

GEOPOLITICS AND FOREIGN POLICY. THE CASE OF ISRAEL

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present research paper is to provide an accurate insight into the spatial and resource dimensions of Israeli geopolitics, with a special focus on territories and water, and determine how these ultimately influenced the foreign policy of the Jewish state by means of process tracing applied in the two sets of cases provided. Israeli foreign policy always had peculiar traits yet my claim is that it was always influenced by geopolitical considerations which will be called *sui generis*: geopolitical consciousness. As such land and water as part of this consciousness establish a nexus that was always at play in defining the actions of Israel in the region, be it a major peaceful or military enterprise or a mere part of it. The cases provided: the War of Independence, The Six Days War, the Camp David Accords and the Oslo Peace Process each bear the mark of the geopolitical consciousness of the state in some form. As findings come to suggest both land and water played a significant role in determining Israeli foreign policy in the region, which even though was broken down into three options proved to be much more complex than that with a multitude of shifts and overlaps among isolationism, expansionism and reconciliatory action.

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INTRODUCTION

Situated within the broad field of geopolitics and foreign policy with a special focus on the case of Israel, therefore breaking with the tradition of researching these two disciplines in exclusive connection to a great power, the present paper will examine how geopolitical considerations influenced foreign policies and analyze to what extent policy practices conform to existing theories. As the title of the thesis suggests, the topic covered by the present research defines the relationship between two dimensions of the political: geopolitics and foreign policy in the case of a small-sized, medium-power state, which is also one of the most mediatized in the Middle-East: Israel. Even though there are various other factors contributing to foreign policy beyond geopolitics, my present aim is to focus specifically on the relation between these two. The main concern that will be addressed is to what extent geopolitical considerations, which I will term geopolitical consciousness, influenced the foreign policy behavior of the state. During the research I plan to look into the characteristics of this geopolitical consciousness, including its main determinants, objectives and rationales, most eloquent representatives and its influence on the state's behavior in the Middle East.

Even though classical geopolitics developed within the political culture and strategic discourse of the great powers (Germany, Great Britain, the United States and to a lesser degree the Soviet Union) during the first half of the 20th century, soon after World War II it gained momentum among other states as well. Smaller states, such as Israel which will be the focus of the current research, became concerned with geopolitics to a great extent, especially after the territorial changes that occurred in the aftermath of World War II and the decolonization period worldwide. National self-determination and the need to affirm their existence on the world and regional stage triggered in general the geopolitical discourses of a significant amount of these small and medium sized states. Whether these discourses and the subsequent behavior of these states were peaceful or violent came to be influenced also by the

position acquired or adopted during the Cold War. I consider Israel in this respect unique, having managed to position itself first in non-alignment with only gradual subsequent shifts towards the West by the middle of the 1950's;¹ and this is one of the reasons for choosing it as the case to be studied in depth at present.

Confronted with several major problems after its foundation in 1948, the state of Israel had to resort to a genuine geopolitical stance within the Middle-East. Among the determinants that framed Israel's unique geopolitical situation and geopolitical consciousness were: first, the fact that the fledgling state was surrounded by a generally hostile Arab world,² second, that it occupied at the same time a strategic position in the Suez area³ and third that it was a Jewish state⁴. Fourth, beyond geographic considerations it had to adopt a specific stance in respect to demographic issues as well⁵, ultimately linked to one of the most salient resource problems of the region which constitutes the fifth determinant: fresh-water and its acquisition, supply and distribution⁶. These five dimensions are the major constituents of the basis of Israeli geopolitics in the past and today as well, but with variations in scope and importance. Yet my research will draw mainly on two of these: geographic considerations and the fresh-water problem which are more relevant for the present research and their influence on foreign policy. Thus geopolitical consciousness will be limited for most of its part to these two dimensions of geopolitics. I chose to give a lesser importance to the demographic factor for a series of reasons: it is first of all organically linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to which a lot of research and work has been already allocated in terms of the refugee problem and population growth within the territories of Israel providing small space for any new

¹ Avi Shlaim, "Israel between East and West: 1948-56," *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, 36 (2004): 658.

² David Newman, "Citizenship, Identity and Location: The Changing Discourse of Israeli Geopolitics," *Geopolitical Traditions? Critical Histories of a Century of Geopolitical Thought*, eds. Dodds, K & Atkinson, D. (London: Routledge, 1998), 4.

³ George Friedman, "The Geopolitics of Israel: Biblical and Modern," *Stratfor* (2008), 7.

⁴ Newman, 4.

⁵ Uri Bialer, *Between East and West: Israel's foreign policy orientation 1948-1956*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 68, 76.

⁶ Newman, 14.

approaches on the issue. Second, given the historical background of the establishment of the state, more specifically the various waves of immigration called Aliyah's, it is somewhat difficult to analyze the exact influence geography had on the population, as classical geopolitics would proceed, since most of the long-term inhabitants of the state form a very small proportion of the population providing no solid argument for inferences to the whole population. The only two viable niches are inquiring into the socially constructed dimensions of the link between geography and the demos; and looking into how geography was utilized to create symbolic images influencing the behavior of the state.

Not only does Israel represent a unique case for understanding the influence of geopolitics on foreign policy but it also entails a series of other features that motivate its choice as the subject of my paper. First, a relatively low number of works address the issue of geopolitics in Israel explicitly and even if they do so, they either do that from a broader geopolitical context while discussing the history and development of geopolitics or they address mainly the role of the demographic factor both in respect to settlement activities and the refugee problem, or the current crisis in the dynamics of the population. Fresh-water, as the most vital resource in the area, especially in connection to the Jordan river, became prominent because of the desire of each state to control as much of it as possible.

Second, Philippe Moreau Defarges created a theoretical framework for further research, by observing three types of foreign policy options available to Israel based on the geopolitical considerations available,⁷ within which to scrutinize the effects of geopolitics on foreign policy. The first one is the isolationist approach towards the surrounding world based on the logics of the fortress, the Massada. Isolationism as such was and still is a predominant strategy as long as Israel sees itself as an isolated player in the Middle East and the world

⁷ Philippe Moreau Defarges, *Introdução a Geopolítica*, (Lisbon: Gradiva – Publicações, February 2003), 125-126.

stage,⁸ a feeling supported by the trauma of the Holocaust as well which underlined that the Jewish people could not be safe even in the societies in which they had to a great extent assimilated themselves.

The second one is the expansionist view based on the logics of the Promised Land in connection to Israel's original territories received in 1947 which by no means coincided with its biblical territories. Expansionism has been closely connected to Zionism and the desire to reestablish the boundaries of biblical Israel, and was generally a trademark of Israel's wars, all of which involved some form of occupation followed by territorial rearrangements and eventually by settlement activities. Israel was seen in the region as an expansionist-colonial state⁹ especially until around the Six Days War whereas expansionism by settlements was a phenomena that gained momentum mostly after 1967 and especially in recent decades.

The last option questions the isolationist policy in favor of reconciliation with the Arabs (an option more successfully embraced towards the end of the century). Even though the Camp David Accords of 1979 did not take place at the end of the century, the "cold peace" with Egypt did provide an example of Arab-Israeli cooperation that gained a new dimension in the 1990's when almost a 10 year long peace process developed. Yet smaller attempts at reconciliation existed almost after each of the wars undertaken and especially after the first conflagrations.

These strategies were not mutually exclusive as one might expect after such a categorization, though there were periods when one or the other dominated. Even more so, the same geopolitical consciousness depending on the given circumstances would have the capacity to fuel different processes in the 61 years history of the state.

Literature dealing with these three options is varied and diverse, the latter topic being covered the most, especially if we consider the articles and books written around the modern

⁸ Philippe Moreau Defarges, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

⁹ Stewart Reiser, "The Arab-Israeli Wars, A Conflict of Strategic Attrition" in *Prolonged Wars: The Post-Nuclear Challenge*, eds. Karl P. Magyar, Constantine P. Danopoulos, (July 2001), 68.

day peace efforts in the region. I will therefore focus my research on this issue to the most relevant geopolitical aspects, territories and water, given the fact that the Palestinian problem within itself could be the focus of a distinctive research paper if not an entire book or series of books.

The third and last reason justifying the choice of the subject is the fact that ever since its foundation the state of Israel has played a pivotal role in Middle-Eastern politics with the capacity to draw the attention of all major actors on the international scene to the events that take place around and within its borders, sometimes posing a threat even to world security. The urgency surrounding the developments in the area makes research also worthwhile.

Henceforth these provide a reasonable argument for the choice of the topic. Furthermore as a salient part of the disciplines of International Relations and Political Science, both geopolitics and foreign policy present themselves as fascinating and challenging fields of research in the case of Israel, a state that has uniquely utilized both in order to maintain its strong status in the Middle-East and rise to the position of regional power.

Turning on the ambivalence of Israeli foreign policy, which is the research subject of the thesis, I will scrutinize how strong the relationship between geopolitics and foreign policy was and what it evolved into towards the present, encompassing therefore a time span of approximately 60 years, focusing on four cases, the exact structure of the paper being presented in the paragraphs below. From the early days on Israel managed to conduct its foreign policy in a very brilliant but puzzling way drawing benefits from all major powers interested in the Middle-East changing its attitude towards the surrounding Arab world in various instances some of which will be presented in Chapter 4 and 5. I will therefore analyze in what ways these changes in attitudes were determined by the geopolitical consciousness of the state, claiming that it played a very significant role in the development of the relations with the surrounding world. Therefore my contribution to the existing literature will be in

providing an evaluation of specifically Israeli geopolitics and an analysis of the effects of the land-water nexus on foreign policy for subsequent research.

Beyond Defarges there are a series of authors coming from various backgrounds and nations that have touched upon the broad subject of the present thesis whose works have served the elaboration of the present topic. Accordingly I drew upon the writings of scholars such as Frederic Encel, John Agnew, George Friedman, Avi Shlaim, Uri Bialer, Paul Johnson, Alain Dieckhoff, Baruch Kimmerling, William Quandt, Stewart Reiser, Bernard Reich and Michael Oren who have addressed various aspects of Israeli politics, especially topics concerning: Zionism and its policy consequences, the relevance of the major Israeli wars and their geostrategic implications, modern Jewish history and Israeli foreign policy, and different views on the development of Israeli geopolitics and the role of water, using various sources and publications ranging from *Foreign Affairs* to *Middle Eastern Studies*.

As the practical part of my research I undertook a research trip to Paris where I met Professor Philippe Moreau Defarges, a prominent international relations scholar and public figure in French politics on whose ideas I based my foreign policy orientation divisions; Professor Beatrice Giblin, head of the French Institute for Geopolitics who helped a lot in understanding how geopolitical theory can be utilized in case of the Middle East; and Professor Frederic Encel, one of the few researches that has dedicated his efforts specifically to Israeli geopolitics and who was extremely helpful in highlighting the main geopolitical concerns of Israel.

Some of the noteworthy sources utilized were: David Newman's article that discusses both the changing discourse of Israeli geopolitics as well as the issue of the geopolitics of water. The geopolitical visions proposed by him were the following¹⁰: 1) Israel in the Middle East; 2) Israel in a European framework; 3) Israel and the Jewish Diaspora; 4) Israel in a US

¹⁰ Newman, 16.

framework; and 5) Israel as the center of the world; visions that provided a dimension for shaping the present analysis. Baruch Kimmerling's book on the link between Zionism and territory that was very helpful in understanding Zionist policies and ideology in respect to settlement, conflict and territory. Stewart Reiser's article was especially helpful to view the cases analyzed through a strategic lens underlining the rationales for foreign policy behavior most of the times. Yet most accurate and inspiring was Professor Encel's work on the topic which I also incorporated in the current paper by use of the information acquired through the interview with him.

Therefore in view of the existing literature I aim to critically evaluate and assess how various geopolitical visions apply to reality and how the geopolitical consciousness of Israel crystallized itself and evolved. My position is therefore in between the two general stances taken in a social scientific research accepting to both agree and disagree with various existing sources, showing that the panoply of conceptions and ideas can be merged into a unifying concept: geopolitical consciousness that was and is the main determinant of Israeli foreign policy even if this may not have been entirely so at all times during the state's modern history.

The present thesis is comprised of five chapters dealing with the following topics: Chapter 1 – Classical and critical geopolitics along with Zionism and its geopolitical implications coupled with a critical assessment of Israeli geopolitical consciousness; Chapter 2 – Basic notions about Israeli foreign policy; Chapter 3 – The issue of water and its modern day implications; Chapter 4 – Conflict cases: the War of Independence and the Six-Day War with a special focus on the role of geopolitics; Chapter 5 – Cooperation cases: the Camp David Accords and the Oslo peace process. The method of analysis for the cases covered will be process tracing, with the purpose of tracking how specific events and turning points affected the behavior of the state and what role geopolitics played in their development. In the next paragraphs I will now provide a short synthesis of each chapter.

In the first chapter I will draw upon the classical schools of geopolitics: the German, French and Anglo-Saxon ones, as well as use notions of critical geopolitics for a better understanding of the subject matter. The key notions to be discussed according to these will be: state, borders, identity, strategic positioning, alliances and expansion. I will analyze which strains of these schools have been adopted or borrowed by the state of Israel in conceiving its own geopolitical stance. These will constitute the theoretical background and an introduction into the study of geopolitics. At the same time I will consider their practical provisions in terms of geopolitical action as independent variables, since adopting the traits of these schools of thought can have significant implications in terms of policy design. Accordingly, there are claims that Israel's geopolitical discourse resembled, and in some respect still does, the classical German one and this will be one of the lines of inquiry. I further intend to look into some works and writings dealing with the topic of Zionism. This part will therefore focus on the explicit claims of these on how Israel should act on regional and international level, how it should deal with agricultural colonization as a form of expansion and what role it should attribute to the land.

The second chapter, turning to the subject of the research question, focuses on various aspects and characteristics of Israeli foreign policy which is the element to be determined by geopolitical consciousness. A theoretical link is thus established between the previous chapter dealing with geopolitics and the second one, dealing with foreign policy. It further aims to clarify the position of Israel within the framework of the Cold War and Great Power rivalry.

The third chapter is dedicated exclusively to aspects regarding the importance of water resources for Israel and the geopolitical implications of these. Some of the salient issues in this respect are the policies regarding the Jordan River, its status as natural border and water supply in the region, as well as the implications of the occupation of the Golan Heights.

