed territories. Did

religious groups' pressure play a role in that decision?

Data Requirements and General Questions

This research has designed questions to be asked of each of the three cases being

reviewed. The intent is to extract similar data from the different sources in order to produce

cumulative results for comparison and examination.

It is important to notice that the questions below focus on the Likud government's

perspective of the issue. Given the objective of this research, it would not be appropriate to

emphasize, for instance, what the religious movement thinks of a certain action, but rather

whether the Likud perceived that thought as relevant in making its decision. By doing so, this

research can assess whether religious influence exercised its pressure or if in fact security

motivated the decision.

Therefore, to establish and gather the data requirements needed to support the hypotheses

tests, this study will address the following questions:

1. Did the government's decision affect Israel's security?

2. What was the officially stated government's reasoning for making the decision, and did scholars assessing the cases agree with it?

3. Did the government perceive public opinion polling data and sources regarding the decision as favorable or unfavorable?

4. Did the government's position on the issue match the religious groups' position?

5. Did religion driven parties have the power to bring down the coalition?

The process of answering the questions above will take place by reviewing and compiling data from scholarly articles, journals, Likud leaders' public statements, memoirs, books, public documents, and speeches. The intent is to compare several different sources until finding the motivation that can be interpreted as more reliable in validating what forces prompted Likud's leaders to decide on settlement questions, therefore allowing for a conclusion on whether religion or security acted as the main driver of these policies.

Implications

Since its birth, Israel has experienced a vast array of issues ranging from establishing its legitimacy among its neighbors to protecting what some consider the Jewishness of the state. Caught in between are the Palestinians and their struggle to achieve self-determination and to win back the land they consider theirs. The divisiveness of this issue is seen in the several groups that rely on religious fundamentalism, nationalism, or radicalism, to pursue their agenda. On the other hand, there is the Knesset and its responsibility to address pressures from several sides and still be able to make decisions cautiously that, regardless of their validity, will ultimately trigger the rage of some and the praise of others. In a conflict that has lasted for generations and currently shows little or no sign of short term progress, comprehending the motivators of these

decision processes is key to understanding the rationale behind the party leaders' plans and actions.

As this work will address, there is a well established perception that religious groups are exercising great influence on how such decisions are made. Based on those groups' agendas, which clearly are opposed to any deal that regards land compromise as an option, it follows that they are indeed enemies of the peace process with the Palestinians and are obstacles to be overcome either by the Likud or any political party in power. However, if the religious influence claim is inflated and that the current coalition – led by Likud's Chairman Netanyahu – bases settlements decision on security consideration instead, a new type of approach might be appropriate.

This is especially relevant for actors with substantial interest in the outcome of this conflict, such as the United States. Being the main mediator between the Jews and Palestinians, the current American administration might reconsider its plans and strategies for that region if fully aware of the real motivators affecting internal politics. The same conclusion applies if the challenged perception is true. If religion is indeed shaping Likud's settlement policies, the international pressure addressing this conflict would certainly need to be reevaluated with several new limitations to be considered. Five years have passed since a new American administration has taken over and promised to vigorously resume peace negotiations in Israel. However, very little has been accomplished and Netanyahu's latest decisions regarding unfreezing settlements do not show much promise for progress. Now more than ever, it is crucial to reassess what causes Israel's Likud to make its settlements decisions, therefore employing this knowledge to improve the chances for peace.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Prevailing Trends in the Literature

Although this work focuses on comparing the religious influence against the security

motivation when shaping settlements policy, given that its main purpose is to challenge the

perception that religion is the defining force, this literature review tends to focus on the religious

side of the argument. The material reviewed covers mostly the perception of the religious

groups' role in shaping Israeli policies, the understanding of the core beliefs driving religious

groups to defend the status quo, and the assessment of the means these groups make use of while

projecting their agenda. In addition, this review also considers scholars' assessments of the

importance of security in guiding the Knesset's approaches towards this issue.

Perception of the Role of Religion

As addressed before, the literature related to the issue of Israel's policy toward its

settlements presents many examples of the power of the religious influence. In fact, religion

fundamentalism is frequently offered as the driving force behind the never-ending conflict with

the Palestinians while other factors tend to be ignored – such as security concerns. Scholars tend

to focus on two main areas when defending this view. First, they provide several examples of

how Jewish fundamentalism rooted itself in Israeli politics, therefore affecting crucial decisions

regarding the Palestinian settlements. Second, the sources illustrate their arguments with claims

of achievements that such pressure delivered.

Lustick, of course, provides ample support for the claim of religious influence. In his

assessment of fundamentalist influence, Lustick spends a significant amount of time analyzing

the Gush Emunin movement. Although he recognizes the Gush as a minority, he accepts the

assessment of other scholars comparing the power of such movement to the influence of Zionism (Lustick, For the Land and the Lord, 1988, p. 12). Lustick's rationale lies in his view of Gush as an ideologically influential organization, sharing similar values, and absolutely committed to implementing its view, therefore "making Jewish history." (1988, p. 12). Moreover ,although Lustick somewhat accepts that Gush is "far from realizing its ultimate aspirations," he argues that in attempting such goals, fundamentalists are a "powerful force within Israeli politics" and successfully established the foundation of their movement by "helping to destroy the national consensus on the meaning of Jewish nationalism and the territorial shape of the State of Israel" (1988, p. 3).

Newman and Sprinzak also defend the relevance of religious influence with strong statements regarding the nature of its power. Newman refers to the West Bank Rabbis Forum, for instance, and claims that as "the most important ideological forum" in the region, it is able to dictate its wishes to an "increasingly subservient" political leadership (2005, p. 196). Newman attributes this power due to an ever growing "national religious population" that has turned to fundamentalism, therefore being more susceptible to the influence of Rabbis (2005, p. 197).

Sprinzak, on the other hand, points to the legitimization of intolerance by its transition from violent acts to radical political activity. He cites the election of Rabbi Meir Kahane, an extreme religious fundamentalist, to the Knesset. As Sprinzak puts it, this newly established political party, the Kach, called for the removal of all Arabs from the historical Palestine and, despite its radicalism, found over 26,000 voters to support its fundamentalist ideology (1989, p. 171).

Scholars tend to support their claims of religious influence by citing certain achievements that such groups supposedly advanced. A good example is Lustick's claim that the Gush

Emunim's influence is directly responsible for establishing Jewish settlements in the more populated areas of the West Bank. As he puts it, the Gush had a "central role in the implementation of the Likud's annexationist policies" and delivered "fundamentalist perspectives to wide strata of Israeli society, both religious and non-religious" (Lustick, For the Land and the Lord, 1988, p. 14). Hertzberg also presents a similar assessment regarding Jewish fundamentalist influence on the legitimization of the West Bank settlements. He refers to the "messianists" as the driving force behind the radical and irrevocable change on Israel's political map brought by extreme religious dialogue embedded into policy determination (Hertzberg, 1986, p. 89).

There is no shortage of instances confirming the claims of a powerful and effective religious fundamentalist movement pressuring the Knesset into reshaping its settlements policies. These sources not only present extraordinary claims but also offer supporting evidence. This research intends to challenge, however, that concurrent events offer a more compelling explanation of the results of the fundamentalist efforts - such as security - which will be soon further explored.

Core Beliefs and Motivations

Scholars analyzing the influence of Jewish fundamentalists point to Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook as a key agent in establishing a rationale to defend the supporters of Israel's position on the territory dispute. Through his significant influence on religious movements during Israel's first decades, Rabbi Kook shaped the formation of a movement responsible for the future establishment of many settlements in the West Bank. This movement was called Gush Emunin – Block of the Faithful (Hertzberg, 1986, p. 88). David Newman, Eliezer Don-Yehiya, and Moshe Hellinger agree that the Gush Emunin played a crucial role in creating and motivating the

religious activists' efforts contributing to Israel's claim over the disputed territories. The

reasoning behind it, rather than political, is based on the belief of the "fundamental truths of the

Bible" (Newman, 2005) (Don-Yehiya, 1987) (Hellinger, 2008). Ehud Sprinzak further explains

the Gush Emunin's views through a religious prism. As he puts it, its fundamentalist approach

proclaims that its followers should pursue the land promised to Abraham by God. Their

understanding is that Israel is living in an "age of redemption" and the conquering of the

Palestinian territories is similar to the great biblical conquerors Joshua and King David

(Sprinzak, 1989, pp. 179-180). By using such arguments, religious groups provide a messianic

commandment to their followers and transform the issue into a religious question, rather than a

territorial and political one.

Hellinger and Arthur Hertzberg, however, emphasize the importance of Rabbi Zvi

Yehuda – Rabbi Kook's son - in guiding and expanding the reach of the Gush Emunin ideology.

They credit R. Zvi Yehuda for two advancements in their cause. First, he took his father's

teachings and made them sacred, which for his students made them incontestable. Second, he

popularized the complex ideology of his father and created a "popular fashion" religious-

Zionism (Hellinger, 2008, p. 539). In addition, Hertzberg singled out a crucial difference

between father and son's students. R. Zvi Yehuda's followers were rather "impatient and more

militant", which led to a more committed pursuit of their goals (Hertzberg, 1986, p. 88).

Hertzberg and Newman point to the 1967 Six-Day War as the key event that propelled

the acceptance of the movement's plans and propagated their views. They explain how many

religious fundamentalists in Israel believed the success of that war as an actual miracle and a

proof of God's intervention. They agree that this changed fundamentalists from a passive to an

active approach. As Newman puts it, there was a belief that after the miraculous liberation of the

Palestinian territories, there was an obligation to keep them under Jewish rule (2005, p. 207).

Don-Yehiya cites a good example of this rabbinic prophecy's confirmation. He refers to R. Zvi

Yehuda's 1967 sermon grieving over the continuing Arab rule over parts of the "Great Israel",

and how it should soon end. Three weeks later, when Israel invaded Palestine, his students took

it as God's involvement in their favor (Don-Yehiya, 1987, p. 228). Hellinger also adds to this

point by proposing that the Six-Day war successfully gathered public support - religious and

secular - for the Gush Emunin's concept of the "Greater Israel" (Hellinger, 2008, p. 541).

For scholars addressing this topic, Jewish fundamentalists view the Torah (or the Bible's

Old Testament) as a clear plan of what God wants for his people and how to accomplish it. The

existence of a powerful movement, such as the Gush Emunin, helps this cause by successfully

rationalizing the settlements and makes it extremely difficult to reject such a doctrine without

rejecting the Torah's commandments.

Means to Enforce a Messianic Plan

Another area that scholars tend to address is how religious fundamentalists groups pursue

their interests. Different sources mention tactics such as political participation, lobbying, fund

raising, and even violent acts. They mostly agree, however, that a common approach is to raise

the political cost of opposing their agendas, which religious groups achieve by building support

among the general public.

Jewish fundamentalists adopt a very direct approach when promoting their agenda on

Israel and its settlements. Also, probably due to their direct relation to the problem – suffering

the consequences of the conflict on a daily basis – they are more inclined to rely on extreme acts,

including violence. Scholars cite three main tactics these groups employ: indoctrination via

public education, demonstrations/violence, and direct political involvement.

Newman and Don-Yehiya point to a well planned and long term strategy of propagating the Gush Emunin's ideology through the establishment of an ever expanding network of schools, synagogues, and institutes of higher Jewish learning. Newman argues that such a strategy aims to create a second and third generation of leaders who will maintain their activist roles as enforcers of God's plan. He also notes that the opposition forces have yet to balance this ever growing initiative. In addition, Newman points out that the dissemination of the greater Land of Israel ideology does not limit itself to private or religious institutions. Seeking general acceptance of the fundamentalist cause, Jewish religious groups also successfully imposed their messianic curriculum on public schools. Lastly, he refers to indoctrination within the settlement communities. These peoples, who more than anybody experience the backlash to this conflict, have access to a "separate educational framework," which the Jewish fundamentalist groups control (Newman, 2005, p. 210). Don-Yehiya also emphasizes that much of the dissemination of the Gush Emunin's views was made possible due to the easy access to the state-religious education system. Followers of R. Zvi Yehuda succeeded in exploiting high school students by "socializing religious youth to the political values" that their ideology supports (Don-Yehiya, 1987, p. 228).

Demonstrations, sometimes followed by violence, are also part of the Jewish fundamentalists' arsenal. Sprinzak and Newman address this point and show how successfully these groups employ this tactic when opposing anti-settlement policies. Sprinzak cites several examples of Jewish extremists relying on violence, or even terrorism, to constrain government or Arab reaction to their agenda. He also points to public manifestation of anti-Arab sentiments, which extreme Rabbis organized, leading to aggression and confrontation in Arab neighborhoods (Sprinzak, 1989). Newman also adds to this claim by pointing to the trend of increasing pressure

on public officials in the post-Oslo period. Religious fundamentalists appealed to "holocaust imagery" and labeled government supporters of the land compromise as "traitors," openly calling for the expulsion of the Arab-Palestinian population out of Israel (Newman, 2005, p. 201). In addition, he comments on the more frequent use of violence as a tool. Examples such as the killing of Emil Greenzweig (Peace Now Demonstration), the mass murder of Muslims in a Hebron mosque, and the 1995 assassination of Prime Minister Rabin support his argument (Newman, 2005, pp. 201,202).

The effectiveness of political participation in promoting the Jewish fundamentalist agenda is an aspect that Newman addresses in detail. He points to one of the original goals of the Gush Emunin movement, which was to "thwart any government policies aimed at future territory compromise" (Newman, 2005, p. 195). To do so, religious fundamentalists infiltrated the Israeli government to contest those policies from within. Just by disrupting any peace process they could claim success. Moreover, once within the government, Gush Emunin supporters were able to use government resources to promote their ideology. Newman also cites the common policy of fundamentalist government ministers who appointed settlement leaders to senior civil service offices, therefore expanding their influence in the public sector (Newman, 2005). Sprinzak also recognizes the effectiveness of fundamentalists in pursuing a political agenda. He presents examples in which religious groups attempt to public shame government officials into backing away from any land for peace compromise. In the Camp David case, for instance, key supporters of the Gush Emunin tried to "symbolically associate" the prime minister's role in Camp David with the "shameful peace signed with Hitler in 1939" (Sprinzak, 1989, p. 175). Upon failing to achieve their goals, fundamentalists took to the streets, lobbied the Coalition government (Likud) and the National Religious Party, and finally – after the peace treaty was

signed in Washington – moved to form the Tehija, a political party solely devoted to

delegitimizing Camp David (Sprinzak, 1989).

Jewish fundamentalists are clearly willing to rely on direct and extreme tactics to move

towards their goals. This is likely due to a society that is not as receptive to the affected people –

the Palestinians – given the years of conflict and the impasse over the consequences of Israeli

policies in the region.

Role of Security

Scholars also refer to reasons other than religious fundamentalism pressure to justify the

Likud's position regarding the disputed settlements. Actually, the literature shows several

occasions in which the supposedly achievements of religious influence can be explained by a

more pragmatic decision process. Not only that, this literature portrays an Israel that seems to

revolve around the survival of its status as a sovereign, yet surrounded and threatened state. As

Kilroy puts it, Israel's consolidation "places security at the height of the government's policies

(domestic and foreign) and the legitimacy of the ruling party and prime minister was directly

linked to their ability to provide greater security for the Israeli people" (2006, p. 399).

There are two main areas that this research points out as alternatives to the religiously

driven rationale. First, they refer to the influence of a military based decision process where

policy makers convey orders to address an immediate or potential attack to Israel's borders or

population. Second, the sources point out the other factors, sometimes not evident, that work in

the background and significantly influence the Knesset's positions.

McPeak, Yashai, and Tzabag specifically put significant emphasis on the security driven

approach. In his assessment of Israel's control of the disputed territories after the 1967, McPeack

provides relevant evidence by describing their strategic value for the military. For instance, he

refers to Israel's intent to prevent concentration of Egyptian forces close to its border and the

Knesset's obsession with controlling the "southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula" to avoid "Arab

closure of the Gulf of Aqaba" (McPeak, 2011, p. 430). Also, he points out that the "the principal

strategic justification for retaining the Golan" was that "it constitutes a geographic cushion,

outside Israel, in which a Syrian attack could be dealt with…until Israel" could mobilize

(McPeak, 2011, p. 431).

Yishai also pinpoints the security nature of Golan's relevance. He refers to Ministry of

Foreign Affairs Moshe Dayan's statement asserting that the "Golan 'is not part of our ancestors'

land" and that "it had not been regarded as a 'sanctified area' but rather as a territory invaluable

for Israel's security, a bargaining counter to be traded for progress toward peace" (Yishai, 1985,

p. 51). In Yishai's view, the Golan's strategic position, coupled with Israel's bitter relations with

Syria were important contributors to the Knesset's decision to annex that region. Although he

briefly mentions support from settlers, he seems to imply that the Israeli government considered

these groups as just another reason to justify their security related actions.

Tzabag, on the other hand, focuses on the military influence during these decisions. He

provides details on how Israeli decision-makers carefully considered the relevance of Golan, for

instance, when prioritizing it over the Sinai during the 1973 Yom Kipur War. A critical

statement to which he refers is Defense Minister Dayan's comments regarding the Golan

Heights: 'no withdrawal at any cost. We fight until the last man remains and do not withdraw

even a centimeter…Any commanders, of any rank, who are not able to perform this mission,

must be replaced' (Tzabag, 2001, p. 188). Tzabag also mentions Dayan's statements that the

'Sinai is not critically important. Twenty kilometers more or forty kilometers less is far less

important that the north' (2001, p. 188).

Kilroy has similar comments when assessing the Gaza disengagement of 2005. He points out that despite the significant relevance of withdrawing from Gaza and some areas of the West Bank, Sharon's unilateral decision "was predicated on a belief that Israel's long-term security interests were best served by a change in policy: on focused on contraction rather than expansion…" (Kilroy, 2006, p. 398). He elaborates this position by arguing that those settlements were no longer attractive to Israel's security because of the unlikelihood of a conventional attack by Arab state armies (Do Fences Make Good Neighbors? An Analysis of Israel's Security Policy Choices, 2006).

There are also several other factors that can and do affect the Knesset's decisions regarding settlement policies. Rynhold and Waxman, for instance, present background factors also driving settlement decisions in the Knesset. They refer to this as the "gradual abandonment of the ideological ideal of Eretz Yisrael by many…inside the Likud" (Rynhold & Waxman, 2008, p. 20). They further illustrate that by citing the mid-1950s "domestic political considerations" that led the Likud to forgo the claim to East bank of the Jordan. Lastly, they point to the Intifada and its effects on the public opinion regarding the settlements status quo and the Likud leaders' recognition that "in order to remain credible and attractive to mainstream Israeli voters, the party had to shift its stance [regarding the settlement situation]" (2008, p. 20).

Yishai also address public opinion as crucial to Golan annexation. According to him, in a poll conducted during "before the first legislative attempt, 71.7 per cent of the respondents supported the move" and "four days after the final approval…70.6 per cent were pro-annexationist" (Yishai, 1985, p. 51). In addition, Yishai refers to subsequent polls that indicated the Minister's increase in popularity following the adoption of the law.

None of the authors explicitly denies the influence of other forces in determining the decision processes of their arguments. The fact that there are so many variables taking place concurrently, however, leaves the door open for further evaluation. This literature review found several occasions of scholars presenting their views without carefully considering alternate explanations to their conclusion. Such ambiguity, of course, is the key driver of this thesis.

Analysis of the Literature

These scholars present a straightforward description of the impact of religious influence in shaping the Israel-Palestine conflict. On the other hand, many sources also consider security and other alternate rationales when assessing the decisions in question. There are, though, a few areas that deserve further evaluation.

One of the key issues in the literature reviewed is that scholars tend to adopt a generalized assumption of results without a proper analysis of their correlation with their causal actions. Newman provides several good examples of this factor. When assessing the power of Gush Emunin within the key settlements, he refers to the West Bank Rabbis Forum and claims that its ideological status enabled them to directly influence Israel's political leadership. Newton continues to assume that the Jewish state's national religious population "has become increasingly fundamentalist in matters of religious observance and ritual…, so too the Rabbis have greater influence over the political activities and decisions" (Newman, 2005, p. 197). Regardless of the veracity of this statement, Newman's proposition leaves the reader wondering how he reached such conclusion. Although it can be implied, the article does not provide evidence of increasing fundamentalist power.

In the same article, Newton again assumes a conclusion without backing it with evidence. He refers to the tactics of fundamentalist leaders being appointed to senior service government

positions based on political views, therefore promoting settlement development through the

power of their actions. He himself recognizes, however, the difficulties in assessing "exactly how

much of the various ministry budgets have been poured into the settlement network in the West

Bank and Gaza, although it is assumed that this runs into many billions of dollars" (Newman,

2005, p. 206).

It is easy to credit fundamentalist groups with influencing several key and controversial

settlements decisions. As Lustik puts it, however, "it is difficult to determine how deep and wide

fundamentalism's influence on Israel's Jewish population as a whole has been or might be"

(1988, p. 12).

The importance of the historical background in understanding the current relationship

between religious groups and policy makers also deserves further evaluation. The scholarly work

on this issue spent much time helping the reader understand the origins of the support for the

Greater Land of Israel concept. Hellinger and Don-Yehiya emphasize the origins of the

movement and how it developed through Israel's history. The importance of this lies in

understanding how the ideology of Gush Emunin found support among the general population.

Sprinzak addresses the rationale of Gush's supporter when explaining how the

movement's religiosity concentrates on the sacredness of the formation of the Kingdom of Israel,

which it considers to be in the making. This approach matches the current situation of the state of

Israel. On the other hand, as Sprinzak points out, Gush Emunin's followers are very "modern,

nationalist, and pragmatic" and willing to tolerate "many forms of secularization" (Sprinzak,

1989, p. 179). This helps the reader comprehend how fundamentalist views find support among

the secular public, for it evokes the messianic purpose as well as the needs of settlers and the

general population's security concerns.

Another important question is to determine to what extent scholars can credit the changes

and influences of policies affecting the Israel-Palestine conflict to fundamentalist movements

rather than to politicians' personal or other agendas. It is easy to raise this question given the

obvious influence that such choices would have on the Israeli jews living in the settlements.

Newman addresses this when commenting that all the fundamentalist militancy could not stop

the progress of the Gaza disengagement in 2005. This should undermine the relevance of the

Gush Emunin ideology in affecting Israeli policy, given the importance of the occupation in that

region for the Grand Israel concept. Although Newman recognizes the demonstrations and public

outcry, he never questions why they could not stop such a relevant milestone (Newman, 2005).

The same applies to Sprinzak's comments on the reaction to the 1978 Camp David

Accords. Although he addresses it as a catalyst to motivate further political manifestations, he

does not question why they were not able to prevent it (Sprinzak, 1989). Nevertheless, Newman

indirectly presents a third source of motivation - one that can more easily reach the general

public, therefore exercising a greater impact on public policy. Rather than religious views or

personal political agendas, Newman recognizes that the question of the settlements, although an

"abstract" issue for most of the population, directly affects the lives of their inhabitants. As

Newman puts it, they are "fighting against their own evacuation from their homes" (Newman,

2005, p. 201).

As mentioned above, the literature addressing the influential forces on policy making

regarding Israeli settlements places much credit in the power of the religious fundamentalist

movement. Scholars have ascribed to these groups the ability to guide or even establish policies

that are in harmony with their firm belief of implementing their God's commandments. The

overall conclusion, therefore, is that there is a perception that fundamentalists have successfully

worked at different levels to prevent any resolution that relies on land-compromise simply because the state adopted policies consistent with their position.