The fourth chapter will focus on two major Israeli wars, seen as turning points in foreign policy making: the War of Independence in 1948-1949 and the Six-Day War from 1967. This part will therefore involve more historical backtracking and causality explanations. I note that my concern here does not lie within the way the wars were conducted but within their rationales, implications, the surrounding events and their aftermath. At this point I intend to focus on the issue of water and identify what role if any it played in the two conflicts. My argument here is that water gradually became an important consideration in the geopolitical consciousness of Israel, playing a very important role within the large geopolitical considerations as we gradually approach the 21st century. It is debated among scholars to what extent the water problem influenced the Arab-Israeli conflict yet it is clear that it determined some specific actions and events which we will look at closely.

The last chapter concentrates on two reconciliatory events that balance the expansionist ones in the previous chapter and will turn to the peace process in the Middle-East and its key moments: Camp David and Oslo. Beyond territorial and demographic issues, an important concern is given to the problem of water and how to manage this vital resource, proposing various possibilities of fresh-water division and distribution on which I dwell on.

The conclusions will comprise the findings and considerations of what has been examined throughout the research paper and evaluate its actual contribution to the field of geopolitics and foreign policy in the case of Israel, a small-sized medium power state. I also intend to critically analyze what I have examined so far and further identify whether we can actually infer to a genuine Israeli geopolitical consciousness determining the state's foreign policies to a significant extent or not.

CHAPTER 1 - GEOPOLITICS AND ZIONIST POLITICS

1.1 *Classical Geopolitics Applied to Israel*

Geopolitics is the discipline that developed in the last century in an atmosphere of great power rivalry and colonial imperialism focusing on the analysis of the relation between geography and political power within a community. An exact definition of geopolitics is difficult to provide as is the case with other concepts in political sciences as well, yet it must not be confused with political geography, a notion considered sometimes overlapping with it, that also deals with the geographic distribution of power as well as how it is concentrated and shifts between places over time defining the ways in which the world got divided into political units.¹¹ Geopolitics is but the subject area of political geography, a concept whose defining dimensions are: the focus on a common set of concepts such as boundaries, territory, state, nation, spheres of influence and place, the focus on the role geography plays in mediating the relationship between people and political organization and the existence of social and academic subfields in professional organizations and publications dealing with the subject.¹² Geopolitics while drawing on these dimensions was meant to harness geographic knowledge to further the aims of specific nation states having an instrumental purpose as well, today referring mostly to how foreign policy elites and mass publics construct geographic imaginations of the world to inform world politics¹³ and how they utilize geography for specific aims. Hence geopolitics concentrates on how space determines politics and how political entities use space to achieve their aims. It is therefore particularly useful to analyze international relations which have a strongly spatial dimension, especially when focusing on the Middle East where territories are contested for various reasons in a relatively small area.

¹¹ John Agnew, *Making Political Geography*, (London: Arnold, 2002), 1.

¹² Ibid., 12.

¹³ Ibid., 14-15.

The struggles of the Arabs and the Israelis therefore come down to control of territories.¹⁴ Some of the most representative scholars in the field that I will draw upon in this section are Friedrich Ratzel, Halford Mackinder, Alfred Mahan and Paul Vidal de la Blache.

The present chapter will therefore present an overview of geopolitics and will be composed of three sections: the first dealing with classical geopolitics, the second with critical geopolitics, the third with establishing a nexus between Zionism and geopolitics while the fourth one will convey some ideas about the importance of Jerusalem. My aim is to clarify how geopolitics is applicable to Israel, why it is a useful tool to analyze both the developments in the Middle East and the making of Israeli foreign policy and to introduce ideas that can be developed in future research. Subsequently my argument is that geopolitics is one of the most appropriate tools to analyze the events in the region and given the importance of geopolitical considerations it also has a clear influence on Israeli policies, especially those that concern the surrounding Arab world.

Geopolitics is a specifically good choice for analyzing the Middle East because it focuses on the rivalries between the peoples for the control of territory.¹⁵ Each of the states caught up in the Arab-Israeli conflict aimed first and foremost at gaining additional territorial growth in order to establish a strategically and politically superior position: Syria aspired to a position of hegemony in the region, Egypt wanted to become the unquestioned leader of the Arab League and implicitly the Arab world while Jordan aspired to gain the territories of the Palestinians and maintain control of the West Bank, opposing the establishment of a rival state that could threaten its own existence. Israel as well wanted to secure its territorial existence once it came into being after almost two millennia of Jewish dispersion. Therefore the conflict essentially revolves around the control of a small territory, which is specifically outlined by the dispute of the Temple Mount, one of the places with the greatest symbolic

¹⁴ Philippe Moreau Defarges, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

¹⁵ Beatrice Giblin, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

values in the world, from which the second Intifadah broke out.¹⁶ However vast the Arab World is compared but to the territory of Israel, East Jerusalem and the Temple Mount as such became of vital importance once captured by the Jews. Geography also defined the targets of agricultural settlements that were established in Palestine and later on Israel, which were always set up in places of strategic and geographic value.¹⁷ Therefore in our present case it is especially important to observe how the political uses the configuration of physical geography to create new political relations and situations. The last important element of geopolitical analysis are the representations and symbols used by the various factions involved in the conflict, representations that fuel a wide range of feelings and actions.¹⁸

Geopolitics starts from a simple premise: the geographic location and conditions play a significant role in the way people and furthermore states behave, which implies that any given country existent at some earlier point in history on the same territory as today should present similar traits in what concerns the making of its foreign policy.¹⁹ Therefore geopolitics scrutinizes the interaction between politics and space. There are three dimensions of analysis in case of any state: internal geopolitics, focusing on the structure of the population and territorial integrity; regional interaction, focusing on relations with the neighboring countries and interactions with the great powers.²⁰ I will touch upon each of these in the subsequent paragraphs.

While initially great powers implemented geopolitical considerations at the time when the discipline developed, after World War II due to the various territorial changes the discipline became a concern for smaller states as well in whose case we find a wide range of factors determining their geopolitical consciousness. In case of Israel some of the most representative determinants in the early days of statehood were: the small size of the country

¹⁶ Beatrice Giblin, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Friedman, 2.

²⁰ Ibid., 2.

and its uniqueness relative to the rest of the Middle East, underlining its isolation from the surrounding world, and the demographic structure of the population in the region, composed of a large number of Arabs hostile to the existence and struggles for recognition, acceptance and survival of the newly formed state. The ratio of the population within the state also created reasons for concern given the fact that the Arab minority always occupied important proportions of the population (at least 20% up to ~35% depending on the time period or well above 80% in the days of the Mandate).

Turning back to land, it was German political geographer Friedrich Ratzel who first recognized the key importance of the space occupied by a state and its position on the world map,²¹ concepts that are indeed of unique significance in case of Israel.

Israel stands at the crossroads of Europe, Asia and Africa and in this respect it is perhaps not that surprising that it became the historic center for two of the world's most important monotheistic religions – Christianity and Judaism – and the focus point for the third one – Islam. Beyond this unique spiritual position, the land of Palestine also constituted a key location in the trade routes of the Middle East thus developing into a strategic region from which control over vast areas could be assured on both land and sea.²² Historical developments show that control of this area meant control over the Levant,²³ but with the rise in importance of fossil fuels and especially petrol the area gained an even greater economic importance. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that Israel was and is concerned in stressing its unique location on the world map.

Mackinder's writings and theory on control of the Pivot area of the world is also helpful to draw upon, to the extent that it emphasizes how a key territory with natural borders affects the balance of power in a certain region as could be implied by his heartland theory even though he himself only focuses on the Eurasian and (later) North-American heartlands as

²¹ Agnew, 14.

²² Friedman, 10.

²³ Ibid., 10.

regions from which world or regional domination can be pursued. A greater Israel would be exactly such an area in the Middle East, with various natural borders surrounding it from all around, thus being capable of exerting its influence in the entire area without having anything to fear from in conventional military terms. Mackinder's theory does not stop here though; his aim is to lift geography into politics making it an aid to statecraft, the vision of the pivot defining foreign policy priorities.²⁴

Drawing upon the writings of Friedrich Ratzel is useful from another perspective as well. Being the founder of the concept of the state as a living organism, Ratzel conveys a new dimension to the problem of defining the borders of a state. Thus borders are seen as second rank organs supporting and enforcing the growth of the state which are never meant to be and never will be fixed²⁵ due to the constant development – lifecycle – of the state.²⁶ Today, after 60 years of statehood Israel still does not have universally accepted borders and does not seem to be very concerned with having all its frontier disputes solved any time soon, which does make a case in point under the geopolitical vision of Ratzel. A testimony to this idea is also the fact that Israel's location is historically fixed yet its borders are not.²⁷

Borders have several dimensions: physically they separate tangible units, politically they define the limits of authority, socially they demark the perimeter of a distinct society and attitudinally they draw the line from where the other is seen to reside.²⁸ All of these dimensions are applicable to Israel as well, yet they may and have become blurred at times. The moment the issue of the Israeli-Arab borders became of utmost importance was in the aftermath of the 1967 Six Day War due to its huge territorial implications. Israel had tripled its territory and unprecedentedly expanded its borders. Yet the Jewish state did not until the

²⁴ Agnew, 66.

²⁵ Carla da Silva Diaz & Paula Lou' Ane Matos Braga, *The geopolitics of Israel*, Universidade Estadual Paulista Júlio de Mesquita Filho, 17.

²⁶ Dragoș Frăsineanu, *Geopolitica*, (Bucharest: Editura Fundației România de Măine, Spiru Haret University, 2005), 71-72.

²⁷ Friedman, 3.

²⁸ Gad Barzilai & Ilan Peleg, 1994, 'Israel and Future Borders: Assessment of a Dynamic Process', *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 59.

peace agreement with the Egyptians reach a comprehensive deal about any of its borders²⁹ in spite of the territorial expansion achieved in 1967. Following the Camp David Accords in 1978 the southern borders were secured and clearly delineated, whereas on the other side Israel adopted a comprehensive settlement policy into the Occupied Territories driven by the Likud as major political force, for most of the time, until the early 1990's when the Oslo peace process brought about further changes with geopolitical implications, among which the stabilization of the eastern flank with Jordan.

In a relatively recent study on more than 100 maps depicting Israel's territory published by various sources (government, tourism agencies, publishing house, etc.) with various purposes (guide, travel, infrastructure, etc.) this confusion and conflict about the borders can be easily picked up there still being no unanimous limits to Israeli borders in respect to the territories conquered in 1967. According to the researches two opposing narratives are clashing with each other, narratives that have been present in the past as well: *Greater Israel* vs. *Smaller Israel*.³⁰ The maps were seen as to ultimately reflect the ideology of the producers and the national ideology depicted on the map as well as the political context of the world.³¹ Greater Israel implies Israel together with the territories it conquered in the 1967 war with the exception of the Sinai Peninsula while Smaller Israel implies the country within the United Nations Green Line set up before the Six Day War. In the conflict between the two vies, depiction or elimination of the Green Line was central in the smaller vs. greater Israel debate, foreign and Palestinian maps drawing it up while Israeli ones dropping it and portraying the Gaza Strip, historical Samaria and Judea as frontier regions and areas of transition with fluctuating borders³² and therefore various implications.

²⁹ Barzilai., 64.

³⁰ Noga Collins Kreiner, Yoel Mansfeld & Nurit Kliot, "The Reflection of a Political Conflict in Mapping: The Case of Israel's Borders and Frontiers," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (2006), 386.

³¹ Ibid., 391.

³² Ibid., 406.

Another significant idea that Ratzel develops concerns the fact that the state grows not only by expanding its population and borders but by increasing its culture, a trend we may observe in the actions of the Israeli leaders to secure most of the holy sites within the country,³³ belonging to the Jews from biblical times while at the same time claiming their right to the whole of the Promised Land. In this sense all states behave like living organisms, implying a fluctuation of their territory during the various phases they go through. Within this process four of his seven laws regarding the growth of the state can be observed in the case of Israel: growth in size requires cultural growth, annexation of new territories and demographic growth while the borders are the clear bearers of growth and fortification.³⁴

A constituent element of the geopolitical doctrine of Mahan and Zionist policy as well was the necessity of securing the support, or if possible the alliance, of a great power in order to obtain security and the circumstances under which to develop the country into a noteworthy local, regional or international power. In the case of Israel an alliance was seen as vital due to the impossibility of simultaneously fielding an army, maintaining the civil economy and producing weapons and war supplies.³⁵ Ben-Gurion is seen as the most concerned Israeli leader to realize this project of an alliance ever since the early days of statehood, but his interest was ultimately in the patronage of the United States even though his pragmatism demanded courting any great power that was willing to support Israel.

Without any doubt Israel represented a territory of interest for various great powers from Great Britain and the Soviet Union to France and ultimately the United States. Given these constellations it is somewhat difficult to exactly address along historical lines to what extent Israel actually managed to adopt a unilateral foreign policy based on its own genuine geopolitical consciousness. Even so we find a number of instances in which Israel was reluctant to obey the orders of the great powers, the single major exceptions being the

³³ Carla da Silva Diaz, 17.

³⁴ Agnew, 65.

³⁵ Friedman, 10.

withdrawal from the Suez on US demands in 1956 in the middle of the military operations aiming to liberate the Canal and the scaling down of the attack against the Egyptians in 1973. These were perhaps the most significant moments in terms of importance for the region and the world when Israel was required to heed the warnings of a great power. Ultimately the Jewish state was always at awe in considering the recommendations of any state unless it was in concordance with its national interests,³⁶ particular instances being US demands to halt the settlement activity in the West Bank and Gaza Strip or various votes in the United Nations on granting the Palestinians various rights. Since the possibility of political pressure from the outside was expected, Israeli leaders teamed up with powers that could not significantly endanger the autonomy of the state in realizing their strategic interests. The USSR was therefore favored as long as it permitted Jewish emigration, provided Israel with weapons, did not change its policy towards its native Jews and did not threaten the state's autonomy. France was the typical ally who was seen as the least interested (and capable) to threaten Israeli autonomy³⁷ throughout the years of cooperation in economic, scientific and military terms.

The unique perception of being a lonely and isolated actor on the world stage regardless of the moderate initial support of the great powers increased the feeling within Israel that it could only rely on itself and that it must maintain an independent foreign policy without any form of external intervention in its security decision-making process.³⁸ It is true that without great power support Israel might not have been established but the exact extent to which each of them was willing to provide continuous support to the newly founded state remains debatable. Isolation was not only a perception that was imagined and constructed by Israel and its political leaders, but was very much a fact in the early years of statehood and later years as well. Asian and African states bordering or being part of the Middle East were generally reluctant to recognize Israel either because they did not share the aspirations of the

³⁶ Beilin, *Israel - A concise political history*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1992), 143.