    Concurrently, there is vast evidence to attest for alternate explanations leading to the supposedly successful claims of the Religious fundamentalist movement. Among them are military plans, political survival, international pressure, relations with neighboring states and others. If the goal is to fairly address the Israeli-Palestinian impasse, it is crucial to question the extent of the validity of both views.

Chapter 3

Case Study: Return of Sinai

This case seems to support the security side of the argument. Additionally, it certainly lacks evidence to credit the religious fundamentalist agenda for any relevant influence in Begin's decision to sign the Camp David Accords, therefore returning the Sinai to Egypt.

Upon answering this thesis's five questions, this work points to a decision made mainly to solidify Israel's security in the region, coupled with a secondary – and critical – goal of turning the Middle-East conflict focus away from the West Bank. Moreover, the evidence supports the perception that the public opinion preceding the Camp David Accords gave the Likud room to adopt drastic actions in addressing Israel's society's concerns, even if it meant compromising part of the land conquered in 1967. Lastly, despite going directly opposing the fundamentalist view of negotiating land for peace, the Likud was probably confident that it could proceed with its plan without the risk of religious parties bringing down the government coalition as the result of such changes.

Case Background

"Peace requires respect for the sovereignty, territorial area and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force. Progress of reconciliation in the Middle East marked by cooperation in promoting economic development, in maintaining stability, and assuring security…" (Carter, 2006, p. 222). These are strong words in the Camp David Accords of 1978 - the document laying out the framework for the pursuit of peace between Egypt and Israel.

During the first 30 years of Israel's existence, Egypt played the role of its archenemy. Being in a state of war, the two nations engaged in battle in 1948, 1956, 1967, and 1973 (Eldar,

2003). Needless to say, it was a historic step when Egypt's President Anwar Sadat adopted a

different approach and reached out to Israel to stop this cycle of war (Israeli-Palestine Conflict).

Despite his Knesset speech for peace, though, Sadat had a very calculated plan for Egypt - a plan

that recognized that his nation could only retake the Sinai through a peace treaty with Israel,

which would require deep involvement and pressure from the United States. As put by Moshe

Sasson, "from the Egyptian perspective, that development was engendered neither by a devotion

to peace as a value per se, nor by some sort of ideological shift. It was, in fact, motivated by a

purely Egyptian national interest" (Eldar, 2003, p. 57).

Israel also had its own reasons for considering negotiations with its strongest enemy in

the region. Despite decades of intense conflict, the Jewish state knew that sacrificing the Sinai

while pursuing a peace treaty with Egypt could help the nation to solidify its grip on the more

relevant regions of its occupied territories. Israel took the conclusion of the Camp David Accords

as a "transitional period" and a "chance to postpone the hard decisions over the borders and

sovereignty" (Quandt W. , The Middle-East - Ten Years afte Camp David, 1988, p. 4).

Regardless of the opposition or support from both sides, the two enemies eventually found

common ground and signed the accords leading to a state of peace that lasts up to today.

Although the conflicts between these two states dates back to 1948, it was in 1967,

during the Six-Day War, that Israel crossed into foreign territory and started its occupation of

neighboring countries. Egypt was affected by losing its control over the Gaza strip and the Sinai

Peninsula (Israeli-Palestine Conflict). Sadat was determined to reclaim Egypt's land and

continuously worked to remove Israel from Sinai.When repeated negotiations failed, however,

Egypt joined forces with Syria and launched a coordinated attack on the Jewish holy day of Yom

Kippur.

In October of 1973, Egypt and Israel were in a bloody clash that lasted three weeks and led to the largest tank battle since the end of World War II. The losses were staggering for all involved, with Egypt and Syria together counting over 15,000 combat deaths, and Israel losing 2,688 (Miller, 2008).

Egypt had three main goals when launching the attacks. First, it wanted to break the frustrating stalemate for both parties in solving of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Second, it wanted to retake the territory it lost during the war of 1967. Finally, it needed to establish a strong position for the future negotiations with its neighbor Israel.

The attacks from Syria were neutralized fairly quickly. Within a few days, Israel was able to drive Syrian forces off the Golan and established a position within artillery range of Damascus. Things were quite different from Egyptian side. Sadat's forces quickly overran Isarel's Bar-Lev line along the Suez Canal and deterred Israeli airpower by extensively deploying surface-to-air missiles stations. Nevertheless, Israeli forces successfully counterattacked across the canal moving its forces within one hundred kilometers of Cairo and presented a threat of eminent destruction of the Egyptian Third Army. Foreign intervention saved Egypt's position at that time. Because a full implementation of Israel's counterattack would certainly destroy any chances of a "postwar diplomacy," President Nixon and Secretary of State Kissinger intervened to stop Israel's plans (Miller, 2008, p. 134). Despite terrible losses and limited military gains, Egypt's campaign effectively restored Egyptian pride. On the other hand, Israel's confidence had been deeply shaken by the surprise attack and "by a cease-fire that prevented a conclusive military victory; and American complacency about an unresolved and unmanaged Arab-Israeli conflict had been undermined" (Miller, 2008, p. 135).

The first steps leading to the Camp David accords took place with President Sadat's unprecedented visit to Jerusalem - the first time ever for a chief of state of an Arab nation to visit Israel to address the Knesset on matters of peace. Sadat's visit marked the beginning of series of negotiations between the two neighbor enemies during 1977. In the following year, a deadlock moved President Jimmy Carter to intervene and invite Begin and Sadat to meet at Camp David to attempt to find common ground. After twelve days of negotiations, Israel and Egypt concluded two agreements. First, they established a framework for concluding a peace treaty between the two nations. Second, they agreed to a broader framework for achieving peace in the Middle East (Israeli-Palestine Conflict).

As described by President Carter, the agreements represented "an achievement that reflects the courage and wisdom of these two leaders" (Safty, 1991, p. 285). Camp David took Sadat to "international stardom, and Western leaders and many scholars heaped lavish praise on him for his courage, vision, leadership, and bold negotiation strategies" (Safty, 1991, p. 286).

Under these circumstances, this thesis will address the following questions to determine what most strongly influenced the Likud's rationale when deciding on matters of retaining or giving up conquered land. Each answer will attempt to consider security or religion as the main motivators and point out possible conclusions to lead to a final policy position.

Did the government's decision affect Israel's security?

The simple answer is yes. Although Egypt played a major role in actively pursuing a peace treaty with its neighbor, Israel had tangible reasons to facilitate a common ground between the two nations. Among such, it was the importance of neutralizing its most powerful enemy in the region. Even though a peace with Egypt would not fully prevent war with other neighboring

Arab nations, a treaty between the Sadat and Begin would certainly change the dynamics of that region.

The historical background preceding the Camp David accords also emphasizes the relevance of security concerns for both parties. The fresh memory of the October 1973 was not only an eerie reminder of the consequences of a belligerent relationship between the two states, but also a painful acceptance that the strong Jewish nation came close to a defeat resulting from the Egyptian attack. Moreover, the 1973 war reached unprecedented levels of risk by closely bringing the superpowers - United States and the Soviet Union – to a near-nuclear-confrontation. This certainly led to the recognition that a "full-scale war in the Middle East could someday involve the use of nuclear weapons," which made "the region exceptionally dangerous," therefore adding a "strong impulse to peacemaking efforts" (Quandt W. , Peace Process - American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 2001, p. 179).

There were also other incentives for Begin's Likud to sign the accords. Probably the main one, which will be further explored on the next question, was the diversion that the peace treaty created away from Israel's other problems. Despite the massive loss of territory to Egypt, Israel not only assured peace with its neighbor, but also avoided addressing the most relevant issues of West Bank and Gaza – while simultaneously appeasing the international community. For Begin, the Sinai was basically a sacrifice to preserve the greater concept of Eretz Israel (Quandt D. , 1986).

Lastly, both nations ended up with additional gains that directly or indirectly implied a pragmatic rationale on Israel's decision. After the signing of the treaty, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown committed the United States to a $3 billion annual military aid package to develop new airfields in the Negev - $800 million of which would come as a grant. The U.S. also

indicated that several of the weapons systems previously requested by Israel would be positively evaluated and likely approved. Additionally, Jimmy Carter "was also required to write a secret letter to Begin, affirming what Begin and Sadat had orally agreed upon on March 26 concerning the oil supplies" – consolidating then this secondary agreement (Quandt W. , Peace Process - American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 2001, p. 235).

The sum of these facts indicates that Begin made a calculated decision when moving to sign the accords. Despite the internal conflict in the Knesset and the possible disapproval of the Jewish people, he saw the value of returning the Sinai to Egypt and embracing the peace treaty. Israel greatly benefited from neutralizing its strongest and more threatening enemy in the region. Moreover, it took advantage of the positive backlash to the accords to secure weapons packages, grants, and oil supplies agreements with the U.S., and successfully bought precious time by shifting the focus of the Arab-Israeli conflict from West Bank and Gaza.

What was the officially stated government's reasoning for making the decision, and did scholars assessing the cases agree with it?

Per Begin's own publicly expressed views, the return of Sinai to Egypt was mostly based on security reasons. As briefly addressed above, this decision sought to accomplish a peace treaty with Israel's most powerful enemy in the region. Neutralizing Egypt would likely prevent further coordinated attacks from neighboring nations against the Jewish state. Although scholars assessing this position do not disagree, there is plenty of evidence to conclude that Begin's decision had much deeper roots. Mainly, he sacrificed the Sinai to keep Judea and Samaria.

Just three days after signing the Camp David Accords, Begin expressed his controversial decision's reasoning:" We wanted peace for the last 35 years! It never came. Now we have a breakthrough. We may have peace. We hope it will come. There are still problems to be solved.

Hurdles to be overcome. For those days—the good ones and the difficult ones—having learned

the lesson what happened since March" (Articles about Begin, 1978). During his speech, before

an audience of presidents of major American Jewish organizations in New York, Begin carefully

restated the never ending conflicts between the parties and how Israel exhausted the attempts to

reach a peace agreement. Begin used similar arguments while defending his position in the

Knesset: "the duty of the premier is to do whatever is needed to prevent injury to 'even one of

our sons' in a war that he might have prevented by policy initiatives" (Naor, 2000, p. 162). The

sole focus of his message was his duty to, by all means, protect his people and cultivate peace in

the region.

The decision to sign the Camp David Accords, which the Ninth Knesset approved "by a

large majority," is fairly more complex than Begin implied (The main events during the ninth

Knesset). And the best way to approach it is to first understand how Begin viewed the relevance

of the Sinai.

The key factor in Begin's decision was how he saw the concept of Eretz Israel. Unlike

other supporters of this concept, which accounts for the rights of Jewish people over their God

given land, Begin never perceived the Sinai as part of it. In fact, he had already supported trading

the Sinai for peace while in the government of 1967 (Rynhold, Re-Conceptualizing Israeli

Approaches to "Land For Peace" and the Palestinian Question Since 1967, 2011).

Scholars assessing this question seem to agree that one of the main motivators for

Begin's move was to shift the focus of the Arab-Israeli conflict away from Judea and Samaria.

Although Camp David would return the entire Sinai to Egypt, leading to the dismantling of

several Israeli settlements in the region, it also left the status of the West Bank and Gaza

unresolved despite the possibility of no future agreement. As Eliyahu Ben Ellisar ,the Director-

General of the Prime Minister's office put it, "There will be a de facto annexation. That is, after

five years when both sides will disagree, the situation would mean that things stayed the same in

Israel's favor" (Rynhold, 2011, p. 37).

There are other significant sources that support this argument as well. A critical example

is Ezer Weizman, Israel's Defense Minister, who described Begin's decision as a calculated

approach to limit the land for peace negotiations to the Sinai. Despite Egypt's perception that a

similar agreement could be used as a model for further "understanding with Jordan and Syria

over the West Bank and the Golan Heights," for Begin it was " the precise opposite…as far as he

[Begin] was concerned, the withdrawal from Sinai would be the end of story" (Safty, 1991, p.

294).

Begin, therefore, decided to compromise the Sinai to retain some form of control over

what he considered Eretz Israel. Although one cannot deny that there were substantial benefits in

neutralizing Egypt, therefore reaching a certain level of peace, Begin seemed to ultimately let his

ideological views take precedence.

Did the government perceive public opinion polling data and sources regarding the

decision as favorable or unfavorable?

Given the results of polls taking place prior and post the election of 1977, the Likud

could fairly assume that its government's decision to return the Sinai to Egypt would not

significantly affect future support from its voters. Among the most relevant topics of public

opinion surveys, three are quite relevant to the question proposed: what voters considered to be

the main reasons to support a political party, the public's evaluation of general performance of a

government, and the major concerns affecting the decisions of the constituents. Based on the

results to be discussed next, Begin's decision to sign Camp David probably took these polls into

consideration while evaluating the political consequences of his move.

By assessing public perception regarding the most relevant reasons to support a political

party, Begin could probably have concluded that his government had room to negotiate with the

Egyptians to pursue security stability in the region. The polls showed that two of the top four

motives for party support were the increasing chance for peace and the party's approach towards

peace negotiation (Penniman, 1979).

During 1977, 29% of Likud supporters backed the party because it could increase the

chances for peace in the region, while the DMC, which later joined Begin's coalition, supported

this reason by a 34% margin (1979, p. 70). Concurrently, 48% of Likud's supporters considered

the party's firmness as an asset to conduct peace negotiations, while 31% of DMC voters valued

the party's flexibility in doing so (1979, p. 70).

Another significant topic affecting voters' perception, consequently affecting Begin's

coalition, was the public's perception of the general performance of the government. During the

years prior to Camp David, polls indicated that the economy was the public's main concern, with

92% of Israelis disapproving of the current government in 1977 – prior to the elections of the 9th

Knesset. Nevertheless, even under such dissatisfaction, Israelis considered that the nation's

"security affairs [were]…being relatively adequately handled" (Sella, 1986, p. 116). Shortly after

the elections, polls indicated significant progress in favor of the new government. During the

second semester of 1977, dissatisfaction towards the government's general performance dropped

from 80.9% to 32.3%. In addition, when addressing security related issues, Israelis' disapproval

of Begin's coalition's performance moved from 32.4% to 9% (1986, p. 116).

Lastly, there was the importance of what the voters considered as the major concerns affecting Israeli society. In 1977, when questioned what the major problem the government should deal with, respondents clearly pointed to security as a priority. The survey showed that among supporters of the Likud and the DMC, 31.7% and 26% considered security as higher priority, respectively, with security being the main concern for Likud supporters, just behind the economy for DMC supporters (Penniman, 1979, p. 159).

There is no doubt that a coalition government must consider its actions when making such a significant decision. Begin's endorsement of the Camp David accords should offer ample evidence to conclude that taking such an unexpected measure would not dramatically affect its coalition in the near future. Begin's Likud enjoyed considerable support from the public as a new leadership in Israel and was perceived as a strong and effective government to defend Israel's interests. Moreover, when considering the peace process in the region, both Likud and the DMC – which were members of the coalition – had advantages from their supporters' perspectives as to how better handle such a critical issue on behalf of Israel's interest. With these factors in place, the Prime Minister certainly assessed the public opinion situation and likely concluded that singing Camp David Accords would not significantly disfavor the government coalition.

Did the government's position on the issue match the religious groups' position?

Returning the Sinai to Egypt was definitely an affront to the religious agenda. Despite the admiration that many fundamentalists had for Menachem Begin – the founder of the Herut movement - the main fundamentalist groups fiercely protested against the Likud's leader's decision to sign the Accords.

Begin enjoyed great admiration from some very influential groups in Israel, such as the Gush Emunim, Land of Israel, and the Kach. He significantly benefited from such endorsements,

which likely contributed to his victory during the elections of 1973 (Sprinzak, 1989). Nevertheless, after Begin's treaty with Egypt, the same groups retaliated not only by influencing public opinion, but also by politically coordinating forces to punish this action contrary to their ideology.

The relevance and frustration of opposing religious groups towards the Camp David Accords is clearly expressed by one of their most influential leaders: Rabbi Rav Yehuda Kook – founder of the Gush Emunim. Rabbi Kook referred to the Accords as a false attempt to give the Israeli people peace in its own land. Moreover, he declared that "any sort of peace which does not result from the strength which He will give his people, will be an amputated, temporary, peace and a curse for generations to come" (Lustick, For the Land and the Lord, 1988, p. 82).

Another respected Gush Emunim scholar, Yehuda Elitzur, provides further substantiation for the religious fundamentalists' aversion to the Israel-Egypt treaty. According to him, the "promised," or "patriarchal" boundaries [of Eretz Israel] extend to "northeastern Sinai, Lebanon and western Syria, the Golan Heights, and much of Transjordan," and it is Israel's destiny to "eventually…conquer and settle" (1988, p. 105).

The reaction of religious groups against Begin's decision also attests to the diverging views between the Likud and fundamentalists. According to leaders of the Gush Emunim, the "upcoming evacuation [of the Sinai] was an existential threat to the settler movement and [to] their way of life" (Pedahzur & Perliger, 2009, p. 44). Members of the Gush movement quickly realized, though, that such a move would draw support from center and left-wing parties, therefore leaving the only option of taking the issue to the streets relying on public opinion. As Rabbi Haim Druckman put it, 'we should not lose hope; the support of the general public for our

just demand could influence the government not to carry out the immoral act of evacuation'

(Pedahzur & Perliger, 2009, p. 45).

The religious opposition was such that it led to the establishment of factions such as the

Movement to Halt the Retreat of Sinai. This was an extraparliamentary movement created to

derail the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. Urit Elitzur, the movement's leader,

focused mostly on coordinate petitions demanding the Likud to change its policy and transferring

families from Israel to Sinai, as envisioned by the prophet (Jewish Terrorism in Israel, 2009).

Another development was the formation of the Tehiya. This was the first political party traceable

to the Gush Eminum. Its ideology was based on "Begin's 'betrayal' of the cause and the failure

of Gush Emunim and other ultranationalist elements to prevent it" (Lustick, For the Land and the

Lord, 1988, p. 58).

When the Likud backed Begin in signing the Camp David accords, it was clear that it did

so directly against the religious fundamentalist agenda. The party and its leader took strong

criticism prior, during, and after the fact. It upset several members of its base and faced tangible

consequences for deviating from the fundamentalist agenda then in place.

Did religion driven parties have the power to bring down the coalition?

Probably not. The National Religious Party was likely the only source of real threat to the

Ninth Knesset's coalition government. Its twelve seats were critical to form Begin's government.

With the Democratic Movement for Change joining the 18th government shortly after the

elections, however (such addition took place prior to the Camp David Accords), the Likud

coalition could probably have survived the NPR disassociation regardless (The Knesset).

Before continuing with this subject, it is relevant to clarify the Knesset's coalition

formation process. As a unicameral entity, the Knesset legislature is formed by 120 members

(Kilroy, 2006). Its electoral system is "based on nation-wide proportional representation, and the number of seats which every list receives in the Knesset is proportional to the number of voters who voted for it" (The Electoral System in Israel). After the election, the current President appoints a Knesset member who can likely form a viable coalition government. This coalition requires an absolute majority, 61 members, so it normally requires a group of political parties and individual seat holders to reach such a number.

At the formation of the 18th government on 20 June 1977, the Knesset's coalition was configured as follows: Likud members (including Shlomzion) counted 44 seats; the National Religious Party provided 12 seats, Agudat Yisrael contributed with four seats, an Independent member (Moshe Dayan) added the last one seat needed for the absolute majority of 61 seats (Factional and Government Make-Up of the Ninth Knesset).

Among the coalition members, there were two groups that could possibly, based on religious grounds, act against the government: the NRP and the Agudat Yisrael. The NPR (holding 12 seats) was likely the main threat to the coalition. This party had "exerted predominant influence over the enforcement of the religious status quo," advancing "a political program focusing on establishment of Jewish sovereignty over the whole land of Israel as a decisive step toward hastening a divinely ordained process of redemption, which they believed had already begun [as a result of the Six Days War]" (Lustick, For the Land and the Lord, 1988, p. 8).

The Agudat Yisrael (holding 4 seats) represented a significantly less relevant threat to Begin's coalition. First, if counting the additional support from the DMC, losing four seats would not have affected the coalition whatsoever. Second, based on historical precedents of Agudat's actions, the party did not seem as directly opposed to the ideas of the Camp David

Accords. The Agudat was "largely sectorial, caring for the welfare of its constituents in areas of educational institutions, housing, welfare services, transfer payments and exemption from military service, and the Jewish-religious character of the State" (Parliamentary Groups). Although a supportive agent of fundamentalists groups, the Agudat Yisrael members "have tended to act politically only on issues that involved maintaining or enhancing the economic resources at the disposal of their isolation from the mainstream of secular and sinful Israeli society" (Lustick, For the Land and the Lord, 1988, p. 166).

Despite such threats, Begin's coalition enjoyed some additional support right after the formation of the original government. The Democratic Movement for Change joined the coalition on Oct 24th, 1977, therefore adding 15 seats to Begins's government (Factional and Government Make-Up of the Ninth Knesset). This reinforcement likely prevented any significant action against the coalition stability from the religious parties. Given that losing the NRP entirely would cost Begin 12 seats, coupled with the unlikely loss of Agudat's support on religious grounds, the Likud government would still have kept the absolute majority needed to stay in power.

Based on these facts, Begin's Likud probably made its decision without a significant concern for the stability of the coalition. Begin had the numbers to maintain absolute majority, even after giving up the Sinai back to Egypt, and the two main sources of threat probably did not have the power to seriously affect the 18th government, therefore bringing it down as a consequence of the Camp David Accords.

Conclusion

Returning to the main question of this thesis, religious fundamentalism likely was not a significant factor defining Likud's decision to return the Sinai to Egypt. There is no doubt that

the land compromise with Egypt was a direct affront to fundamentalists' priorities. However, the assessment cannot deny that Begin's rationale, supported by the Knesset, had in its core not only security, but some other critical motivations.

Yes, the decision certainly affected Israel's security concerns in a positive manner. As mentioned earlier, the Camp David Accords resulted in neutralizing Israel's most powerful and influential enemy in the region. But there were also secondary benefits that one can argue was critical to reaching such a compromise. There were the monetary benefits that both nations enjoyed, sponsored mainly by the United States, after reaching the agreement. And most importantly, there was Begin's goal of deferring – or indefinitely postponing - the truly difficult decisions regarding Judea and Samaria, which he never publicly suggested would be up for negotiation. Giving up the Sinai meant a safer Israel coupled with a conveniently vague, yet praised, plan to deal with the West Bank.

Supporting the background that allowed the Likud to make such an unexpected move, there was public opinion in Israel. Prior to the Accords, polls reflected a society supportive of the new government and determined to address what it considered as critical issues: security and peace negotiation. In addition, Begin's coalition seemed to be fairly immune to any religious political parties' attack to bring down the 18th government.

With these factors in mind, it follows that in deciding to return the Sinai to Egypt, Begin's Likud let Security (and other pragmatic reasons) be the determining factors. Religious fundamentalism was certainly not a significant driver.

Chapter 4

Case Study: Golan Heights

Among the cases this thesis assessed, the Golan decision offers the strongest support for security as the key driver of Likud's decision in that region. Although the research will point to some evidence of religious fundamentalist groups supporting the Knesset decision, such support was mostly based on defending the Jewish settlements. It is clear, however, that nothing but pragmatic and calculated reasoning were in place to protect and secure valuable resources to further Israel's security and welfare.