³⁷ Friedman, 10.

³⁸ Newman, 11.

Jews and comprehend the problem of Jewish insecurities or because they were influenced by the Arab propaganda and fears about what was to come.³⁹

A similar colonial history and the need for development drove Asian and African countries to gradually establish ties with Israel and start some forms of cooperation;⁴⁰ yet most Muslim states remained reluctant with exceptions in case of Jordan, Turkey and Iran. Some of the literature on the subject, on the other hand, considers that Israel actually became hostage of the dynamics of the US and USSR⁴¹ in the Middle East but managed to ‘slip between the cracks’⁴² due to the two powers’ lack of decisiveness in influencing Israel and their reluctance in seeing it as strategically crucial⁴³, at a time when British and French influence was fading in region. Even though found occasionally under some form of patronage of a great power, which was not unique to the states in the Middle East, Israel always pursued first and foremost its own geopolitical interests in concordance with its aims in the region.

1.2 Critical Geopolitics and the Case of Israel

Going beyond classical geopolitics we need to analyze Israel from a more unconventional point of view as well, namely critical geopolitics. Critical geopolitics sees geopolitical imaginations, geopolitical visions of one’s self, as being defined mainly by the collective identities that are constructed or emerge within the state while the actual geopolitical positioning is being determined by external circumstances: the interaction between the states.⁴⁴ Therefore according to such theoretical accounts, change in geopolitical discourse is seen to be determined by changes in both the identity of the population and in the

³⁹ Leo Y. Kohn, “Israel and the New Nation States of Asia and Africa,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 324:96 (1959), 96.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 101-102.

⁴¹ Friedman, 3.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Newman, 2-3.

global positioning of a state. What thus becomes important is how politics and the media represent places and their strategic importance.⁴⁵

With regards to the identity of the population, it is influenced by various factors of domestic politics, among which the ones with stronger geopolitical impact are the educational and socializing processes that enforce the notion of territorial attachment and spatial exclusivity⁴⁶ which create a national sense of territory. These phenomena also have a side going far back, even before the statehood period, stressing the powerful historical and spiritual connection⁴⁷ of the Jewish people to the land of Israel after having lost it to foreign occupants in the first century AD. The centrality of Jerusalem and the holy places has been one of the main themes of Jewish faith that was religiously constructed and kept alive the bond of the Jews with their homeland. This connection reinforced by Judaism is present even today, when return to Israel (Aliyah) is considered almost a duty and a form of fulfillment for each individual of Jewish faith. Zionism as such did not challenge this special connection representing a special set of emotional, spiritual and cultural relations to Israel on behalf of those who were reluctant to leave their homes.⁴⁸

Vidal de la Blache, even though not a representative of critical geopolitics, also has an interesting view on how identities emerge. National identities as seen by him are not defined by ethnicity or environmental constraints but by the fusion of life forms, borders being of a lesser importance.⁴⁹ In this sense it is to some extent relevant for the way in which the Israeli national identity has been constructed and forged, through the merger of different types of life forms, which represented the Zionist ideals, such as the settler-pioneer, warrior, the technician

⁴⁵ Agnew, 109.

⁴⁶ Newman, 6.

⁴⁷ Kohn, 96.

⁴⁸ Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea – A Historical Analysis and Reader*, (New York: Atheneum, 1981), 65.

⁴⁹ Agnew, 71-72.

and the farmer.⁵⁰ These embodied the relentlessly pragmatic spirit that Zionists toiled to instill into the emerging society and state.⁵¹ Israel could be a particularly significant case study for the ‘melting pot’ concept representing a unique fusion of people of various backgrounds, languages, origins and beliefs having produced in the process of nation building both successes and disappointments.⁵²

Space as opposed to classical geopolitics represents not only the traditional physical territory but also symbolic and abstract notions of space at various levels: local, national and global.⁵³ These emotional and symbolic dimensions of attachment reinforced by political and social processes and provisions are central to shaping and managing the national and territorial identity of the Israeli citizens.⁵⁴ Government rhetoric, the media, education systems, national practices, art and culture, sports events and many more are all constant reminders of the national identity of individuals. However, territory had and still has a pivotal role in formulating and reformulating national identity.⁵⁵ Territorial conceptions in respect to holding on to the territories occupied under the 1967 war had as well a profoundly different feature from the ones in the rest of the region, in that the homeland and its integrity were associated with a conditional divine promise⁵⁶ rather than the traditional argument of the birthplace of ancestors. It is true that in most cases the national ethos is built on a combination of these two, yet the divine claim dominates all others in Israel.

In this sense one of the most interesting manifestations in respect to ownership of the land is the debate between two competing religious camps that have political representation as well, the Religious Nationalists and the Haredi. While the former are adamant about the non-negotiability of the integrity of the state, firmly opposing the idea of an independent or non-

⁵⁰ Derek J. Penslar, *Zionism and Technocracy – The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870-1918*, (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 154.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Beilin, 1.

⁵³ Izhak Schnell, “Introduction: Changing territorial concepts in Israel,” *GeoJournal*, 53 (2001), 213.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 214.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Jewish controlled West Bank, the latter is more open to the idea of a solution that would either establish two states or separate in some form the West Bank from the rest of Israel without giving up control upon it.⁵⁷ This confrontation was not just religious but political-ideological as well, the ultimate choice of reconciliation with the Arabs: acceptance of an independent Arab political entity or final expansion (incorporation of the West Bank and Golan Heights mainly) being left to be decided by the victors of the struggle between the two major Zionist state-ideas, one aiming for a uniquely Jewish state, implying as few other nations as possible in the mix, whereas the other aiming at reestablishing biblical Israel (Greater Israel), which inherently implies full sovereignty over the West Bank.⁵⁸ This was the standpoint of the 90's and still seems to be up to date today.

Borders also have an important say in defining identity, beyond their classical function they also reflect and symbolize to a greater extent the national identity, elites, ethos and collective myths⁵⁹ of a society. This is best reflected in the struggle for the West Bank which is historically and religiously seen as an important constituent of Israel, whereas due to its large Arab population it is not desired to be organically part of Israel, for it would facilitate the blurring of the border between identities. Identities are not only seen to be defined by the territory occupied by certain people but by the interactions and ways of life of people sharing the same land.⁶⁰ In this respect an Israeli-Palestinian nexus would ultimately trigger a redefinition of the Jewish identity, an identity that is questioned even today given the demographic structure of Israel. This having been said I note here that borders in this sense are social constructions which have significant moral consequences and may have disputable socio-political implications demanding consideration of other more viable alternatives.⁶¹ It is

⁵⁷ Saul B. Cohen, "Jewish Geopolitics: Nationalism and the Ties between the State and the Land," *National Identities*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2007), 27.

⁵⁸ Barzilai, 62.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁰ Agnew, 124.

⁶¹ Henk van Houtum, "The geopolitics of Borders and Boundaries," *Geopolitics*, 10 (2005), 678.

specifically in this respect that the change in attitude within Israeli society in the late 1980's and early 1990's occurred when both the public opinion and the political elite started questioning the utility of the post 1967 status quo⁶² which supported further settlement activities in the Occupied Territories without significant improvement in the Arab-Israeli relations. Upholding the status quo meant maintaining a major threat to the Jewishness of Israeli society incorporating mostly Arab populated areas, which became an important concern for both public opinion and elites. My claim is not that under these circumstances Zionism is not predisposed towards expansionism anymore, but that on a closer look there is an inherent conflict between wanting to reestablish and maintain Greater Israel and have a Jewish state at the same time, and depending on which of these conceptions is cherished more by Israeli public and political elites, one of them will prevail in respect to foreign policy option in the region. Zionism therefore bears the mark of a reconciliatory attitude towards the Arabs at least to some degree even if not in its most generous form.

Beyond this there is also a unique form of patriotism being gradually questioned yet which was very strong until the 1980-90s that professes unquestionable allegiance to the defense forces, the single source the state can rely on in order to maintain its security and defend the homeland. The defense of the homeland is considered the ultimate form of heroism while dying for the country is seen as the ultimate sacrifice,⁶³ a phenomena that came to be called the Massada complex after the siege of the Massada by Roman troops in the first century in which the Jewish resistance heroically sacrificed itself before the attackers. In recent decades more and more segments of the public started turning against this myth surrounding the armed forces as the conflict with the Palestinians prolonged. If until the 1990's the swearing in ceremonies of the soldiers were performed at the site of the Massada, this has been dropped due to strong nationalistic feelings that it fuelled. Yet the military

⁶² Barzilai, 65.

⁶³ Newman, 11.

continues to remain an important element of the life of Israelis even if nowadays it does not anymore play the same role of the *melting pot* of young men and women who came from diverse backgrounds and corners of the world, meant to re-forge the Israeli nation.⁶⁴

1.3 The Role of Geopolitics in Zionism

It is not the aim of this paper to present an overarching description of Zionism and its implications but only to present a summary of the ideas with greater impact on the geopolitical positioning and foreign policy of the state. Zionism fostered two geopolitical visions according to revisionist historian Avi Shlaim: the non-recognition of a Palestinian national identity and the quest for an alliance with a great power.⁶⁵ One major Zionist imperative was from its outset the establishment of an alliance with a great power that could protect Israel and support it. This struggle for finding the proper ally remained constant and started even before the statehood period with Turkey as envisaged power, followed by Britain and France in the 1950's and 1960's. Yet ultimately it was the American option that would prevail, due in not a least significant way, to David Ben-Gurion who maneuvered himself through the early stages of statehood in sometimes ambivalent ways but always loyal to his ultimate goal, namely that of securing US support for Israel⁶⁶.

From its very early days on Zionism was particularly concerned with the issue of agricultural settlement, seen both as an act of moral improvement as well as of achieving national-economic independence and social reform.⁶⁷ Building on the Haskala it identified the need to regenerate the harsh landscape of Palestine, make Jewish farms flourish and create a society "ex nihilo" by the unique use of agricultural settlements as a tool of changing the occupational structure of the Jews from commerce to manufacture and agriculture.⁶⁸ Going

⁶⁴ Beilin, 265.

⁶⁵ Shlaim, 657.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 659.

⁶⁷ Penslar, 2.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 151.

even further, what particularly made Zionism relevant from a geopolitical perspective was its aim to establish a geographical entity in Palestine for the Jewish people, and this made it unique among all the ideologies (nationalism, liberalism, socialism) in the framework of which it appeared. Nationalism as such took the link between territory and the nation as normal and given, yet Zionism was not based on a living reality in this sense but on historical memories, ties and feelings.⁶⁹ In their aim to give a political-geographic existence to the Jewish people in Palestine, some Zionists such as Ahad Ha-Am recognized that the Jewish state would play a unique role in the game of interests of the great powers being located at the crossroads of three continents.⁷⁰ Ultimately it did play an important role in this respect.

Zionist politics was also responsible to a great extent for the aggressive water policies implemented by Israel because of its major concern with agricultural settlement and cultivation. Reclaiming the land and making the desert bloom were high aspirations of Zionism that would have implicitly made the Jewish society in Israel thrive and would have provided some form of legitimacy to the state, since the Arab population did not have either the means or the underlying ideological motivation to do it. The four main reasons identified for the aggressive stance on water (limiting distribution of water, cutting distribution from the Arab side, water diversion, etc.) were seen to be: the need to support intensive agricultural production, the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, sharing and contesting symbolic places with the Palestinians and the problematic status together with the boundaries of Jerusalem.⁷¹ Would there have been any remedies to these, whether to all or just some, it was expected that Israel's policies would have been less pragmatic.

To further see the importance of water it is no coincidence that the territorial revendications of the Zionist leaders, especially those of Chaim Weizman, at the Versailles

⁶⁹ Kimmerling, *Zionism and Territory – The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics*, (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1983), 205.

⁷⁰ Hertzberg, 57.

⁷¹ Schnell, 216.

peace conference ending World War II, included areas beyond the borders of biblical Israel such as the Litani and Hasbani rivers in the north, the Golan/Hermon in the north-east and the Gulf of Aqaba until El-Arish south-east which were especially important from the perspective of water.⁷² This not only meant control of water sources but also control of water ways and the port of Eilat in the south. The choice for the requested territory was very pragmatic and based on possession of as many water resources and water ways as possible.⁷³

Zionism was in a significant part concerned with the redemption of Israel by settling the land as well as creating strategic settlements along the border. Redemption was understood both from the non-Jewish population and from desolation and nature.⁷⁴ Yet this interesting strategy implemented along the boundaries, termed Frontier Settlement, whose origins may be linked to German and Italian practices,⁷⁵ defined as the settlement of people in border and peripheral areas of the country for both political-military reasons and ideological ones, was central to the Zionist enterprise not only because of securing boundaries and enhancing the socio-economic capacity of the areas but also because of creating stable points from where to launch further settlements or expansionist activity.⁷⁶ Settlement implied technological improvement and Zionist leaders soon observed that technological power would come hand in hand with state power.⁷⁷ Therefore the technologically developed settlement would have increased defensive capacities. Especially characteristic during the Mandate period, these settlements created the seedbeds of the military as well.⁷⁸ The underlying idea for this strategy was that whereas borders symbolize the limits of a country's sovereign territory, a frontier is a political-geographic space lying within as well as beyond the

⁷² Frederic Encel & Francois Thual, *Geopolitique d'Israel*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2006), 122.

⁷³ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

⁷⁴ Kimmerling, 201.

⁷⁵ Penslar, 7.

⁷⁶ Nadav Morag, "Water, Geopolitics and State Building: The Case of Israel," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 37:3 (2007), 188.

⁷⁷ Penslar, 7.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 154.

integrated region of the political unit into which expansion may take place.⁷⁹ Frontier as taken from the American experience and understood by the Israeli one as well thus came to mean the line dividing the inhabited from the uninhabited, while having the connotation of a movement always towards the horizon creating the illusion of infinite expansion.⁸⁰ And indeed in the period of the Mandate, expansion was seen as infinite.

Zionist politics resorted to the use of geography in various other ways among which one of the most significant was the one meant to create certain beliefs related to the boundaries of Israel already from the early 20th century.⁸¹ Within these boundaries a specifically Jewish state was envisaged to come into existence, thus linking national identity to the territory of the state in a profound way, which would have complex implications once the 1967 occupations were carried out. Therefore two conflicting views developed in respect to mainly the West Bank based on Zionist reflections, views that have been mentioned earlier. Geography therefore played a significant role in state policies, acquiring geopolitical implications beyond the traditional ones.