The five following questions will show a Likud coalition that clearly based the decision to annex the Golan Heights based on the security value of that territory. Begin and his government officially stated such as the rationale of the proposed law and scholars assessing this Knesset move overwhelmingly agree with it. Public opinion also seemed a non-issue for Begin, given the great support found among Israelis for the control of the Golan for its strategic value. Although religious fundamentalism did not play a significant role in the annexation decision, it certainly did not interfere with it, given that religious groups also wanted to secure control over the territory, whether to protect its settlements or in the belief that it was part of the sought after Eretz Israel. Finally, Begin likely felt confident that his coalition would easily survive any collateral damage as a result of the Golan annexation.

Case Background

As previously addressed in this thesis, the time frame assessed for this case study starts during the Six-Days War, 1967, until the passing of the Golan Heights law in 1981. Given the fluid status of this region, which until today remains under Israeli annexation defying the United Nations Security Resolution 457, examining this milestone allows this work to pinpoint when the

Knesset had to move to implement a tangible decision regarding Israel's handling of this acquired territory – to annex or to trade for peace.

The Golan Heights, which represent not much more than a narrow strip of land along the northern border of Israel, had been significantly affected by military and political decisions during the time in question. Starting with its conquest during the war of 1967, followed by the immediate Jewish settlement of its area, the Yom Kipur war, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Forces (UNDOC), and culminating with the Knesset's enacting of Israeli jurisdiction over it, these roughly 500 square miles of land continue to deeply affect Israel's policies domestically and internationally.

Israel drastically transformed the Arab-Israeli conflict when it successfully overcame its enemies in the 1967 war. Despite the coordinated attack from several fronts, the Jewish state not only neutralized its enemies, but also ended up acquiring control of the Sinai, the West Bank, , East Jerusalem, Gaza, and the "strategically important Golan Heights" (Quandt W. , Peace Process - American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 2001, p. 3).

The settlement movement lost no time in moving into the newly acquired land, with settlers developing the area almost immediately after the war. Starting with the Kibbutz of Merom Golan, which was founded in July 1967, Israelis spread throughout the Heights to build 12 Jewish communities by 1970 (Golan Heights Background, 1994).

In 1973, Syria moved across the 1967 cease-fire line and made its most significant gains in recapturing the lost territory. Israel took heavy losses during the Yom Kippur surprise attack, and came dangerously close to succumbing to Egypt and Syria. Syrian forces, however, could not stand their ground against Israel's massive counter attack that pushed the invading army back to the post-1967 War borders (Golan Heights profile, 2011).

The aftermath of the 1973 War, coupled with the extremely high and continuous tension between Israel and Syria, led to the formation of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF). The fruit of a United States led diplomatic initiative, the belligerent parties eventually subscribed to the Agreement on Disengagement between Israeli and Syrian forces. The agreement, which was signed on 31 May 1974, enabled the establishment of a separation area and two equal zones with restricted forces and armaments. In addition, the agreement called for the direct involvement of a United Nations observer force to supervise its implementation. Therefore, by the authority of the Security Council Resolution 350 of 1974, the UNDOF was created. Since its establishment, the UNDOF has been present in the area continuously observing the cease fire and supervising the disengagement agreement. (UNDOF Background).

The climax of this time-table, as far as this work is concerned, was the enactment of the Golan Heights law. On December 14th, 1981, the Likud led Knesset culminated its efforts to establish control over that disputed territory by passing a law to apply Israeli sovereignty to the Golan. The law provided its purpose in three short paragraphs. First, it established that "the law, jurisdiction and administration of the state shall apply" to the region in question. Second, it determined its validity as immediate. Third, it assigned the Minister of the Interior as responsible for its implementation, "in consultation with the Minister of Justice, to enact regulations for its implementation and to formulate in regulations transitional provisions concerning the continued application of regulations, orders, administrative orders, rights and duties which were in force on the Golan Heights prior to the application of this Law" (Golan Heights Law, 1981). As a result of this milestone, Begin, backed by a 63 against 21 vote majority, successfully achieved his plan, which led to the implementation of a *de facto* annexation of the Golan Heights (Ben-Zvi, 1993).

This work moves now to assess the Likud led Knesset during the decision process leading to the Golan Law. Like the previous case, the following five questions will attempt to determine what roles security considerations and religious fundamentalism played, if any, in achieving this outcome.

Did the government's decision affect Israel's security?

As previously mentioned, this case study presents vast evidence that the Likud government considered security above all when deciding to keep the Golan Heights. Several sources attest to a decision process rooted in the importance of preserving the strategic advantage of keeping control over the region for political and military purposes.

Perhaps one of the best examples illustrating Begin's coallition's view regarding the Golan is found in the comments of Moshe Dayan, Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1981. Dayan "asserted that the Golan 'is not part of our ancestors' land," therefore a territory to be considered as a "political asset, subject to negotiations." Moreover, the Foreign Minister referred to the region as not being "regarded as 'sanctified area' but rather as a territory invaluable for Israel's security, a bargaining counter to be traded for progress towards peace" (Yishai, 1985, p. 51).

Not too far in the past, Israeli leaders had already recognized the importance of Golan. In January of 1977, Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin referred to the development of settlements in the territory as a tool that allows for an "increase [in] Israel's security and provides a firm basis for its demand for peace with defensible borders" (Lesch, 1977, p. 34). Although not in a Likud's controlled government, such a statement illustrates a view shared not only by Begin's Likud, but also by members of the Knesset that would eventually provide the support needed for Begin's Golan law.

The interest in the Golan Heights is not something new to Israeli security aspirations. The best example to support this claim is Israel's approach towards that area during the 1967 War. Rather than being the result of "political decisions," the Six Days War's "very outcome …as a whole" was a "race toward the Suez Canal, the Wailing Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem, and Kuneitra and the Hermon Peal of the Golan" (Yaniv, 1987, p. 132). For Israel, keeping that "part of the plateau" meant acquiring a permanent "security buffer, because of its settlements there, and because of the Golan's extensive water resources" (Hinnebusch, 1996, p. 50).

The Golan Heights' main strategic value lies in its natural features. As perfectly put by scholar Ze'ev Begin, "the significance of the Golan…is not derived from the 20 miles…that [it] add[s] to Israel, but rather comes from [its] rugged topography" (Begin Z. , 2004, p. 29). From a military perspective, the area serves the purpose of a geographic cushion – outside Israel – to facilitate stopping or slowing a Syrian attack, while allowing time for Israeli reserve forces to mobilize (McPeak, 2011).

Israeli leaders, early on and until 1981, had already recognized the strategic value of the Golan Heights and the impact that controlling the region had in ensuring the Jewish State's security. When the Likud controlled Knesset passed the law to extend Israeli sovereignty to the disputed territory, it did so solely based on security considerations. Maintaining the Golan Heights allowed the so needed buffer between Israel and Syria by securing critical defensive positions and enabling Israel's armed forces to preserve topographical superiority over its threatening neighbor

What was the officially stated government's reasoning for making the decision, and did scholars assessing the cases agree with it?

As in the Sinai case, Begin's Likud controlled government clearly expressed its rationale to pass the Golan Heights law based solely on security reasons. Not once did it mention fundamentalism pressure or influence when proposing this *de facto* annexation, which resulted in international condemnation due to the Jewish State's defiant move to extend Israeli sovereignty over the disputed territory. Scholars assessing Begin's decision mostly agree with such assertions and provide interesting insights into the government's pragmatism in doing so.

Begin not only focused on security while explaining his rationale behind the Golan law, but he also made an effort to distance himself from any "Grand Israel" related rationale. During his speech before the Knesset, while introducing the proposed act, despite mentioning the Jewish settlements in the region in the Second Temple period, he "did not demand annexation in the name of 'an inalienable historical right" (Naor, 2000, p. 166). In addition, Begin even stated that "if the President of Syria will be willing to begin peace negotiations with Israel, 'nothing will stand in our way'" (2000, p. 166).

Further substantiation of the official government position is clearly expressed in the first paragraph of the Golan Law itself. The text refers to Begin as stating that "the time had come to implement the government's policy regarding the Golan Heights citing Syria's implacable hostility to Israel, and the recent deployment of Syrian missiles on Lebanese soil." In addition, the law text presents the action as a result of "a provocation of crisis proportions…" and cites Begin reminding "the ministers that the Syrian president had recently rejected any ties with Israel, even if the PLO would recognize Israel" (Golan Heights Law, 1981).

The literature assessing the steps leading to the Golan law provides a greater understanding of Begin's reasons to pursue such a move. Among them, the way the Israeli

government perceived Syria's position at the time and how it perceived its own deserve further attention.

The Camp David Accords resulted in a change in public perception regarding Israel's Northern neighbor. With the 1979 peace treaty with Sadat, Egypt "withdrew from the cycle of Arab confrontation with Israel" and conceded that title to Syria, which Israel then began to consider "as its main regional adversary" (Karsh & Miller, 2010, p. 84). During the same time, the Syrian regime relentlessly work to build an all-Arab front against Israel and was rapidly strengthening its armed forces by acquiring advanced military equipment from the Soviet Union.

The Israeli government's attitude was also changed by the 1979 treaty. Giving up control over the Sinai by its return to Egypt allowed Begin to take a tougher approach when dealing with Israel's enemies in the east and to the north. Such a change is clearly illustrated by the1981 attacks that destroyed an Iraqi nuclear reactor, the bombarding of the PLO offices in West Beirut, and finally the annexation of the Golan Heights (Conflict, Diplomacy and Society in Israeli-Lebanese Relations). As argued by scholar Itamar Rabinovich, the Golan law "probably had a number of motives, some of them domestic, but primarily one seems to have been a desire to demonstrate that Israel still had options available, and would resort to these if others attempted to jettison the Camp David accords and to deny the legitimacy of Israel's claims to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip." Moreover, Rabinovich refers to another, yet more relevant, aspect of Begin's decision: "it was based on a sober calculation of the Arab-Israeli and Syrian-Israeli balance of power at the time" (1984, p. 131).

Begin clearly had Israel's security as his main priority when pursuing the Golan annexation. His government perceived a great threat coming from the ever belligerent Syrian armed forces and no longer had to divide its attention to address a threat from Egypt. Israel's

leaders, after their significant Camp David concession, also felt empowered to rely on more hard-hitting tactics while dealing with Israel's enemies. Based on such circumstances, scholars mostly agree with the officially stated government rationale.

Did the government perceive public opinion polling data and sources regarding the decision as favorable or unfavorable?

The Likud coalition in 1981 had ample reasons to assume it had public support to implement changes addressing the occupied territory of Golan Heights. In the months leading to the enacting of the Golan law, Begin was backed by several previous polls suggesting annexing the Golan was in line with the majority of Israelis' views, and specific studies clearly gave him and the Likud confidence that the new coalition was not only qualified, but also more capable of addressing the Jewish State's security issues.

Public opinion was likely not a great concern for Begin when making its Golan law decision. Polls bluntly showed that Israelis overwhelmingly approved the move of annexing the disputed territory. In a study conducted immediately before the first legislative attempt to pass the law, 71.7 per cent of the respondents endorsed to move to do so. In another poll shortly after the law's implementation, the approval rate was still exceptionally high, with pro-annexationist support at 70.6 per cent. Moreover, additional polls revealed a boost in the popularity of the ministers supporting the move as a result of the law implementation (Yishai, 1985).

Besides the numerous polls pointing out Israelis' views regarding the fate of the Golan Heights, it is also relevant to understand the rationale behind it. In this case, the Jewish population, like the Likud, perceived that territory as a security asset. In fact, "polls show[ed] frequently" that roughly two thirds of Israelis "say the occupied lands are invaluable only for

strategic – not religious and 'Zionist' – reasons," and that "they oppose settlements that seem an obstacle to peacemaking" (Avishai, 1990, p. 100).

Another good illustration of how the Likud could have interpreted public opinion regarding the Golan annexation as favorable was the 1981 assessment of the Israel National Election Studies (INES). This organization has been conducting election studies in Israel since 1969 and focuses on investigating voting patterns, public opinion, and political participation in the Jewish State. During that year, the INES conducted a study from March until June, assessing the responses of 3,574 citizens on topics such as peace negotiations, security, democracy, and economy.

For the purposes of this thesis, two main conclusions derived from the study: Israelis wanted the Likud to address security matters and Begin was the right person to build and maintain an effective coalition. When asked "which party best reflects your stand on security issues," a significant 43.2 percent indicated the support for the Likud versus 30.8 percent for the Alignment party. Regarding "who [among the following] would you like to see as a Prime Minister after the elections," an overwhelming 40.3 percent response went for Menachem Begin, distantly followed by Yitzhak Rabin, with 21.5 percent, and Shimon Perez, with 17.9 percent. Finally, when asked which party would likely be able to form a government, the Likud received a 46.9 percent support versus a 42.8 percent in favor of the Alignment (The Israel National Election Studies, 2007). With such supportive results soon before the elections, which preceded the Golan law implementation by only a few months, Begin probably did not see a major, or even a significant risk in moving forward with his annexation plan.

Begin's coalition had sufficient reasons to feel confident about implementing the Golan law without major concerns for a political backlash. The Likud government enjoyed strong

support as the ideal party to lead Israel into effective peace negotiations. The Israeli population

also clearly expressed its support for the annexation of the Golan, not only as a negotiation asset,

but also for its undeniable strategic value. In the end, Begin was even able to confirm the success

of his decision by the boost to his government's popularity as the result of the Golan law.

Did the government's position on the issue match the religious groups' position?

The simple answer is yes. Both the Likud led coalition and the religious fundamentalists

wanted to keep the conquered territory in the Golan Heights. In fact, it is probably fair to assert

that any effort to either expand or maintain conquered territory would probably find support

among Jewish fundamentalists. In this case, however, those two groups' reasons were quite

different. While Begin's government decided to annex the Golan for security reasons, the

fundamentalists groups found religious backed motivations to do the same. Fundamentalists

considered the Golan Heights as "holy land," had plans for it, and actively worked to implement

them.

The key factor in supporting the annexation of the Golan on religious grounds derives

from the ever changing view regarding what constituted the borders of the "Grand Israel." Such

territorial boundaries assertions arose mostly out of various interpretations of the biblical

descriptions of the Promised Land, which often created conflicting views regarding the Jewish

State approach towards settlements. (For the Land and the Lord, 1988).

A good illustration of this perception is found in the comments of Yehuda Elitzur, one of

the most respected scholars in the Gush Emunim. Claiming biblical sources for its conclusions,

Elitzur outlined several territorial shapes for the sought after Jewish State. Based on this view of

what he considers "ideal borders", Israel's "promised" and "patriarchal" boundaries extend to

"the Euphrates River, sourthern Turkey, Transjordan and the Nile Delta." Such an outline, which

includes "northwestern Sinai, Lebanon and western Syria, the Golan Heights, and much of the

Transjordan" represents what "Israel is required eventually to conquer and settle" and "is

sufficient to transform that territory into a part of the 'holy Land of Israel'" (Lustick, For the

Land and the Lord, 1988, p. 106).

Fundamentalists also supported efforts pressuring the government to enforce the

annexation of the Golan Heights. Among such efforts, the work of the Golan Settlement

Committee (GSC) was probably the most relevant. The formation of this group was the result of

two main events: the statements of Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan about using the Golan as

negotiation tool for peace and the implications that the treaty with Egypt had on the occupied

territory. Although not strictly a fundamentalist organization – besides religious observants, the

GSC found members in a variety of socio-politcal segments – the committee successfully

coordinated a comprehensive approach to advance its goals. The role of fundamentalists in

supporting the GSC's efforts was mainly found in organizing regional rallies in the Galilee,

Jordan Valley and other agricultural settlements, ensuring attendance of "local councils and

municipalities of all political streams" (Yishai, 1985, p. 52).

In this case, the reasons of both the government and religious groups happen to support

the same outcome. Although Begin's Knesset sought the annexation clearly based on

pragmatism, in an effort to secure a strategic territory along with its natural resources,

fundamentalists pursued the same result based on the belief of restoring their "promised land."

Did religion driven parties have the power to bring down the coalition?

They might have had the power to disrupt the Likud led coalition, but they did not have

the motivation to do so. Considering that this question is based on the effects that the Golan Law

would have had on the integrity of the 19th government, the answer is likely no, given the

overwhelming support found among the members of the Knesset.

The formation of the 19th Israeli government took place on May, 8th 1981. In the

arrangement of the Knesset, Begin's new coalition was configured as follows: Likud members

counted 48 seats; the National Religious Party contributed with six seats; the Agudat Yisrael

provided another four seats; the Tami counted three seats; and the Telem added two more seats,

leading to an absolute majority of 63 seats (Parliamentary Groups).

Once again, the National Religious Party and the Agudat Yisrael were the main likely

forces that could have caused a rupture in the coalition based on religious motives (a brief

assessment of these parties' religious based agendas were already addressed in chapter three).

The best way, then, to estimate Begin's confidence level when proposing and avidly pursuing the

implementation of the Golan law is to assess the voting support that the law found among the

parties.

Scholar Yael Yeshai rightly refers to the introduction of the Golan bill as a "dramatic

event in Israeli parliamentary history" (Israeli Annexation of East Jerusalem and the Golan

Heights: Factors and Processes, 1985). Unlike the norm, which required statutory two days

between the proposal of a new law and its vote, the Golan bill was granted special privilege to be

debated immediately after its presentation. By the end of the day, on December 14th 1981, with a

vote of 63 in favor and 21 against, the 10th Knesset approved the extension of Israeli sovereignty

to the Golan Heights. The bill found its support mainly in the Likud's coalition factions, with the

exception of the ultra-orthodox Agudat – which chose to abstain. Moreover, the law took the

votes from the Tehiya and eight members of the Alignment party (Yishai, 1985).

The decision to annex the Golan Heights was not highly controversial as far as the religious based parties' were concerned. After all, it appeared to support the view that Israel was entitled to secure the territory acquired in 1967, therefore moving a little closer to the Eretz Israel's goal – regardless of what motivated the decision. Among the religious factions of the Likud coalition, Begin had the support of the National Religious Party, and the Agudat Yisrael, while not voting for the law, also did not present a tangible opposition. Without the risk of losing these two parties, the Prime Minister probably felt confident that the coalition would not be affected by his decision.

Conclusion

As previously stated, the decision to annex the Golan Heights by the implementation of the Golan law is probably the best example to support the hypothesis that security considerations shape Likud's policies towards disputed territories. Even though the alternate rational of religious fundamentalism pressure would not constitute a significant obstacle in this case, given that such groups also wanted to maintain the territory in question, it is undeniable that Begin's government took a pragmatic approach leading to his decision and based it solely on how annexing the Golan Heights would increase Israeli strategic interests in dealing with its northern neighbor.

In addition, the Likud led coalition was deeply aware of the overwhelming support that it found among Israel's population. It not only recognized the public approval for the Likud as a leading political party, but also as a force to build a strong Knesset and address the peace negotiations and security concerns appropriately. Lastly, Begin also understood the effects of the Golan Law on national politics and perceived very little risk to his coalition as a consequence of the law's implementation.

Chapter 5

Case Study: Gaza Strip

Once again, the assessment of the Gaza disengagement points to a Likud that primarily considered security matters when deciding to unilaterally leave that conquered territory. This is especially important to this thesis because for the first time an Israeli government evacuated settlements from the most sacred regions, Gaza and West Bank.

The answers to the next five questions will point to a decision that indeed affected Israel's security, although not only from a military perspective, but also based on the perception of the threat of an ever growing Palestinian population and the impact that incorporating such a significantly large group would have on Israeli society. In addition, this assessment will address the scholars' agreement on the security reasons behind the government rationale, but also add the details on influence of domestic politics. It will show that public opinion gave the government reasons to believe it would not face a significant backlash by abandoning Gaza and that it did not have to fear coalition stability for doing so. Lastly, it illustrates how drastically different were the views of the government and religious fundamentalists regarding giving up control of the Gaza Strip.

Case Background

On the morning of September, 12th 2005, the departure of the last Israeli soldier from the Gaza territory marked the end of a long history of Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip. Being one of the main territories taken during the Six Day War, this area counted twenty-one settlements, with more than 8,000 settlers, by the time of the disengagement. Nevertheless, what really distinguishes this case from the others is the fact that for the first time in history Israel dismantled and evacuated settlements in this region. Moreover, such an unprecedented move

took place under the command of Likud's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, also known as the

"father of settlements" (Rynhold & Waxman, Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement

from Gaza, 2008, p. 11).

The importance of this case lies in how fundamentalists saw Sharon's decision and how it

affected their religious based goals and sentiments toward that region. It was evident that the

Gush Emunim designated the sacredness of the Eretz Israel as its top priority. Despite the fluid

understanding of what constituted the Grand Israel concept, the inclusion of Judea, Samaria, and

Gaza definitely was a common perception among fundamentalists' views. Members of the Gush

constantly worked to prevent any "arrangement even minimally satisfactory for Palestinians in

the West Bank and Gaza," therefore ensuring territory integrity (Lustick, For the Land and the

Lord, 1988, p. 178).

Although a champion of Israeli settlements, Sharon started to demonstrate signs of

changing policies regarding the acquired territories shortly after becoming Prime Minister in

2001. One good example was his public acceptance of the eventual creation of a Palestinian

state. Perhaps even more significant was the change in how he referred to such territories. As

opposed to the usual language referring to West Bank and Gaza as "liberated territories," as early

as 2002, Sharon addressed the Likud in a completely different tone: "I think the idea that it is

possible to continue keeping 3.5 million Palestinians under occupation – yes it is occupation, you

might not like the word, but what is happening is occupation – is bad for Israel…controlling 3.5

million Palestinians cannot go on forever" (Rynhold, Re-Conceptualizing Israeli Approaches to

"Land For Peace" and the Palestinian Question Since 1967, 2011, p. 26).   Interestingly enough,

in that same year, Sharon publicly stated that he would never abandon any of the settlements in

the West Bank or Gaza. He referred to those territories as a venue to expand Jewish presence in the region, therefore increasing national security (Kilroy, 2006).

Nevertheless, in 2003, Prime Minister Sharon proposed a unilateral disengagement plan to direct a complete withdraw from the Gaza Strip, regardless of a possible peace agreement with the Palestinians. On September, 12th 2005, the Military Commander marked the end of 38 years of Israeli rule over the Gaza Strip by issuing the following proclamation:

> "1. In accordance with the resolution of the Government of Israel of September 11, 2005 the forces of the IDF left the areas of Gaza Strip and transferred the control of these areas to the Palestinian Council.
>
> 2. From the end of this day, the Military Government in Gaza Strip has ended. Major General Dan Harel, Commander of IDF forces in Gaza Strip, September 12, 2005" (Bell & Shefi, 2010, p. 269).

Once again, this work will assess Sharon's Likud led Knesset's decision to give up control over a conquered territory. As in the two previous cases, the following five questions will examine what roles security considerations and religious fundamentalism influence played, if any, in achieving this outcome.

Did the government's decision affect Israel's security?

The straight forward answer is yes. However, the rationale explaining how the Gaza disengagement affected Israel's security goes much deeper than the military's perspective, as found in the Sinai and the Golan cases. Sharon's decision to leave that territory had roots in his pragmatism and views of, for instance, the significant cost of maintaining the occupation, the hopeless negotiations with Palestinians, and the unwanted possibility of absorbing the Arab population into Israel, therefore dramatically impacting its Jewish character.