Zionism as pointed out earlier as well was and is not a monolithic ideology, defining various actions and attitudes, becoming more and more interpretable as new generations of Israelis emerged and continue to emerge. At the beginning of the 20th century it was strongly expansionist for there was no other viable option as long as the Zionist leaders expected millions of Jews to immigrate to the land of Israel once it was established and were at the same time in dire need of territories available for settlement. Even Ben Gurion's expectations were very high, hoping for about several million Jews to return to Israel once a state was set up. Such a large number of people could have been impossibly settled in the urban area of Tel-Aviv or in the Negev, therefore the need for settlement was constant.

⁷⁹ Kreiner, 383.

⁸⁰ Kimmerling, 3.

⁸¹ Kreiner, 383.

Differences in respect to settlement appeared already as early as Herzl started his Zionist activity though. National settlement as a particular form of agricultural settlement was ascribed to Herzl and ultimately envisaged the creation of a state by the implementation of a publicly funded colonization program, while the other major direction, Labor settlement included all the characteristics of national settlement and even more: public landownership, exclusion of non-Jewish labor force from the national territories and the widest possible application of the cooperative principle.⁸² It was this latter type that would prevail after World War I. Another division preceding statehood was between political Zionists, who advocated acquisition of sovereignty first followed by colonization and practical Zionists advocating almost the opposite, colonization preceding any imposition of sovereignty over a territory.⁸³

Beyond the contrast created in the previous section between the role expansionism and the concept of a Jewish state played in determining Israeli policies, it needs to be pointed out that Zionism as such had a serious concern for peace. From a different perspective though than the one evoked earlier, peace as one of the basic aims of the Zionist movement, was understood first and foremost in terms of recognition and legitimacy of existence.⁸⁴ Therefore as long as the surrounding environment was hostile and no bargaining position could be attained, peace in whatever terms was unrealizable.

1.4 Jerusalem, Contested Status and Symbolic Value

Jerusalem can not miss from any geopolitical analysis of the Middle East given its uttermost importance for Jews, Muslims and Christians as well. Jerusalem is therefore a micro-cosmos on its own and a continuous source of tension and rivalry.⁸⁵ If Israel as the Holy Land is the crossroads of the three civilizations, Jerusalem is the focus point of the three,

⁸² Penslar, 5.

⁸³ Ibid., 41.

⁸⁴ Kimmerling, 149.

⁸⁵ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

giving home to the most sacred places of Judaism and Christianity and the third most sacred place of Islam.

What makes the situation even more explosive is the concentration of holy places in one small area, namely the Temple Mount within the Old City of Jerusalem. Historically divided into four quarters: the Muslim, the Armenian, the Christian and the Jewish one, the Old City has been one of the most controversial territories, ever since its recapture by the IDF in 1967. Set up initially according to the UN Partition Plan of 1947 as international territory, Jerusalem was soon divided by Jews and Muslims, to be later incorporated into Israel following 1967.

The controversy has seen both geographic dimensions (division and unification) and symbolic ones as well, Jerusalem having an actual intrinsic value but one that is being often superseded by the value given to it by the different parties caught up in the dispute.⁸⁶ Therefore Jerusalem can be all or nothing as comes out from the exclusivist claims of the Arab and Israeli sides on it,⁸⁷ where only minor factions are open to give it up as part of a peace settlement. In this respect Jerusalem is of instrumental value to the side that has control upon it. A division as was the case for Berlin under the Cold War is highly unlikely to happen, therefore the only viable solution to the Israeli-Arab dispute in this respect would be joint sovereignty in the city without territorial rearrangements though.⁸⁸

Jerusalem was and is for the Jews the element that brings together Jews of various convictions and origins: laics and religious ones, Zionists and ultra-orthodox ones, rich and poor, Sephardim and Ashkenazi, therefore demanding a particular attention.⁸⁹ The first state leader who created the powerful symbolic value of Jerusalem was Ben Gurion, according to whom the Negev and the Galilee were only the body of Eretz Israel whereas Jerusalem was

⁸⁶ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Encel, *Geopolitique d'Israel*, 230.

its spirit.⁹⁰ The failure to recapture the Old City and East Jerusalem in the 1949 was therefore seen as a tragedy in view of the demographic and military efforts put into it by Ben Gurion.

Yet this particularly strong representation was not only true for the Jews who saw in Jerusalem the essence of Judaism, the most sacred place on Earth sanctified by the once standing Temple on the Temple Mount, but evoked similarly strong images in the Christian and Muslim world as well. For the Arabs it represents the locus of the third most sacred place on Earth (Mount Moriah) after Mecca and Medina, from where the prophet Mohammed ascended to Heaven. For Christians it represents a place of redemption, of fulfillment of God's prophecies by the death and resurrection of Christ, and thus of the glory of God.

Given the discussions in this chapter it is a paradox that even though such a wide panoply of geopolitical conceptions may be applied and apply to the study of Israel, the official discourse avoids the mention of geopolitics and Israeli academia is reluctant to openly talk of geopolitics, resorting to the use of international relations theories.⁹¹ Yet as the current analysis proves, state policies, various implemented actions, as well as the founding ideology heavily rely on some form of geopolitical notions, determining a form of global geopolitical consciousness that is always present in the making of policies vis-à-vis the Arab world and the international community. Geopolitical consciousness therefore needs to be understood as the panoply of considerations in respect to space, resources, identity, water, strategic positioning and regional status that are all present to a different extent in defining Israel's foreign policy. The extent of this presence will be the concern of the following parts of the thesis.

⁹⁰ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

⁹¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 2 - ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY UNDER SCRUTINY

2.1 General Assessment

Since explaining Israeli foreign policy behavior is the main goal of the paper it is time to make an in depth analysis of the subject, therefore this chapter will develop the framework for a better understanding of Israeli foreign policy.

Israel in its foreign policy goals and objectives fits into the general pattern of Middle Eastern states seeking first and foremost security and well-being for its people,⁹² with survival and security being its main concerns⁹³. The geopolitical discourse has therefore evolved around these two elements of policy. At the highest level personalities play an important role in defining the foreign policy of the state due to the reduced size of the decision making elite, but that does mean that there are no other important factors at play such as the Knesset, the Cabinet, civil society, etc.⁹⁴ What makes foreign policy singular in this case is the fact that Israel has an atypical set of determinants through which it views the world and which affects its approaches to foreign policy.⁹⁵ To reiterate and complete what has been mentioned previously an outline of the most important factors is required.

First is the fact that Israel sees itself as a Jewish state, unique to the world with a particular role in Jewish history and the life of the Diaspora, beyond the role other nation states have for their representative nations. Second is the Zionist ideology of the state with which even today many Israelis identify themselves. Zionism aimed at creating a sovereign Jewish state that would represent a safe haven for persecuted Jews from all around the world to ensure their survival. Third is the security policy which identifies three major concerns: enhancing the security of the state; establishing, sustaining and expanding peaceful relations

⁹² Bernard Reich, "Israeli Foreign Policy" in *Diplomacy in the Middle East, The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*, ed. Carl L. Brown, (London, New York: Tauris, 2004), 121.

⁹³ Philippe Moreau Defarges, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

⁹⁴ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

⁹⁵ Reich, 122.

with the Arab states and last, opposing any form of anti-semitism wherever it may exist or arise and ensure Jewish immigration to Israel.⁹⁶

2.2 Three Foreign Policy Options

Derived from the reluctance of the Arab world to accept Israel as a state of the Middle East, peace and security or security and peace came to be the central themes of Israeli policy,⁹⁷ and in order to manage these a set of three possible options came to the forefront. Taking the above mentioned factors into consideration Israel's three foreign policy options, drawing on the observations of Moreau Defarges, were and to some extent continue to be isolationism, expansionism and/or reconciliation.

But just before we turn to these three options it needs to be pointed out that at present the meaning of Israeli foreign policy will be confined especially to the relations of Israel with the states of the Middle East for two major considerations: that is where Israeli foreign policy was and is most puzzling and interesting to analyze and it is this immediate environment that Israeli national interest has mainly focused on along the 60 year long history of the state.⁹⁸ Nonetheless we must keep in mind that under general terms the foreign policy of any one state in the region is a multipolar process that involves states in and outside the Middle East,⁹⁹ but for the purposes laid out here it is not possible to analyze the relations with the states external to the region.

The three options identified by Defarges and adopted in the present research are as follows:¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Reich, 125.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 135.

⁹⁸ Efraim Karsh, "Israel," in *The Cold War and the Middle East*, eds. Sayigh, Yezid & Shlaim Avi, (Oxford: Carlendon Press, 1997), 184.

⁹⁹ Carl L. Brown, "Introduction" to *Diplomacy in the Middle East, The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*, ed. Carl L. Brown, (London, New York: Tauris, 2004), xvi.

¹⁰⁰ Defarges, *Introdução a Geopolítica*, 125.

2.2.1 The Isolationist Option or the Option of the Fortress

Israel has traditionally perceived itself as an isolated player on the world stage. This is not only because of the persecution the Diaspora Jews have experienced throughout the centuries but also because of the concept of the reality of statehood that has evolved in the last 60 years during which Israel has been involved in 5-6 major conflicts perceived as defensive wars against external aggression and which guaranteed the continuous existence of the state in a hostile region. Regardless of the controversies surrounding some of these wars, the image of a threatened state has been maintained all throughout its existence, and under such circumstances the logic that would prevail was that of the fortress.

The philosophical roots of geopolitical isolationism are best summed up in a book by former Israeli diplomat, Jacob Herzog, entitled “Behold the People that Dwell Alone”, a title taken from a Biblical description of the Jews by Balaam. This phrase has been utilized very often to sum up the psychological condition of the Israelis in the region, being instrumental in maintaining and perpetrating the myth of the lonely people.¹⁰¹

Defining for the isolationist logics is the so called *Massada complex* based on an ancient event. The Massada was a hilltop fortress in Palestine overlooking the Dead Sea. During the Roman occupation in 70 A.D. the people of the region chose to die heroically for their freedom in the face of the Roman attempts to quench their rebellion, instead of giving up. This event left a powerful echo within the Jewish people that were to be persecuted up till the last century, culminating in the Holocaust. Defending the country from external invaders is the ultimate form of heroism that specifically derives from the Massada complex¹⁰² which is a powerfully constructed image to maintain the cohesion and unquestionable importance of the army. Young Israeli soldiers were taken to the Massada hilltop for their swearing in ceremony where they declared in unison that: “Massada will not fall again”. This mentality

¹⁰¹ Beilin, 143.

¹⁰² Encel, *Geopolitique d’Israel*, 271.

led to policy implications according to which the new formed state could only rely on itself, through a strong military posture and should maintain independence in foreign policy without external interventions (including that of the United States) in its security decision making process.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, this did not exclude the creation of strong bonds with foreign powers sympathizing with the Israeli cause. This logic has been the foundation of Israeli politics since 1948, changing more powerfully only after the 1990's.

Israel is isolated within the major international forum, the United Nations as well, although it draws its major legal justification from the UN 1947 Partition Resolution. The UN condemned Israel several times for the continued occupation of the West Bank, after the 1967 war, and the security zone established in Southern Lebanon, after the long Lebanon invasion. The "zionism=racism" vote, passed in the mid-1970's strengthened this feeling of isolation and loneliness too, albeit the fact that it was rescinded in the early 1990's, leaving Israel skeptical about the UN's commitment to its well being.

2.2.2 The Expansionist Option or the Theory of the Promised Land

Deeply rooted in the conscience of the Jewish nation was the dream of the Promised Land, the territory promised by God to Abraham. This dream was to influence Israeli foreign policy mainly because of the size of the territories allocated in 1947 and the need for establishing a powerful deterrence towards the Arab world surrounding it.¹⁰⁴ Once the fortress had been established the need for expanding the fortress arose, a phenomena similar to that of an empire.¹⁰⁵ The finest example for territorial expansion, and a key moment in Israel's history in this respect was the 1967 Six Day War which will be outlined in the Chapter 4. It was not the only occasion on which Israel occupied foreign territories but it is the most significant one since this was to define Israeli policies from then on.

¹⁰³ Newman, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Reiser, 79.

¹⁰⁵ Philippe Moreau Defarges, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

The internal debate about deterrence as such revolved around two issues: a nuclear versus a conventional strategy determined by compellence and conflict resolution. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was an adept of nuclear deterrence¹⁰⁶ but in as much as to keep the Arab world aware of Israel's capabilities without any open threat towards them. He was hoping that this might diminish their will to fight and would eventually bring about the acceptance of Israel. On the other side was labor politician Yigal Allon, who favored conventional means of deterrence and compellence.¹⁰⁷ He was convinced that a regional nuclear race would harm Israel because as soon as the Arabs would have their hands on the bomb they would use it without any hesitation. He believed that the Arab value system would cope with suffering enormous casualties through nuclear warfare as long as Israel disappeared from the map.¹⁰⁸ He advocated the nuclear race as a last resort option. Allon later succeeded Ben-Gurion and laid the basis for Israel's conventional strategic doctrine starting from the early 1950's¹⁰⁹. This doctrine took into consideration geographical aspects as well, territorial expansion promising to be a good deterrent.

After Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol expanded his cabinet (after 1963) to include both Moshe Dayan and Menachem Begin, both maximal territorial expansionists (to add to Allon's "minimal" expansionism), the idea of a preemptive war, conducted by Israel to face the new challenge on behalf of Egypt, was developed.¹¹⁰ The purpose was not only to counter Nasser's plans of attacking the country but to enhance the deterrent power of Israel as well. Thus in June 1967 Israel destroyed the three frontline armies of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian coalition and conquered the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank together with the eastern part of Jerusalem. This also provided a doctrinal victory for the "conventionalists" over those advocating a more active nuclear deterrence policy. The

¹⁰⁶ Reiser, 80.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 80-81.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 81.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 83.

occupation, though geopolitically useful, altered the Arab-Israeli conflict in several fundamental ways and brought it into a phase that had lasting consequences, unresolved even today. Israel had acquired the lands the majority of the political parties had claimed to be part of their historical heritage. Thus Israel gained an advantage that for the first time in its brief history, allowed its leadership to bargain for peace, leading to the “land for peace” concept.