Given the past aspirations of Israel's government towards the Gaza Strip, it is remarkable that Sharon's Likud opted to unilaterally give up this territory. In 1977, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin – Alignment party – declared Israel's commitment to increasing settlements in order to provide greater foundation to pursue peace with defensible borders. Among several other "confrontation lines," such as Golan, Jerusalem, and the Hebron Hills, he emphasized the importance of ensuring the "blocking zone" south of the Gaza Strip as a factor of national security (Lesch, 1977, p. 34). Nevertheless, the view of keeping Gaza as a "blocking zone" completely changed by the time Ariel Sharon was Likud's Prime Minister. As argued by scholar Barry Rubin, "…the territories [Gaza Strip and West Bank] no longer serve a strategic function for Israel, given the unlikelihood of a conventional attack by Arab state armies, and Israel could better defend its citizens by creating a strong defensive line, rather than by dispersing forces" (Kilroy, 2006, p. 398).

This change of approach leading to the Gaza disengagement was due to Israel's recognition of the limits of military force in the resolution of the conflict. Sharon's initial take on Gaza relied heavily on the Israeli armed forces as the main tool for achieving peace. At that time, Israel fiercely attempted to suppress the Palestinian fighters and even accomplished some tactical successes. However, the small victories were not enough to prevent military and security leaders to realize the limitations of such strategy. As a consequence, such limits started to influence Israel's political debate around 2003 and moved Sharon to prevent returning to reliance on bilateral negotiations (Pressman, Israeli Unilateralism and Israeli-Palestinian Relations, 2001-2006, 2006).

The change to a unilateral approach, as further discussed in the next question of this work, was a key factor preceding Sharon's critical decision towards Gaza. As scholar Nadav

Shelef argued, "the increasingly widespread recognition that the continued occupation is not only impossible, but actually harmful to Israel's security and society, makes maintaining the status quo in the territories equally unpalatable" (2007, p. 460). Sharon's decision took into consideration mainly the expectation that the long term interests of Israel would be best served by a key change in policy: "one focused on contraction rather than expansion, and the belief that Israel's new system of security fences would provide a more effective barrier against terrorist attacks than maintaining a military and civilian presence in portions of the occupied territories" (Kilroy, 2006, p. 398).

Unlike the other cases assessed in this thesis, the Gaza disengagement has a more complex explanation to justify the Likud's decision to leave the occupied territory. Nevertheless, when the Likud controlled Knesset approved Sharon's plan, it did so accepting the Prime Minister's view that it would lead to a safer Israel. But rather than being based solely on a military point of view, this decision's rationale relied on a change of policy that perceived maintaining of occupation of the territories as harmful to Israeli security interests.

What was the officially stated government's reasoning for making the decision, and did scholars assessing the cases agree with it?

Sharon's Likud clearly based its official rationale for the Gaza disengagement on the pursuit of Israeli security. Although scholars largely agree with that position, they also point out to significantly complex set of reasons forming the foundation of that conclusion. Among such, the literature assessing this case focuses on a deep ideological change in Likud's policies and the influence of domestic and international politics.

Sharon's official reason to leave Gaza, which led to resolution 4235 of December 11th, 2005, was clearly argued on his Address at the Fourth Herzliya Conference in December of

2003. At that occasion, Sharon refers his coalition's approved "Road Map" to peace, based on

George W. Bush's June 2002 speech, as the "only political plan accepted by Israel, the

Palestinians, the Americans and a majority of the international community," and as that the "full

and genuine implementation of the programs" as the "best way to achieve true peace." Sharon

also refers to the failings of the Palestinian Authority to carry out its part of the plan's

implementation and presents his government's decision to move to a unilateral approach to

"speedily advance" the Road map "toward quiet and genuine peace." He concluded by stating

that the disengagement's purpose is to "reduce terrorism as much as possible," therefore

"grant[ing] Israeli citizens the maxim level of security" and emphasizing that his plans "is a

security measure and not a political one" (Israel's Disengagement Plan: Selected Documents,

2003).

Even though Sharon mostly based his reasoning on security concerns, scholars point to

indirect motives affecting the government's decision during that time. A shift within the Likud

seemed to have played a major role in guiding the Gaza Disengagement. In his assessment of

Sharon's plan, scholars John Rynhold and Dov Waxman refer to "how the abandonment of the

Revisionist commitment to the value of maintaining Jewish control over Eretz Yisrael meant that

other core values, notably maintaining Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state, along

with security concerns, now shaped the policy preferences of many leading members of the

Likud." They point to an attitude of "given up trying to permanently secure Israel's possession of

the West Bank and Gaza" to a focus on preventing the massive absorption of Arabs into their

society (2008, p. 23). Such conclusion is easily reached if taken into consideration the publicly

known demographic predictions that by 2010 there would be more Palestinians than Jews in

Israel, West Bank, and Gaza combined. The Gaza withdrawal, then, would represent the most

feasible way to ensure a long-term Jewish majority in Israel. As expressed by Deputy Prime

Minister Ehud Olmert, "above all hovers the cloud of demographics" (Rynhold & Waxman,

2008, p. 23).

The same concern regarding demographics is explored by scholar Jeremy Pressman. In

his assessment, he refers to an interview with four former chiefs of Israel's Shin Bet - a

combined security and intelligence service organization – criticizing Sharon's government for

not interfering with what they considered a threat to Israel's "Jewish and democratic character"

as a matter of "Israel's survival" (Pressman, Israeli Unilateralism and Israeli-Palestinian

Relations, 2001-2006, 2006, p. 367).

Pressman also points to domestic issues while assessing the government's decision. First,

he refers to the disengagement plan as Sharon's recognition that the Likud had to address a

growing trend of discontent regarding alternative proposals and the need of his government to act

unilaterally to preempt competing tactics, such as the Geneva's and the People's Voice plans,

which as he put it, "could lead us to the abyss" (Pressman, 2006, p. 367). Second, Pressman

points out that by giving up Gaza, Sharon would shift attention from the West Bank, where Israel

continued to increase its presence by expanding its settlement blocks.

Despite the indirect reasons that scholars provide while assessing Sharon's true motives

to leave Gaza, such reasons seem to be enablers for the Prime Minister to implement his plan to

secure Israel's peace. The Likud government at the time seemed to foresee a peace with

Palestinians only by separating Jews from Arabs and such outcome was only feasible in the

withdrawal from the occupied region.

Did the government perceive public opinion polling data and sources regarding the

decision as favorable or unfavorable?

Sharon's Likud had abundant reasons not to fear the repercussions of the disengagement plan based on Israelis' view of his move. Prior to proposing the handover of Gaza's control to the Palestinian Authority, polls showed that the majority of the population supported parting from the settlements in the region. In addition, studies indicated that Israelis understood the cost of maintaining the status quo and foresaw the impact that a possible incorporation of Arabs into the Jewish state's society would have on their ethnic and democratic values.

Prior to the Gaza Disengagement, Sharon could see that public opinion favored the plan that his Likud led Knesset was about to implement. In the summer of 2005, polls suggested that the "vast majority" of Israeli citizens fully backed policies that took a hard line against terrorism and "advocate a proactive and unilateral response." At that time, the Yedioth Ahromoth, Israel's most widely circulated newspaper, published poll results showing that 54 per cent of Israelis backed policies to evacuate more settlements, such as Gaza, "while 68 per cent supported dismantling of all illegal settlements in the West Bank" (Kilroy, 2006, p. 402).

Earlier in 2003, another study noted support towards the Likud's change in policy. Guided by the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies – Tel Aviv University, and conducted by the B.I. and Lucille Cohen Institute of Public Opinion Research, the National Security and Public Opinion Project surveyed 1,103 citizens on their opinions related to national security issues. The final report emphasized three main conclusions. First, 43 percent of Israelis expected the government would act to strengthen peace with Israel's neighbors within the next three years – an increase from 23 percent in 2002. Second, there was an increase of supporters for abandoning all but the large settlement blocs, moving from 50 percent in 2002 to 59 percent in 2003. Lastly, the support for the separation from Palestinians by "withdrawing unilaterally even if it meant

abandoning settlements" increased from 48 percent in 2002 to 56 percent in 2003 (The Jaffee

Center for Strategic Studies, 2003).

Sharon also knew that Israelis understood his rationale in implementing the Gaza plan.

For instance, the majority of Israelis praised a plan to remove settlements form Gaza because it

would free Israel's from the burden of controlling approximately 1.3 million Gaza Palestinians.

They understood that such a requirement represented "expending a disproportionate amount of

human, financial, and military resources protecting Jewish settlers in Gaza" (Pressman, Israeli

Unilateralism and Israeli-Palestinian Relations, 2001-2006, 2006, p. 367). Moreover, Israelis in

general did not share the perception that Gaza was an integral part of the Jewish state, and felt

that "parting with much or all of the territories was possible and rational" and that a plan to

implement such move would face no "intra-Jewish violence, military or police disobedience, or

civil unrest" (Pressman, 2006, p. 370).

It is valid also to consider Sharon's and Likud's gains from changing the strategy so

significantly. As a former military officer and defense minister, considered a champion of the

political right, Sharon's rise to Likud's leadership in 2001 was perceived as a "referendum on

previous Prime Minister Ehud Barak's Labor Party and its weak response to the Palestinian

Intifada" (Kilroy, 2006, p. 403). However, by 2003, with the disappointing prospects of a return

to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Sharon's personal popularity "began to fall significantly for

the first time" and the Gaza disengagement helped "reverse this situation" by unilaterally acting

on what "55-63 percent of the Israeli public" supported (Rynhold & Waxman, 2008, p. 31).

Leaving the Gaza settlements made complete political sense to Sharon and the Likud.

The decision found the support of the vast majority of Israelis, who in fact did not see that region

as an integral part of Israel and no longer wished to maintain the status quo. In addition, Israeli

citizens understood the consequences to indefinitely maintaining control over the territory, which could lead to its possible incorporation into the Jewish state, therefore adding 1.3 million of Palestinians to their society. Lastly, Sharon felt his political support shifting the wrong way after the elections of 2001 and recognized the need to change to address the pressures and wishes of his constituents.

Did the government's position on the issue match the religious groups' position?

Absolutely not. Once again, any effort aimed at negotiating or returning land to Palestinians faced tough opposition from the religious fundamentalists groups – especially the Gush Emunin. Sharon's plan to leave Gaza was no exception. The Gush's reaction, however, reached a much higher level, given that for the first time settlements in Gaza and the West Bank were being affected. Consequently, the Likud government during that time had to deal with angry protesters attempting to derail the disengagement from the territories.

As perfectly put by scholar David Newman, "the forced evacuation of the Gaza Strip and Northern West Bank settlements represented the most serious ideological and political challenge faced by the settler movement since its inception in the early 1970s" (2005, p. 216). The view of the extreme religious community was also illustrated by the comments of Eliyakin Haetzni, a leading fundamentalist ideologue, regarding the importance of Gaza and the West Bank. To him, "any government ceding territory would thereby negate Zionism and its own claim to legitimate authority." He additionally threatened that "if the state withdraws the army…from Judea, Samaria, and Gaza , scores of thousands of Jews will remain, perhaps joined by thousands more…in an emergency mobilization to save the land….and if…the government tries to evacuate 100,000 Jews from their homes by force, a civil war will break out" (Lustick, For the Land and the Lord, 1988, p. 124).

Although the other territorial concessions were painful reminders of a possible defeat of the fundamentalists' cause, the Gaza disengagement plan had a greater impact on their beliefs. Fundamentalists considered Gaza as "an integral part if the whole Land of Israel" and the Gush Emunim had an uncompromising commitment to incorporate Gaza into the Jewish state (Lustick, Israel's Dangerous Fundamentalists, 1987, p. 138).

As before, fundamentalists did not fall silent before Sharon's imminent implementation of the disengagement. The Gush Emunin led efforts among similar groups and fiercely pushed its influence to oppose Sharon's plan (Hellinger, 2008). Some religious leaders and rabbis, for instance, called for "civil disobedience and even use of force to resist the evacuation of settlements" (Rynhold & Waxman, Ideological Change and Israel's Disengagement from Gaza, 2008, p. 31).