2.2.3 The Policy of Reconciliation

“It is Israel's fervent wish to maintain good relations with all countries, with their governments and their peoples...” (David Ben-Gurion) This was the phrase that best described Israel’s attitude towards the world. Nonetheless this was hard to achieve, mainly with the surrounding world.

Israel did not advocate an offensive policy willingly from its beginnings on. The looming menace of the surrounding Arab world and its hostility towards the Jewish state kicked off the conflict, not that the events previous to the establishment had not already degenerated into armed disputes. The 1947 Partition Resolution provided Israel with a very small territory that made it impossible for her to enter any kind of peace negotiations with the Arab world, being considered both an inferior and a small state. Nonetheless the issue of territory became a vital question, even though gaining territories could only be achieved by war especially when a complete change in status quo was expected to happen. Israel often tried to consider peace with the surrounding world which after each defeat advocated the policy of “*no peace, no war*” that brought negotiations to a stalemate.

The first step forward in this respect happened after Israel gained a defining geopolitical advantage in front of all its three major neighbors by capturing territories important if not even vital to them. This brought possible peace negotiations one step further. After Nasser’s death in 1970, Egypt’s attitude towards the Arab-Israeli conflict gradually changed under the influence of the United States who became increasingly involved in the

peace process. Thus, in 1979 the first peace-treaty with an Arab country was signed, between Israel and Egypt following the Camp David Accords. From then on further peace was not any more out of discussion but became more a matter of time, since the newly established relations with Egypt did not develop into what was expected by the Israeli side. The next major step occurred in October, 1991 following the multilateral peace talks in Madrid as a parallel track to the bilateral negotiations. The goal of the multilateral framework devised was twofold: to find solutions for key regional problems, while serving as a confidence building measure to promote the development of normalized relations among the nations of the Middle East. Even though the Oslo peace process which started in 1993 would ultimately fail, it did bring about some form of reappraisal in the status quo of the Middle East.

Ultimately things for Israel came down to the issue of isolating itself in the region, dominating the region or establishing friendly relations with its neighbors.¹¹¹ Yet as mutually exclusive as these seem Israel found ways in which to combine the three approaches and conduct a complex foreign policy while one view dominated the others to some extent as will be shown in the cases of Chapters 4 and 5.

2.3 The US and the Cold War in Defining Israeli Policies

In assessing the actual independence of Israeli policies, be they based on geopolitics or other considerations, we need to clarify in the present section the role of the United States and that of the Cold War in this respect. Evidence shows and most scholars agree on the point that the Cold War itself played more a secondary role in the making of Israeli foreign policy while virtually almost none in shaping its domestic politics.¹¹² Even more, apparently neither of the

¹¹¹ Philippe Moreau Defarges, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

¹¹² Karsh, 156.

superpowers or the declining powers had a decisive say in their smaller Allies' grand strategies be it Israel or any other state.¹¹³

As much heralded as it was that Israel was the agent of the West in the Middle East a point in case is the fact that the Jewish state was heavily supported by the USSR in its early days (especially through weapons) and was to some extent inclined towards socialism, as controversial as this claim might seem to some scholars. It would nonetheless be false to claim that Israel was torn between the West and the East because it kept its relations with both superpowers for very pragmatic reasons.¹¹⁴ In order to balance out the economic dependency on the West and demographic dependency on the East it adopted a strategy of non-alignment until the early 1950's,¹¹⁵ when relations with the Soviets temporarily froze then broke down.

The United States had not yet become a leading power in the region and was still preoccupied with developing its relations with the Arab world, which meant that had it not been for Truman's pro-Jewish inclinations American support for the establishment of Israel would either have not existed or not sufficed to make the Zionist endeavor reality.¹¹⁶ It was actually the initial reluctance, of both Britain and the US, to the establishment of the Jewish state that drove Israel into the arms of the Soviets with whom cooperation lasted for a short while.¹¹⁷

Eisenhower saw no particular interest in Israel and relations with the US started improving only in the 1960's, especially after the French had lost their interest in Israel and the Soviets gained a foothold in the region. American-Israeli relations entered a new phase based on two major considerations: an ideological/sentimental one and a strategic one.¹¹⁸ US support did not become substantial until the Kennedy-Johnson and the Nixon years reaching

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Uri Bialer, *Between East and West: Israel's foreign policy orientation 1948-1956*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 206-207.

¹¹⁵ Shlaim, 659.

¹¹⁶ Paul Johnson, *A History of the Jews*, (New York: Harper Perennial, 1988), 525-526.

¹¹⁷ Karsh, 160.

¹¹⁸ Bernard Lewis, "Rethinking the Middle East," *Foreign Affairs*, (1992), 2.

its peak towards the end of the century when Israel became the largest recipient of foreign aid in the region. The 70's and 80's were the years when the relation with the US flourished whereas the early 90's brought about cooling down in US-Israeli cooperation, which did not mean that the US would not support Israel anymore, just that the administrations became more critical of the Jewish state than before. What also needs to be given attention is the fact that the exact nature and extent of US commitment to Israel remains somewhat imprecise because there is no mutual treaty or formal alliance binding the two countries together, requiring the US to intervene with arms under necessary conditions.¹¹⁹

Historical evidence shows that Israel was best off in defining its own policies and carrying them out when the US did either not intervene or was strongly against Israeli moves. In this sense some of the most notable events are: the 1956 Suez War, where under American instructions the military operations had to be halted and Israel had to return the territories it occupied; a similar phenomena happened after the Six Day War in 1967 in respect to the Sinai peninsula, which had to be returned gradually to Egypt under American pressures as soon as possible even though this only happened in 1982; of an even stronger effect was the reappraisal of military and economic relations between the two states following the 1973 Yom Kippur war, which induced Israel to open talks with Egypt; Washington's support and minimal interference in the Oslo peace process which proved beneficial to a certain extent, etc. The most efficient tool of the US in dealing with Israel was manipulation of arms supplies with which it would induce some form of modified behavior upon Israel or would try to improve its status in the eye of the Arab world.¹²⁰ In the two case studies on war America's role was minimal if non-existent whereas in the two peace agreements the US was more of an intermediary while the general role it wanted to adopt within the Arab-Israeli conflict was that

¹¹⁹ Reich, 134.

¹²⁰ Karsh, 169.

of an honest broker or intermediary to alleviate tensions between the two sides.¹²¹ It was not until the powerful Jewish lobby developed that US support became more ignorant of the Arab side.

Even though support for Israel was unquestionable most of the time, this did not mean that Israel developed its policies in terms of what was acceptable to the US or followed radical moves just because it had a superpower at its back. It is true that this implied a somewhat more robust self confidence but it by no means meant that the Jewish state did not have a will of its own according to its capacities. This aspect is especially relevant when considering Israel's nuclear program at Dimona in the 60's, about which the US was rather critical, as a result of which Israel acquired the nuclear bomb in the 70ss as well as a series of local conflicts in which the opinion of the US was totally ignored. Israel is up till today seen as a very much independent state regardless of her ties to the US. The special relationship is one that needs to be sustained but Israel refused and refuses to let outsiders influence its perceptions of threat or security which are decisive in defining its foreign policy.¹²²

This independence is further confirmed by the disenchantment with Israeli politics of some pro-Israeli American lobby groups and Jewish communities,¹²³ who secure American financial and economic support for Israel for other goals than the ones used for; since several such organizations separated themselves through time from the official policies of the Israeli government. It is not only the lobby groups that are questioning their relationship to Israel but other Diaspora communities as well started seeing the Jewish state as the equal rather than the senior partner occupying the moral high ground in the relationship.¹²⁴ The only force within US society that did not hesitate in expressing its support for the Jewish state regardless of its

¹²¹ Newman, 27.

¹²² Reich, 134.

¹²³ Newman, 24.

¹²⁴ Ibid.. 23.

policies, where the US evangelicals who have gained influence within the last decades while liberal Christians and secular intellectuals, more critical of Israel, have been losing it.¹²⁵

Israeli leaders are also fairly ambivalent regarding their attitude towards the US; on the one hand there are the benefits arising from the strong pro-Israeli American lobby groups that require a positive attitude and on the other hand there is the constant American pressure (even if not very strong all the time) to make various concessions to the Palestinians and the surrounding countries that is seen as a form of intervention in domestic affairs demanding opposition,¹²⁶ such as the constant demands for a settlement of the conflict, solution to the refugee problem, granting rights to the Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and the termination of the ambivalent status of the Occupied Territories. Yet there are always limits to the ability of one party to influence the other in any relationship, the US-Israeli relations are not an exception to this, and limits beyond which a state will not go given its national interest.¹²⁷ Regardless of US importance to Israel the Jewish state has drawn its clear limits of action within which it has relatively high independence yet the US does retain some amount of influence upon Israeli policies based on suggestions that Israel is sometimes likely to follow.¹²⁸

Each state of the region is of course concerned about its own safety, for if any of them were attacked they would have no assurance of any power coming to their aid,¹²⁹ therefore a type of security dilemma is created that demands arming up.

As often as Ben Gurion's name came up, among the concluding remarks for this chapter it needs to be outlined that unless there was indeed a strong personality at the top level, Israeli geopolitics and subsequently foreign policy was not generally dictated by a single person or institution as was the case to some extent in the 1950's; but it was a

¹²⁵ Walter Russell Mead, "God's country?," *Foreign Affairs*, 85:5, (2006), 8-9.

¹²⁶ Newman, 25.

¹²⁷ Reich, 135.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 135.

¹²⁹ Philippe Moreau Defarges, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

combination of all institutions that had some form leverage on policymaking: the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, the Knesset, the Chief of Staff, the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Defence, the the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, the Herzlian Institute, etc..¹³⁰ Under such circumstances it is clear that the foreign policy of the state was and is based on various considerations, yet following mainly the need to obtain security or an enhanced position in the region, aims which could be either achieved by reconciliation or some form of territorial reappraisal as long as the Arab world was unwilling to negotiate and capable of maintaining a hostile stance. Once a geopolitical advantage was achieved Israel was able to embrace a wider spectrum of options shifting from isolationism to expansionism and reconciliation depending on the circumstances and the status quo.

¹³⁰ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

CHAPTER 3 - AN IN DEPTH ANALYSIS OF THE WATER PROBLEM

3.1 *The Overall Importance of Water in the Middle East*

Water has been a controversial issue in the Middle East for the last part of the 20th century leading in most recent decades even to claims that envisage the outbreak of future wars mainly because of water crises. The controversy about the importance of water has risen due to the differences in the status quo of countries in and around this region with greater or lesser water resources; where having more of it does not at all imply higher levels of development. In some cases it has gained significant geopolitical implications in either fuelling conflicts in some instances, or nurturing cooperation in others.¹³¹ To what extent it was the actual source of conflicts or cooperation I will examine in the following two chapters while providing some insightful information about it in the present one. For the time being it is important to acknowledge though, that water is in some form and endless source of disputes.¹³² Its role in disputes or cooperation will be assessed according to the rationales considered or pressures received to make it part of the political agenda and/or act in ways that further the acquisition of water resources, or influence its distribution.

Scarcity of water in some parts of the Middle East is not a novel problem. The appearance of great civilizations along the great rivers of the region such as the Nile, Tiger and Euphrates points to the importance and necessity of this resource both for the development of a thriving society and economically strong state already in ancient times. Former Palestine is not an exception to this phenomena; having hosted various peoples along the two banks of the Jordan and along the coast of Lake Tiberias who were able to ensure their expansion and survival through the building of irrigation systems in areas located several tens of kilometers further away. The necessity to replicate this model was more or less

¹³¹ Ian Selby, "The Geopolitics of Water in the Middle East: fantasies and realities," *Third World Quarterly*, 26:2, (2005), 330.

¹³² Ibid., 341-342.

permanent throughout history, constituting a concern in recent times as well. This does not imply though that this classical argument about the importance of water is applicable and true in the development of most events in the Middle East for every instance of the previous century, but it underlines that it was without a doubt crucial for the agricultural developments in the region.¹³³ This is especially a problem if a state lacking necessary water resources does not have the financial capacity or partners with whom to build up a system for the import and distribution of water. In these terms water played an important role in the development of Israel as well, the foundations of which were laid down through agricultural settlements.

3.2 Early Water Policies

Water as a basic, existential and scarce resource in the region became to be viewed not just as a mere resource but as a politically important asset as well.¹³⁴ The water problem constituted a concern already for the early Zionists and grew in importance through time. To understand why, we first need to turn our focus to two important features of the Zionist project: providing security for the state and ensuring the means for a sustainable development of state and society¹³⁵. Security under the present context incorporated not only protection from existential threats (military security) but also from threats to the well-being of the society and its capacity to cope with future growth by absorption of immigrants, processes in which water played a vital role. This was not enough though if Israel wanted to settle the immigrants in various areas of the country which suffered from water shortage, and desired to develop its agricultural output to sustain the ever increasing demand for food on behalf of the growing population. Securing water sources and developing a comprehensive irrigation and supply system was therefore imperative, which the Zionists recognized as well, as Herzl pointed out in *Altneuland*, where he proposed the use of water resources in the Golan area for

¹³³ Selby, 334.

¹³⁴ Newman, 14.

¹³⁵ Morag, 179.

irrigating the southern arid regions and the establishment of a canal to transfer waters to the Dead Sea to effectively replenish those diverted for irrigation purposes.¹³⁶

Moving waters from north to south was therefore significant in realizing the Zionist project (settlement throughout Palestine) that is why policy makers offered special importance to the north – north-eastern boundaries of the state. Herzl saw the possibility of constructing a hydroplant as well, if the differences between the altitudes of the Mediterranean and the Jordan River could be exploited. Given the lack of coal or fossil fuels in the region, water as a possible source of hydroelectricity for industrial purposes was seriously considered by early Zionists.¹³⁷ The ambitious supply plan was ultimately realized through the construction of the National Water Carrier in the 60's although the project faced a series of hurdles as will be later described. Even after its construction, problems were by far not solved but only alleviated, yet Israel's success in overcoming the water problem became more than obvious by today. The most important reasons for this success are manifold encompassing: the Zionist provisions described earlier, the strong statist political economy of the state, the ever growing investments into the water infrastructure due to the economic developments between the 50's and 70's, the high levels of immigration, and capital influx from Germany, from the Jewish communities around the world and the United States, as well as the treatment of water as a national security issue where control of regional supplies was crucial.¹³⁸

3.3 Israel's Water Basin

Even until present day the Jordan river system with its four major tributaries: three of which, the Dan, Hasbani, and Banias, coalesce north of Lake Tiberias while the fourth, the Yarmouk, joins the Jordan River south of the Lake, along with Lake Tiberias provide only for

¹³⁶ Morag, 186.

¹³⁷ Elmusa Sharif S., "The Land-Water Nexus in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (Spring 1996), 70.

¹³⁸ Selby, 334.

37% of the total water resources that Israel can harness, the rest being provided by groundwater, 58% and floodwater run-offs, 5%.¹³⁹ Even if this may not seem too problematic, considering the rate of development in the country, the more there will be built the less groundwater will be available, which will ultimately endanger the well-being of the population. Israel has in recent times, to decrease the effects of these phenomena, resorted to import water from Turkey and construct a series of major desalination plants.¹⁴⁰ Nation-building and state-building were therefore closely interwoven with the water issue from the very early days on, water being not only a mere economic resource but a vehicle, a means of creating the new Israeli society based on agricultural settlements.¹⁴¹ Nonetheless this strong concern for water also provided an argument used classically for claiming legitimacy for the state, the Jews being the ones capable of developing the country, contrary to their Arab counterparts who lacked both the means and the support to do that.¹⁴² Yet as important as agriculture was in the early days, its contribution to recent GDP levels is only around 2.8%¹⁴³.

Water distribution was not the only concern though. Already during the Balfour Declaration it became obvious for Zionist leaders that, in order to ensure access to water resources, control over the sources of water was necessary. It is for this reason that already Weizmann insisted before Lloyd George on including northern territories such as the valley of the Litani and the western and southern slopes of the Hermon range into the territory of the Jewish National Homeland arguing that these would be imperatively required for modern economic life.¹⁴⁴ The Zionist Organization itself envisaged the incorporation of all the headwaters of the Jordan basin, segments of the Litani and Yarmuk and seafronts at the

¹³⁹ Morag, 180-181.

¹⁴⁰ Selby, 333.

¹⁴¹ Morag, 183-184.

¹⁴² Ibid., 184.

¹⁴³ Selby, 336.

¹⁴⁴ Morag, 190-191.

Mediterranean and the Red Sea into the future map of the Land of Israel.¹⁴⁵ The final north-eastern boundaries were to be set by the UN Partition Plan of 1947 after earlier agreements between the French and the British on the issue, and came to incorporate the whole of the eastern Galilee region including Lake Tiberias, Hamat Gader, and the Huleh Valley (the north-eastern border region of Palestine).

Even under these circumstances several water resources were scattered among the 4 states in that region: Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon, each of them insisting on the control of what they possessed, being more than reluctant to give up total control. It is this aspect that shows in what way water became an issue of contention among these four states to the extent that several secret negotiations were undertaken and meetings arranged between some of the parties such as Israel and Jordan,¹⁴⁶ long before the 1994 peace agreement came into being. Yet the actual capability of the water problem itself to push for peace between some of the parties is questionable, cooperation in respect to this resource being more an element and a facilitator for improving relations following the peace agreement¹⁴⁷ rather than actually leading it. But I will examine this issue again in the chapter dealing with the peace agreements.

If water became ultimately an element of cooperation with Jordan it was very much a thorn in the relationship with Syria. The first confrontations about water erupted between Syria and Israel in one of the demilitarized zones along the armistice lines in the north, Syria trying with all means to prohibit Israeli usage of its waters in the area, a dispute that drew the attention of President Eisenhower who dispatched Eric Johnston to handle the situation. The plan, providing for distribution of water resources, that was devised by the American diplomat was ultimately rejected. The rivalry would reach its peak in the mid 60's, to which we will come back in Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁵ Sharif S., "The Land-Water Nexus in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", 70.

¹⁴⁶ Selby, 342.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 342.

3.4 Dimensions of the Water Dispute

Even so to fully recognize the importance of water in the development of Israel and its impact on shaping foreign relations with its neighbours several dimensions of the problem need to be considered encompassing overall the Jordan river, the control and the role of water in various processes. These dimensions as identified by Morag are: 1) geographic and topographic facts in relation to the Jordan river; 2) the present scope of water use from the Jordan system; 3) the role of water in state development both from a demographic point of view as well as a geopolitical one; 4) the geopolitical dispute about the control of the headwaters of the Jordan located in the Golan Heights; 5) water as constitutive element of the peace negotiations among Israel and Syria.¹⁴⁸ A further significant implication is provided by the fact that the Jordan, contrary to other Middle-Eastern rivers, is a border river which meant that altogether four states had some kind of claim on it, complicating and heating up any negotiations that dealt with the modification of the system or its tributaries. Therefore under these circumstances any attempt of unilaterally tampering with Israel's water resources following various disputes was considered a legitimate *casus bellum* by the Jewish state.¹⁴⁹

Given the concern allocated to the control of water, Israel's attitude to the Negev is also very interesting and requires some attention especially because some parts of it were contested for a short while and because it is more a wasteland than a fertile territory. Not only is it an arid, desert like place it is also relatively far away to be easily supplied with water to create the necessary conditions for settlement and living. Ben Gurion himself regarded it as a large territorial reservoir for settlement though,¹⁵⁰ yet active policies in this direction were only implemented after the late 1960's. Beyond this, there are strong strategic considerations regarding it, as recognized already by the British and the Arabs in the days of the Mandate

¹⁴⁸ Morag, 180.

¹⁴⁹ Newman, 14.

¹⁵⁰ Kimmerling, 11.

period because of its vicinity to the Suez-Canal, forming a buffer zone next to it and because of its role as a natural bridge between the eastern and western parts of the Arab world.¹⁵¹ Despite Israel's subsequent success in achieving transfer of water to the south, the Negev still remains largely unpopulated and arid, with about 7.7% of the Israeli population living there. Even if this percentage seems relatively low, compared to the early stages of statehood and the pre-state period, it is a significant development proving that two of the rationales of the quick build up of the water distribution system was to increase the population of the Negev and make it inhabitable while the second was to increase the overall food production levels in order to assure some form of independence from foreign imports in case the Arab world would impose a blockade on the state at some point.¹⁵² Yet with technological advances it has gradually become clear that the tremendous brackish-saline aquifer under the Negev has the potential, if enough desalination plants are constructed, to supply the water needs of the whole Negev region.¹⁵³ This has not become top of the agenda yet though. A further argument for keeping the desert as it is, is that ever since early times it was also used as a training and experimental ground for the military.¹⁵⁴

The West Bank on the other hand represents a more complex issue having at the same time water based significance as well. It is argued that dependency on the transboundary waters of the rain-fed Mountain Aquifer is one of the main reasons of holding onto it even at present¹⁵⁵ while this may not have always been the case since 1967. I briefly note that both in case of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip the main water sources are aquifers, but what is even more important is that the West Bank concentrates three main aquifer systems out of which two are of major importance to Israel because of the quality of their water whereas the

¹⁵¹ Morag, 187.

¹⁵² Ibid., 190.

¹⁵³ Elmusa Sharif S., "Dividing the Common Palestinian-Israeli Waters: An Internal Water Law Approach," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3 (1993), 70.

¹⁵⁴ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

¹⁵⁵ Selby, 339.

third one is somewhat more inferior. After 1967, in addition to controlling surface resources, Israel managed to take hold of approx. 80-90% of the water resources common with the Palestinians¹⁵⁶ due to technological breakthroughs in drilling. On the other hand the strategic argument seems to be much more compelling for holding on to the West Bank, as will be shown later, even if under present circumstances Israel has less to fear from a conventional land attack from its eastern side than it had decades ago.

In order to see the overall dimension of the water conflict with the Palestinians, a number of five issues need to be considered: the issue of redistributing the common waters, unilateral encroachment by settlers on endogenous waters in case of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, control of hydrospace and specifically of headwaters, institutional control and data available for research purposes.¹⁵⁷ These different aspects are either found in other water conflicts or are missing which suggests their uniqueness or abnormality. For the present research one of the most important and most relevant of the five dimensions presented above is the one about hydrospace control that entails questions of land demarcation, sovereignty and security testifying for the role water plays in defining territorial conceptions.

As such, water in the Middle East has the potential to be both a tool of peace and a tool of war, a claim that will be analyzed in the following two chapters by the cases provided. Depending therefore on the water resources available or needed each state has the option of defining its policies in respect to its neighbours accordingly, while it is also true that for war substantial military resources are required as well.¹⁵⁸ This chapter thus proved the relevance of water in the area and specifically for Israel in the way it conducted its policies towards the Palestinians and the surrounding countries. As such, in some instances a land-water connection was established that granted a complete geopolitical dimension to the issue.

¹⁵⁶ Sharif S., "Dividing the Common Palestinian-Israeli Waters: An Internal Water Law Approach", 62.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 59.

¹⁵⁸ Philippe Moreau Defarges, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

CHAPTER 4 - TWO WARS OF STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE: FROM 'INDEPENDENCE' TO 'SIX DAYS'

After having clarified all the conceptual aspects of my thesis I will now turn to the cases chosen for analysis. First I will provide an overview of two of the several Israeli wars conducted since the foundation of the modern Jewish state whereas in the next chapter, in order to balance out conflict with cooperation, I will turn to the two great peace processes Israel was engaged in. For the first set of cases I have chosen the War of Independence and the Six Day War because these provided some of the most interesting geopolitical prospects to be analyzed. Whereas the first one is significant because it brought into existence the state the second one is important because it brought about the state in its most enlarged form during the past 61 years. In what regards the rationales of choosing the two peace processes, I will come back to that at the beginning of the next chapter.

4.1 The War of Independence

Immediately after its declaration of independence Israel faced a rather peculiar geopolitical problem and a paradoxical international position: states overseas and far away granted it recognition whereas its immediate neighbours were not only reluctant to such a move but where completely against it for various reasons,¹⁵⁹ launching a war against it on the eve of its foundation.

The intervention of the Arab states was motivated by several reasons and none of them involved explicit support for a separate Arab entity along or excluding the Jewish one, the Partition Plan having aimed at establishing two political entities in Palestine. Apparently the strongest states: Egypt, Syria and Jordan were driven by the desire to acquire new territory, the aim to kill the Partition Plan altogether and to satisfy public opinion at home which was

¹⁵⁹ Shlaim, 658.

rather unhappy with the current governing regimes.¹⁶⁰ A substantially different dimension of the situation was the fact that the withdrawal of the British troops meant an implicit change in the status quo of the region, for no side knew exactly what was going to happen once the British would leave. Therefore each of the surrounding Arab states wanted to establish a new status quo that would in some ways benefit mainly itself.

Jordan was interested in acquiring most of what had been promised to the Palestinians in the Partition Plan which meant most of the West Bank including Jerusalem, thus occupying both sides of the Jordan River and gaining full control of it.¹⁶¹ Egypt as the strongest state of the Arab world had to intervene both because of political considerations and strategic ones, the Israelis receiving part of the Negev which meant a clear barrier from then on between the west and the east of the Arab world as well as extra complications in regard to the Gulf of Aqaba. Egypt did not only want to maintain the communication channel intact but wanted to acquire a position from which it was able to threaten its rival Saudi Arabia.¹⁶² Syria was interested in strategic parity with Egypt therefore tried pushing as far south as possible, having managed to occupy some land in the north given to the Israelis in the Partition Plan. Initial aims envisaged conquering the surroundings of Lake Tiberias and heading as far as Haifa to re-establish Greater Syria in some form.¹⁶³ The war was inevitable unless great power intervention occurred. The preparations of the surrounding Arab states clearly showed the intention of a hostile move as soon as British troops would leave on the 14th of May.

Israeli revisionist historians in the 1990's came to question the overall picture of the 1948-1949 war by raising a series of issues that provide new and helpful insights into the events surrounding the foundation of the Jewish state. Such is the importance given to the two stages of the war within Palestine. By the late 1940's British troops were overwhelmed by the

¹⁶⁰ Shlomo Ben-Ami, "A War to Start All Wars: Will Israel Ever Seal the Victory of 1948?," *Foreign Affairs*, 87:5 (2008), 150.

¹⁶¹ Ahron Bregman, *Israel's Wars – A history since 1947*, (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 27.

¹⁶² Encel, *Geopolitique d'Israel*, 214.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 214-215.

violence provoked by both the Jewish and Arab sides in Mandatory Palestine and not only among themselves but against the British administration as well. In this sense the Irgun's¹⁶⁴ action of blowing up the British headquarters in the King David Hotel was a case in point.

Nonetheless the Jews were split into two camps, one opposing the use of force as a means to obtain independence whereas the other more militant side was determined to oust the British by any means possible. The moderates had already picked up the sense of fear that violence would do nothing but harm, ultimately alienating the support of the superpowers for partition as well as creating an extremely unstable situation in an already unstable land. At this point it is important to note that revisionist historians claim that it was the period between November 30th 1947 and May 15th 1948 that was critical in what regarded the future of Israel whereas the second phase of the war between May 15th 1948 and spring 1949 was traditionally given much more importance and attention.¹⁶⁵ On a closer analysis the reasons underlying the claim are indeed compelling. As mentioned before, superpower support, especially on behalf of the United States seemed questionable unless the situation would improve in Palestine. In this sense the Palestinian's war against the Yishuv¹⁶⁶, even though disorganized and spontaneous almost caused the US to give up support for Israel¹⁶⁷. Therefore the Yishuv changed its strategy from a purely defensive one to an offensive defensive one,¹⁶⁸ in order to prove it could protect itself and stabilize the situation in order to maintain superpower support. It was during this time that David Ben-Gurion the head of the Jewish Agency adopted *Plan-D* in March 1948, making it a directive to all military units which aimed at pushing the frontiers of the Jewish state beyond the partition lines established by the UN,¹⁶⁹ given the fact that some form of conflagration with the Arabs was inevitable.

¹⁶⁴ Underground military force operating offensive guerrilla type activities against both British and Arabs.

¹⁶⁵ Ben-Ami, 148.

¹⁶⁶ The native Jewish community of Palestine.

¹⁶⁷ Ben-Ami, 150.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ben-Ami, 150.