The acts of extremism increased from small group efforts to major protests involving an ever growing portion of the population. In the months leading to the Gaza disengagement, the protestors' actions included "blocking major traffic arteries, their takeover of abandoned buildings, and the general disruption of public life throughout the country" and went well above what they had previously perpetrated. Policy makers' reaction reached a point of comparing their actions to Jewish terrorism, therefore subject to be "dealt with in the same firm way as Arab terrorism" (Newman, 2005, p. 202).

When moving forward with the Gaza disengagement, both Sharon and his Likud led government held the certainty that it was an affront to the Jewish fundamentalist groups. They had several years of history to back up this perception, and the countless times in which the Gush Emunim protested any plans that even considered touching the territories of the West Bank and

Gaza. In addition, as the plan's implementation approached, Sharon could see that his idea of giving up Gaza would drastically affect how fundamentalists saw him and his government.

Did religion driven parties have the power to bring down the coalition?

Not during the phase preceding the disengagement implementation. Although the original coalition of the 16th Knesset was somewhat affected by the plans of unilaterally leaving Gaza, the rearranged government coalition that was in place for the actual transfer of territory control from Israel to the Palestinians faced no challenges from the religious fundamentalists.

Before addressing the configuration of the coalition, it is important to assess the unique circumstances of that government. Officially, there was only one government during the 16th Knesset's term. In reality, though, three different governments acted between 2003 and 2006. The first one, from 2003 to 2004, was center-right government. This was followed by a center-left government that basically lasted until the implementation of the Gaza disengagement. Lastly, the third government, consisting of a single parliamentary group – Kadima, served as a transition government to address the hospitalization of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon (The Main Events and Issues During the Sixteenth Knesset). For the purposes of answering this question, this work will focus on the first two governments.

At the formation of the 30th government on 28 February 2003, the Knesset's coalition was configured as follows: 38 seats assigned to the Likud party, 15 seats for the Shinui, 6 seats for the NRP, and 7 seats for the National Union. The first parties to abandon the government were the NRP and the National union. Both these parties did so in protest against the Gaza disengagement plan. Shortly after, the Shinui also left the original government for its disagreement with the 2005 budget law. At that point, Sharon had to reassess his possible allies to keep control of the Knesset (The Main Events and Issues During the Sixteenth Knesset).

The second government of the 16th Knesset had a quite different configuration. The Likud still kept its 38 seats, but now relied on 19 seats from the Labor-Meimad party, and 5 seats from the United Torah Judaism – although a coalition member, the United Torah was not part of the government. This new government was formed clearly aware of Sharon's plan to disengage from Gaza and was basically put in place to enable the Knesset to do so.

The Gaza disengagement plan was indeed affected by the religious parties. The impact such parties had on the coalition, however, was limited due to Sharon's ability to form a second government and keep Likud control of the Knesset. Therefore, by the time the plan implementation was imminent, Sharon had the confidence to do so without further threats of another government collapse.

Conclusion

Once again, the efforts of religious fundamentalist did not seem to have a decisive effect on how the Knesset managed such a major milestone in handing over control of a conquered territory. The assessment above points to a very pragmatic decision process that focused mainly in protecting Israel's interests and setting up the Jewish State's position to maintain its society values and its Jewish identity – even if it meant abandoning strongly held beliefs, such as keeping control of settlements in Gaza and the West Bank.

Sharon's plan had at its core the security of Israel's society. What should be emphasized in this case was the different ways in which the threat was viewed. Keeping Gaza represented a massive military effort assigned to the Israeli Defense Forces. Not only that, but it also represented a serious financial burden on the government. In addition, as scholars agree, there was a very real threat of a possible incorporation of Palestinians into the Jewish society. Both the

government and Israel's population understood the likely consequences that this development would have to their values and the "Jewish character" of Israel as a state.

Another fact supporting the Gaza disengagement plan was the overwhelming public support found among Israelis for giving up control over the territory in question. Several polls suggested that the Jewish population would positively accept carrying out the plan. Moreover, even though returning Gaza to the Palestinian was a direct affront to the religious fundamentalist activists' agenda, the Likud led government had no reasons to fear a coalition collapse as a result of the plan implementation.

Chapter 6 -Conclusion

"Foreign Policy and security have been central to the Israeli system since its establishment, and the primary objectives – ensuring the nation's existence and security in the face of Arab hostility – have remained essentially constant" (Penniman, 1979, p. 255).

Based on the three cases this research assessed, Likud's policies towards Israeli settlements are clearly based on establishing the security of the Jewish state. Time and again, Likud leaders, along with the other coalition parties, pragmatically base their decision rationales on establishing this sought after security, which includes neutralizing enemies, maintaining the Jewish character of Israel, limiting Palestinian autonomy, and expanding settlements in the occupied territory. In doing so, Likud leaders sometimes break ties with well-established allies, adopt untraditional measures, and ,more importantly, compromise their views regarding the Eretz Israel concept.

This research started with the challenge of a view held by many scholars assessing the Israel-Palestine conflict: do Jewish religious fundamentalist groups actually influence the political process in determining Israeli settlement policies? Alternatively, it considered a second hypothesis: Security, rather, is the main motivation behind previous and current settlement policies.

The literature reviewed prior to this research focused greatly on the perception of religious fundamentalist groups' influence on settlement decisions. It also assessed the core beliefs of such groups and their motivations in defending Israel's right to conquer and retain territory that, according to them, is part of Eretz Israel. Lastly, it addressed the means employed by these groups to advance their agendas and evaluated the role of security considerations by Knesset leaders addressing the issue. The main criticism of the sources studied is the failure to

reconcile the claim that religious groups dramatically affect the settlement decision process with vast evidence that such decisions are in many cases contrary to the religious agenda.

To assess this contradiction and evaluate the two proposed hypothesis, this research conducted three case studies on the most significant settlement related decisions during Israel's existence. It examined the return of the Sinai to Egypt, the annexation of the Golan Heights, and the unilateral disengagement of the Gaza Strip. These three cases have three main characteristics in common, which was also the reason for their selection. First, they all symbolize significant decisions in expanding or decreasing control over notably large amounts of disputed land. Second, they are all deeply related to the concept of Eretz Israel, which make them relevant to the religious fundamentalist groups. Third, all, or some of their main decisions took place under a Likud led government, which is generally accepted as a party that relies heavily on the support of religious groups.

In addition, when assessing these cases, this research examined key questions in the attempt to better understand these settlement decisions' rationales. It assessed the role and influence of security on the decisions and whether scholars agreed with the governments' official reasons. It also evaluated whether public opinion during the decisions' times could have shaped the Likud's policies. Lastly, it questioned whether the government's position matched those of the religious groups and whether the Likud coalition could have endured such decisions unharmed.

The decision to return the Sinai to Egypt was mainly based on security reasons. It solidified Israel's position by neutralizing the Jewish state's greatest enemy in the region. Simultaneously, it served the secondary - but crucial - purpose of shifting the Israel-Palestine conflict focus away from the West Bank. At the time, public opinion supported the new

government and showed an Israeli society deeply concerned with security and peace negotiation. The government coalition enjoyed certain stability and had no reasons to fear a threat from parties unfavorable to the land for peace agreement approach. Lastly, unquestionably, returning the Sinai to Egypt was a direct affront to the religious fundamentalist agenda. Nevertheless, evidence showed that no amount of opposition could have led the Likud leaders to pursue a different outcome.

The annexation of the Golan Heights is definitely the strongest argument to support the hypothesis of security as the main driver of Likud's policies towards settlements. Prime Minister Begin pragmatically considered strategic value of controlling that region for political and military purposes. Public opinion once again favored this settlement decision with polls showing overwhelming support for the Likud as a leading political party and as a force to maintain a strong Knesset and properly address matters of national security. Although there was a potential for coalition dissolution, Likud leaders knew that the parties supporting the religious fundamentalist agenda had no reasons to oppose the annexation. As for the religious influence, given that in this case the government was annexing a disputed territory, it only pleased religious groups that were concerned with settlement disputes.

As the previous cases, the Gaza Strip disengagement was primarily a security based decision. Nevertheless, it considered not only strategic and military matters, but also some indirect threats to the Jewish state: the ever-growing Palestinian population within Jewish borders, preserving the Jewish character of Israel's society, and the massive financial burden to maintain the Gaza occupation. Several polls at the time showed that public opinion strongly supported Israel's unilateral disengagement of Gaza and that Israelis clearly understood the costs of occupation and the risks of incorporating such a massive Arab population into their society.

Regarding the role on religious fundamentalists in this decision, the Gaza disengagement is

probably the best case to weaken the claim of "great influence" of religious groups. When Likud

leaders decided to implement this plan, for the first time the territories of Gaza and parts of West

Bank were being affected. The government experienced a frantic disapproval from religious

fundamentalist, but decided to move forward regardless.

These conclusions provide a much better understanding of the rationales behind Likud

leaders' decisions regarding Israel's disputed territories. Three common factors stood out,

though. First, the security of the Jewish state was always the desired outcome. Second, the Likud

governments involved enjoyed a fairly stable coalition to support their resolutions. Third, in all

three situations, public opinion seemed to endorse the type of policies employed by the Likud led

Knesset.

This research does not intend to imply, however, that these three factors combined drove

Likud leaders' decisions in the studied cases. It is clear that security was by far their main

motivation. But it cannot be ignored that favorable public opinion and a limited threat to the

government coalition stability likely acted to present a favorable background to facilitate such

controversial decisions. It is also important to emphasize that Likud leaders ignored the protests

of religious fundamentalist groups, no matter how contentious they were.

Moreover, this research's conclusions might or might not be fully applicable to other

cases that do not share similar characteristics as the cases it evaluated. As addressed previously,

when testing the security considerations hypothesis, this work purposefully focused on decisions

involving a significantly large amount of disputed land, with such land being related to the

concept of Eretz Israel, and under a Likud led government coalition. Variations of these criteria,

such as the size of the settlement in question, the political party in power and the vulnerability of

its coalition, the value of the disputed territory to the general public – Jerusalem being a good

example of such case – and even the power of international pressure involved could potentially

lead to an alternate conclusion.

As this research's conclusion is applied to the current Israeli peace process, leaders of the

international community might increase the effectiveness of their efforts by employing this

understanding when mediating the land for peace negotiation. This is even more relevant now

that a Likud led government has been in power for the last four years and recently formed a new

government after successfully obtaining the greatest number of seats in January 2013.

The two-state solution decision is what now lies ahead for the governments of Israel and

Palestine. And the new Likud led government might just be facing the very same three factors

that this research found in the three cases studied. First, the threat of a third Intifada, which in

recent months has been gaining momentum fueled by a "moribund peace process," a

deteriorating economic situation in the West Bank, and recently the protests for the death of a

Palestinian detainee, Arafat Jaradat, in the Megiddo Jail in Northern Israel (Olmert, 2013).

Second, Prime Minister Netanyahu's successful move to "build a broad coalition -- one that

easily surpasses the 60-seat majority in the 120-member Knesset" in order "to form a wide and

stable government" to protect Israel (Schwartz, 2013). Third, recent polls showing a "52

percent…support [for] the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel as part of a peace

agreement" (Perri, 2013).

Some distractions might arise to negatively affect this expected outcome, though - the

main one being the threat from Iran. As Prime Minister Netanyahu himself put it during his

speech of January, 22nd 2013, "the paramount task of the government that I will form will be to

stop Iran from arming itself with nuclear weapons" (Lewis, 2013). It is possible, therefore, that

the two state solution will depend on whether the Palestinian struggle and the risk of a third Intifada can top the Iranian threat in the minds of Likud members and Israelis in general.

Israel has faced many threats since its birth and engaged in many battles with the Palestinian people. The actions of one to neutralize or eliminate the other were many, but very little was accomplished to attain the peaceful cohabitation of the territory that both Israelis and Palestinians call home. Israel, as clearly the most powerful party, is in a better position to advance this goal through the implementation of the two state solution. Nevertheless, despite the perception that religious fundamentalist influence fuels this conflict and disrupts its success, only a real threat to the security of the Jewish state will move the next Likud government towards this chapter's conclusion.

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