The main objectives of Plan-D or Plan Dalet entailed clear geopolitical considerations: consolidation of control over the areas allotted to Israel as well as the defence of their borders and seizure of strategic positions that would block any Arab invasion, allowing at the same time for the occupation and destruction of Arab populated villages and cities, resorting even to forceful expulsion if required.¹⁷⁰ All of these measures were to be carried out in order to secure the defence system of the state, the meaning of which was not specified allowing for a multitude of territorial interpretations.¹⁷¹ Implementation of Plan-D had two major political effects: the expulsion of most of the Arabs from the Jewish state and expansion of Jewish control over territories outside the Partition Plan.¹⁷²

Ben Gurion at this point had not only proven to be the most prominent figure of Zionism in the years preceding statehood and after, but also a brilliant strategist whose visions deeply influenced the development of the state. His geopolitical concerns were characterized by four major independent choices of action.¹⁷³ The first one translated into the occupation of strategically important areas instead of biblical ones, already as soon as the clashes with the Arabs and British in Mandate Palestine had intensified in the 1940's.¹⁷⁴ The second choice translated into his concern and subsequent activities to obtain the support of a major power, to alter the balance of power in the region in favour of the Jewish state.¹⁷⁵ The third one focused on establishing sovereign military capacity as soon as possible, which not only meant a national army but weapons producing facilities including a nuclear reactor as well.¹⁷⁶ His last choice envisaged increased support of the youth to work and make each and every parcel of the land flourish while attempting to limit the supposedly corrupt effect of outside influences

¹⁷⁰ Bregman, 17.

¹⁷¹ Kimmerling, 131.

¹⁷² Ibid., 132.

¹⁷³ Encel, *Geopolitique d'Israel*, 81.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 82.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 83.

such as television and games, establishing a particular form of morality.¹⁷⁷ This latter concern was the typical expression of the Zionist ideal meant to create the new citizen of Israel.

Despite of apparently not being a very significant problem at this point, water or at least the ‘collusion across the Jordan’ with Jordan before and even during the war in respect to water issues seems to have played a significant role in shaping the events of 1948-49 where the Jewish state saw its interests converge with those of its eastern neighbour in what concerns limiting Egyptian power and diminishing the chances of the rise of a Palestinian Arab country in their vicinity.¹⁷⁸ The importance of the Jordan River was clear for Israel whose population had been growing significantly even during the war because of mass immigration. Water was a resource that could not be absent from such a large scale enterprise but its importance was strategic as well. Conquering the West Bank was one of the main controversies of the political agenda at that time alongside the incorporation of the Palmach¹⁷⁹ into the IDF.¹⁸⁰ Conquering the West Bank would have entailed two major implications: establishment of a natural border with Jordan on the Jordan River and alteration of the fragile demographic balance of the state in favour of the Arab population. Hence Ben Gurion was reluctant to conquer all of the West Bank, reason for which he was attacked by leaders of both left, Yigal Allon, and right, Menachem Begin.¹⁸¹ Conquering Gaza and the West Bank would have also entailed the risk of Britain getting involved in the war on the side of its protégés, Jordan and Egypt, which Israel wanted to avoid by all means.¹⁸² Yet the main strategy remained one of establishing as much spatial continuity as possible, contrary to the fragmentation devised in the Partition Plan.

¹⁷⁷ Encel, *Geopolitique d’Israel*, 83.

¹⁷⁸ Selby, 342.

¹⁷⁹ Shock troop established by the British during World War II that went underground as part of the Haganah later.

¹⁸⁰ Beilin, 71.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War*, (Oxford University Press: New York, 2002), 5.

A different dimension of the importance of water was represented by the Negev and the control of Eilat. Control of the entire Negev was important because immigrants could be settled there but only if enough water resources were available that could be transferred to the area. Eilat on the other hand provided Israel with an exit into the Gulf of Aqaba as well as the Red Sea, opening up a sea lane for imports and exports. Therefore in October 1948 while the Israeli troops were on the offensive against Egypt they pushed forward despite the truce signed some months earlier reclaiming the Negev by subsequent attacks, this way driving a wedge between Egypt and Jordan. By March the following year they had captured Eilat thus sealing the division between the western and eastern Arab world and acquiring exits to both surrounding seas: the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

One of the most controversial actions undertaken during the war was the violent expulsion of Palestinians of which it is clear that it was to a significant extent driven by the desire of the settlers to obtain as much land as possible.¹⁸³ This reflected to a greater extent the mindset of the Jewish leadership as well, willing and eager to acquire territories beyond the partition borders. Thus Israel had acquired 77% of Mandate Palestine after the war, most of the 23% (mainly the West Bank) left out being incorporated into the Kingdom of Jordan in 1950 while the Gaza Strip fell under Egyptian administration.

Shortly after the end of the war between 1949-1952 after having signed a series of armistice agreements with Israel the belligerent Arab states attempted several times to establish peace agreements with Israel.¹⁸⁴ The general feeling that prevailed immediately after the war was that peace would soon follow.¹⁸⁵ The Conference in May at Lausanne raised many hopes and even though Israel had previously agreed to reaccept about 100.000 refugees the negotiating sides did not reach an agreement and hopes were ultimately shattered.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Ben-Ami, 151.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 151.

¹⁸⁵ Beilin, 118.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 118.

Another round of unsuccessful talks followed at Rhodes and the event that seemed to turn the tide was the peace agreement reached with Jordan that never got to be implemented for King Abdullah was assassinated shortly after because of this. While relations with the surrounding world were not settled by far, Israel turned its attention to the absorption of immigrants that meant not only providing them with housing conditions but food and water as well.

The war was significant from a series of perspectives: it first of all sent out a clear message to the surrounding states: “we are here, and in no hurry to leave”. Not only that, but due to the territorial interests of Israel some significant territorial changes were carried out throughout the war, expanding the borders of Israel beyond the lines drawn up by the Partition Plan of 1947 ultimately occupying 80% of Mandate Palestine. Yet all major Israeli population and industrial centres remained within firing range of the Arab armies,¹⁸⁷ a situation that created a strong feeling of insecurity and anxiousness. Beyond significant territorial changes the war violently dislocated a large number of Arabs, approximately 700.000 (though exact figures are disputed even today), who became refugees creating the premises for the later Palestinian refugee problem while at the same time it altered the balance of the domestic population of Israel to the benefit of the Jews.

Thus the Palestinian problem as perceived at that point virtually disappeared and became the later-known refugee/infiltrator problem.¹⁸⁸ Revisionist historian Benny Morris argues at this point that had Ben-Gurion wanted and managed to oust most of the Arabs from Israel’s territory the situation would have been much more stable today,¹⁸⁹ yet this is a very radical claim applicable to a series of countries yet lacking proper moral grounds. The refugee problem was given very little attention subsequent to the war and the main frictions between Israel and the Arab world occurred mainly because of border problems in the 1950’s¹⁹⁰.

¹⁸⁷ Oren, 6.

¹⁸⁸ Ben-Ami, 148.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 149.

¹⁹⁰ Beilin, 119.

In concluding this section a series of remarks have to be made. The fact that during the war none of the sides achieved a crushing blow over the other triggered an increased arms race in the region, during which the Arab side was able to uphold a policy of “no war, no peace” because there were no incentives or pressures to force it to negotiate any peace or reconciliation deal.¹⁹¹ Once the status quo in the region was altered and the Jews acquired a national territory the situation gained a geopolitical dimension. These circumstances combined with the fact that neither alliance suggested by the great powers (especially Britain) in the region envisaged Israel as a full fledged member, determined Israel to adopt a strategy of self reliance¹⁹² – isolationism – coupled with some form of great power support that was marked by occasional attempts of breaking through such as was the case in the Suez War in 1956. Therefore the only means for Israel to maintain its security and territory was a strategy of deterrence which would develop two distinct dimensions.

4.2 The Six Days War

One of Israel’s major military operations and most important victories was achieved in the summer of 1967 during the Six Day War that made geopolitics top of the agenda by the conquests realized. The Jewish state practically tripled its territory and gained geopolitical advantage over each of its neighbours. It is argued that water, and especially occupying territories with significant water resources played a significant role in the conflict as could be seen during earlier events in 1965 when clashes over water occurred between Syria and Israel. Overall there were a number of other reasons as well for the increased tensions that led to the breakout of the conflict such as Israel being seen as a colonial-settler state in a post-colonial Middle East that was eager to forget the colonial experience, the Cold War bipolarity, political rivalries between some of the Arab states, Palestinian, Egyptian and Israeli cross-

¹⁹¹ Reiser, 68-69.

¹⁹² Ibid., 79.

border raids, poor intelligence and the political insecurities of the Eshkol government.¹⁹³ Yet as long as we keep in mind that it was the closure of the Straits of Tiran that triggered the war and that the Golan was taken for mainly strategic purposes, in which water was as important as the location itself, we may see that water played indeed a significant role in the breakout of the conflict and in the way it unfolded.

In the Arab world the period after the Suez War brought about some significant changes such as the rise of Egyptian charismatic leader Gamal Abd-al Nasser and Pan-Arabism, elements which conveyed the Arab interests a new geopolitical dimension: the creation of a monolithic Arab state entity while Israeli boundaries and the refugee problem became more of a second rank concern.¹⁹⁴ From then on Israel represented a political and physical barrier in achieving this goal.

It is most important to understand the fact that neither Egypt, nor Jordan nor Israel wanted the war which broke out in June, which as evidence came to suggest was in significant part a consequence of the false information provided by USSR intelligence to both Egypt and Syria.¹⁹⁵ Egypt at the time was caught up in military operations in Yemen and seemed rather unable to commence operations in Israel regardless of its desires to create a united Arab state. Its relations with Israel could be classified as calm regardless of the earlier disputes concerning the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip and Nasser's declarations of July 1965 that a final showdown with Israel would happen in no less than five years.¹⁹⁶ Syria, contrary to the other two countries, had more compelling reasons to settle its disputes with Israel by taking up arms, especially in light of mounting tensions between the two.

The most significant confrontation preceding the Six Day War arose because of water disputes in 1964 over the plans of Israel to divert water from the Galilee to the Negev which

¹⁹³ Selby, 338.

¹⁹⁴ Reiser, 75.

¹⁹⁵ Beilin, 41.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 63-64.

would have affected the Jordan River while creating the premises for immigrant absorption in the desert. Syria who had most vehemently opposed such a move and was expressly against Israel's National Water Carrier program not only tried through the Arab League's support to implement a project by which to divert the Hasbani and Banyas rivers before they reached Israel but took up arms against the Jewish state as well. To gather support for its own diversion plans Syria had requested a special Arab summit at which Nasser took the leading role, ultimately agreeing on the plan. The objective of the diversion of the two rivers was to decrease the debit of the Jordan River by approximately 50% and consequently reduce the volume of Lake Tiberias.¹⁹⁷ Neither of the countries envisaged in the plan was willing to commit itself to it as it was spelled down and Israeli reaction was soon to follow, leading to several clashes in March, May and August 1965 and a series of bombings in 1966.¹⁹⁸ What happened in these years showed that Syria was capable of tampering with the Jordan River's origins by shutting off its supplies while Egypt could enact a blockade on the Straits any time it wanted to.¹⁹⁹ This dual menace had therefore underlined the essential role of water in a possible future confrontation which would follow a year later.

Israel had hoped that with the help of the water carrier it could transfer water from the north to the Negev and by developing the desert it could put an end to Arab claims to cede parts of the desert back to Egypt, forever blocking the possibility of a land bridge between the two Arab countries neighbouring the Negev.²⁰⁰ This project fuelled further tensions and water seemed to be the most likely pretext for war²⁰¹ coupled with mounting terrorist incidents and attacks across the Syrian border on behalf of the Isalmist grouping Fatah and other Palestinian paramilitary groupings which Syria supported.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ Encel, *Geopolitique d'Israel*, 123.

¹⁹⁸ Bregman, 64.

¹⁹⁹ Oren, 17.

²⁰⁰ Bregman, 64.

²⁰¹ Beilin, 120.

²⁰² Ibid., 40.

The last reason for increased tensions in the north was control over the demilitarized zones established after 1948. These territories were occupied by Syria at that time but after withdrawal, sovereignty remained unsettled while both countries were eager to control them. Most of the tensions surrounded Lake Tiberias which was under weak Israeli sovereignty, with a strip of 10 meters that technically belonged to Israel yet was impossible to defend due to Syrian gunfire.²⁰³ Minor clashes over both territorial sovereignty as well as issues such as fishing rights on Lake Tiberias constantly broke out among the inhabitants of the region as well as the two countries' military forces stationed in the area. Land and water were therefore inherently linked in the Syrian-Israeli dispute. These tensions mounted to a small scale air battle between the two countries over the demilitarized zones in April 1967, just a couple of months before the outbreak of the war.²⁰⁴ Israel had in short time gained control of Syrian airspace and also roared above Damascus for a short while,²⁰⁵ proving its superiority over the Syrian air force.

Even Prime Minister Eshkol had recognized the importance of water in the context of the mounting tensions in the north: "Without control of the water sources we cannot realize the Zionist dream [...] water is the basis for Jewish existence in the Land of Israel."²⁰⁶ Combined with continued border incidents in 1966 and 1967 it was clear that war would soon follow.

Given these findings it is important to concentrate on why Israel commenced such overwhelming military operations although evidence suggests that it was completely unaware of its actual conquering potential and was more bent on peace with some of its neighbours especially Jordan rather than on war.²⁰⁷ Peace chances seemed possible before the events started speeding up, Defence Minister Moshe Dayan expecting some sort of action on behalf

²⁰³ Oren, 23.

²⁰⁴ Bregman, 66.

²⁰⁵ Oren, 46.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 23.

²⁰⁷ Beilin, 42.

of King Hussein in the tense days preceding the war,²⁰⁸ even though a clash occurred into the West Bank on November 1966 that upset the overall situation between the two countries. In this respect it is important to keep in mind that the West Bank was since 1949 integral part of the Kingdom of Jordan, yet the failure to conquer it in 1949 had been called an “everlasting shame” ever since.²⁰⁹ Hence after real mobilization started on all sides due to the false information launched by the Soviet Foreign Ministry it was almost impossible to stop the escalation and thus Israel launched a pre-emptive strike that would have surprising consequences. Eshkol had even tried to strike at Syria by an indirect route through the UN Security Council, but the Soviets vetoed all actions against their protégé.²¹⁰

The spark that ignited the build up seems to have been most likely the Soviet attempt to exploit the local states, in order to frustrate the US, rather than the domestic and regional agendas of the participants. The trigger of the attacks was a strategic move on behalf of Egypt to which it had resorted earlier in the past as well by blocking the Straits of Tiran and occupying the region of Eilat, an action that not only endangered Israel’s trade routes with the East but put in a geopolitically fragile situation since the port city was key in developing the Negev.²¹¹ This move was considered a legitimate *casus bellum*²¹² and since none of the great naval powers intervened to protect the freedom of navigation Israel felt compelled to re-establish the status quo.

We also need to note that in this period the internal political situation of Israel was somewhat unstable as well because of growing rivalries between Ben Gurion and Yigal Allon on the strategy of deterrence to be adopted and later Yitzhak Rabin (Chief of Staff) and Levi Eshkol (PM and Defence Minister) on who could crack down most strongly on the Arabs. The situation was further complicated by growing discontent with the Eshkol government that was

²⁰⁸ Beilin, 42.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 159.

²¹⁰ Oren, 30.

²¹¹ Bregman, 71.

²¹² Reich, 127.

having a very disappointing second term, by growing concerns because of a possible second Holocaust with the mounting tensions in the region, by the increasing pressures for recalling Ben Gurion and by Eshkol's poor public performances.²¹³ The debate over deterrence created two camps: one favouring nuclear deterrence represented by Ben Gurion, who saw the bomb as the only means to alter Arab will to fight and bring about the acceptance of Israel while the other camp represented by Yigal Allon favoured conventional means of deterrence believing that a nuclear balance in the region could not be established in the way it was achieved between the East and the West.²¹⁴ In the end the debate reached a form of compromise in which Israel had acquired an undeclared bomb and enhanced conventional power.

The Rabin – Eshkol debate ultimately resulted in relinquishing the Defence Minister post to Moshe Dayan, then a member of Ben Gurion's Rafi party, a move that let loose the break. Dayan had already been an established name in the Israeli army and political circles after his successes in the 1956 campaign, proving to be one of the most brilliant strategists of the period. His military strategy had been based on three rationales: fighting the wars outside the vital national territory in order not to bring about the disruption of agriculture and economy; acquiring pre-emptive capacity and high mobility in order to be able to carry out surprise attacks which were seen as the only way to break with the geopolitical isolation of the country and refraining from pre-emptive attacks without the backing of a great power.²¹⁵ Therefore once he became head of the Defence portfolio, Dayan could enable the IDF to take up an offensive stance that would enhance the deterrent value of the state.²¹⁶

It is at this point required to examine that, as the person in charge of military operations, Moshe Dayan, brought about changes both to the strategy and the aims of the military operations. Initial plans envisaged occupying Gaza and bargaining for the Straits as

²¹³ Bregman, 78-79.

²¹⁴ Reiser, 80-81.

²¹⁵ Encel, *Geopolitiqued'Israel*, 98-99.

²¹⁶ Reiser, 83.

well as pushing as far as the Canal. Dayan on the other hand had not wanted to occupy the Gaza Strip under any circumstances, foreseeing the dangers of engulfing such a large Arab population into the territory of Israel.²¹⁷ He had also not wanted to occupy the Suez Canal, issuing orders for the army to stop short of it but not take it.²¹⁸ Orders were thus clear regarding both Gaza and the Suez Canal. He was further reluctant to take over the Golan Heights as well, considering that such a move would perpetrate the conflict with Syria forever even though it would constitute a strategic asset. Yet in the course of the war that lasted but six days it seems that he was convinced into overriding all his previous considerations. Apparently due to stringent requests in respect to Gaza and lack of specific information about the positions of the troops in the Sinai Peninsula, Dayan consented to going as far as the Canal and occupying the Gaza strip from which settlements were shelled.²¹⁹ The West Bank was a totally different story given the national disappointment of the failure to take it in 1949. A possible occupation of both East Jerusalem and the West Bank, which were seen as organic parts of Israel would not only have meant re-establishing to some extent the historical territory of Israel but would also strengthen the sense of Jewish identity,²²⁰ yet such events were not even deemed possible before the war. However in what regards Dayan he would remain unpredictable and enigmatic.

To understand the important if not even crucial role of water in respect to the Golan as such, historical evidence suggests that it was a group of settlers and kibbutznik, from the Galilee region that pressured the government and mainly Dayan into considering occupying the Golan Heights,²²¹ that comprise some of the headwaters of the Jordan River and also have very fertile ground. The war had already been decided by the eve of the 9th of June. This argument seems to be acceptable in light of the fact that Dayan had not wanted to occupy

²¹⁷ Bregman, 80.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 85-86.

²²⁰ Ibid., 92.

²²¹ Ben-Ami, 151.

neither the Gaza Strip nor the Suez Canal but ultimately was convinced to, just as it happened with the Golan Heights. He had known that if once taken, Israel would never be willing to relinquish the strategically vital plateau for it would create a buffer zone as well along with the rest of the territories taken. Thus what had been until then a fight with Syria for the demilitarized zones would turn into a struggle for the Golan Heights.²²²

Once the war was over Israel had acquired control of most of the freshwater sources in that region being able to veto any kind of increase of the water supply²²³ to the Arab parties until the peace settlement in 1994 with Jordan. The military operations had proven that the land-water nexus could easily be established since Israel did not have to venture far away from its UN designed borders in order to gain control of headwaters and additional water resources.²²⁴

After the war, in 1968 the Allon Plan was devised by Yigal Allon which provided the framework for a territorial compromise, which meant that vital Israeli strategic interests were upheld without imposition of rules over territories with a high number of Palestinian inhabitants,²²⁵ which were also envisaged to be traded for peace. The plan envisaged the partition and annexation of the newly conquered territories based on two major rationales: a geostrategic and a demographic one.²²⁶ At the strategic level the ultimate aim was the annexation of some clearly defined areas by creating ruptures and encirclements within the occupied territories.²²⁷ At the demographic level the areas densely populated by Arabs were excluded from the ones envisaged for annexation, because of their possible effect on the demographic balance as well as on possible future conflict settlements.²²⁸ Yet in order not to

²²² Muhammad Muslih, "The Golan: Israel, Syria and Strategic Calculations," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4, (Autumn 1993), 621.

²²³ Sharif S., "The Land-Water Nexus in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", 71.

²²⁴ Ibid., 72.

²²⁵ Shimon Shamir, "Israeli views of Egypt and the Peace Process" in *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David*, ed. William B. Quandt, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1988), 199.

²²⁶ Encel, *Geopolitique d'Israel*, 29.

²²⁷ Ibid., 30.

²²⁸ Kimmerling, 159.

exasperate the Arab population in the West Bank and have guerrilla groupings appear along the new demarcation lines, Dayan insisted on the open positions policy which meant that movement of Palestinians between Jordan, the West Bank and Israel would to some extent be unrestricted for workers and people wanting to visit their relatives as well as the implementation of some form of autonomy without self-governing.²²⁹ On the other hand Dayan supported permanent Israeli presence in the territories as well.²³⁰ The Allon Plan was never adopted by the government but its operative part would be accepted²³¹ and followed until the 1990's.

The initial euphoria of the victory combined with the gradual realization of what changes the new status quo would imply in terms of demography, a possible peace for territory strategy, future settlement possibilities in the occupied territories and the new image of Israel as a colonial country prompted the government to reconsider the possibility of peace. Even though the Israeli government secretly decided to make known its readiness for peace agreements with both Syria and Egypt on June 19th 1967, the response it received after the convening of the Karthoum Summit by the Arab world was both negative and worrisome: peace was not an option for the Arabs.²³² The agreements sought for by the Israelis would have entailed an exchange of the Sinai and the Golan for peace treaties with Egypt and Syria while planning to resettle the refugees of the Gaza strip as part of a regional plan.²³³ Dayan as well was in favour of this idea, envisaging a whole series of possible peace solutions, while at the same time supporting the establishment of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.²³⁴

If peace was not foreseeable any time soon, the occupied territories still gave Israel an enhanced strategic position making it more defensible and providing it with early-warning

²²⁹ Encel, *Geopolitique d'Israel*, 98.

²³⁰ Reiser, 88.

²³¹ Kimmerling, 159.

²³² Beilin, 42.

²³³ Oren, 313.

²³⁴ Ibid., 316.

time due to greater strategic depth. This would remain the main reason for holding on to them until negotiations with Egypt started over the Sinai and later with the PLO and PA over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Even so the conquest of these new lands stirred up the dispute about the degree to which they were a real resource for territorial expansion, in the sense of how control of the areas could be increased by settlement and ownership in order for sovereignty to be imposed at some later stage.²³⁵ The only territories that would unequivocally become officially annexed were Jerusalem and the Golan Heights which was valuable for a wide range of reasons, the most important ones being: the strategic position of the Heights for defensive/offensive purposes, location of the headwaters of the Jordan River and the existence of a population that was not hostile to the Jews in those territories, namely the Druze.²³⁶ In defensive terms it is the northern part, the Mount Hermon range which is exceptionally valuable because it offers a commanding position that overlooks southern Lebanon, the Golan Plateau, southern Syria and northern Israel.²³⁷ Beyond this, annexation was and remained acceptable to the Israeli public opinion especially because of their resentment of Syrians which were and still are to some extent seen as the worst of the Arabs and the least trustworthy.²³⁸ The Golan therefore remains the most uncontested territory for Israeli public opinion occupied in 1967, having been taken not only from a noteworthy foe but representing no liability whatsoever for the Jewish state since it has neither refugee camps nor a population that is unfriendly to the Jews.²³⁹ As such the Golan is not only a matter of security but of settlement, water, domestic politics and to some extent ideology.²⁴⁰

1967 had a powerful political effect in terms of geopolitical thinking, strengthening the two already polarized schools of thought embodied in the Likud (represented by

²³⁵ Kimmerling, 181.

²³⁶ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

²³⁷ Muslih, 621.

²³⁸ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Muslih, 631.

Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir) and the Labour bloc (represented by Shimon Peres). The school of thought represented by Begin, considerably expansionist in character, considered that it was necessary to safeguard the territorial integrity of the state for the Jewish people while the second one claimed that security came first and reconciliation according to a land for peace formula was a viable compromise.²⁴¹ This further polarization of the two schools would have an effect on the Camp David Accords completed a decade later.

Compared to the War of Independence the Six Day War one had altered the geopolitical calculations in the region in a far different way. Whereas it had consolidated Israeli existence, making it clear that Israel would not disappear any time soon, the sudden seizure of Arab land completely altered the “no peace, no war” policy of the Arabs²⁴² as well as the dream of Arab unity. As in 1948, a new Jewish state appeared in the region in 1967 as well, but this time it had managed to prove its military superiority by achieving an overwhelming victory over the Arab armies. In this new situation Israel had acquired valuable land from the Arabs, which would change the perspectives of bargaining for peace, perspectives that actually changed in less than a decade leading to the peace agreements with Egypt in 1978. Relations with Jordan would have probably evolved in a similar way had the Palestinian problem not acquired a national dimension and a different representative, the Palestinian Liberation Organization. United Nations Security Council resolution 242 calling for a total withdrawal of Israeli forces from the territories occupied in 1967 and for the recognition of Israel, created the legal and conceptual framework that would be invoked in case of future negotiations by introducing the notion of “land for peace”.²⁴³ Hence 1967 was a year of change, brought about by mounting tensions because of the struggle for water, changing the geopolitical perspectives of Israel.

²⁴¹ Shamir, 193.

²⁴² Reiser, 69.

²⁴³ Alain Dieckhoff & Mark Tessler, “Israel et les Etats arabes: de la confrontation totale a une paix partielle” (Israel and the Arab states: from total confrontation to partial peace) in *L’Etat d’Israel* (The State of Israel), ed. Dieckhoff, Alain, (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 302.

CHAPTER 5 - COOPERATION AND THE ROAD TO PEACE: THE CAMP DAVID ACCORDS AND THE OSLO PEACE PROCESS

After the 1967 Six Day War Israel gained the definite status of regional power able to withstand the aggression of any of its neighbours and got surrounded by an aura of indestructibility while its geopolitical status had changed in a most significant way, the state reaching the borders of the often evoked Greater Israel, having within its confines the West Bank of the Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights and went even beyond, through the capture of the Sinai Peninsula. Along with these changes in the balance of power the next decade brought about a series of other surprises. The first one was the 1973 Yom Kippur war that had caught the Israelis by surprise and changed the blissful atmosphere of the post 1967 period. The second was the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement from the end of the 1970's which had only been followed by another peace agreement in the 1994. In the current chapter we will examine these two peace processes and evaluate what role if any, the geopolitical consciousness of the state played in them.

5.1 The Camp David Accords

The event that triggered the re-evaluation of the regional status quo was the 1973 Yom Kippur War that had shattered the myth of Israeli indestructibility. This almost lost war had powerfully shaken the Israeli public and the political elite as well and brought about another dimension in the relations with the Arab world. If until that time isolationism and expansionism were the most often considered options, the new state of mind dominating Israeli society and the realization that only negotiations could improve the conflict led to a gradual thaw in Egyptian Israeli relations under American involvement²⁴⁴ paving the way for a new policy of reconciliation concluded in its first phases with a series of disengagement agreements, followed by a peace agreement. The next agreement would follow almost two

²⁴⁴ Karsh, 180.

decades later and these two events would represent the culmination of Israel's reconciliatory efforts, thus creating the third path of foreign policy options: reconciliation with the surrounding world. The outcome of the war ultimately made military disengagement between Israel and Egypt as well as Syria both necessary and possible.

After having restored the country's pride, self-respect and honour Sadat could move on to start a dialogue with the Israelis whose attitude and leadership changed in a significant way that would make a land for peace strategy as called for in the UN Security Council Resolution 242 acceptable without much protest on behalf of the Israeli side.²⁴⁵ This sudden shift to bilateral talks after a recent war came as a surprise to the Israeli side which had learned to treat the possibility of peace with any other major Arab country as a mere illusion after the events that occurred since 1948. It is at this point important to keep in mind that it was indeed the Egyptians who made the first steps towards peace while the option of a reasonable geopolitical reconfiguration of the area made it an acceptable idea to the Israeli side, which would commit itself to the peace efforts once it became clear that it was possible.

The Yom Kippur war had serious political costs and destabilized the position of the Israeli government of that time, which had acquired after the 1973 elections a young and somewhat indecisive leadership in the persons of Yitzhak Rabin as Prime-Minister (following Golda Meir), Shimon Peres as Defence Minister (following Moshe Dayan) and Yigal Allon as deputy prime-minister/foreign minister (following Abba Eban). This would not have even been the greatest problem had there not been a deep personal rivalry between Rabin and Peres which would leave its imprint on the following decades and make the government itself somewhat unstable. This rivalry combined with economic scandals involving senior Labour politicians led to the fall of Labour from power in the 1977 elections.²⁴⁶ This rivalry also deeply influenced Kissinger's mediation efforts, for the fragile government would not enter

²⁴⁵ Bregman, 143.

²⁴⁶ Karsh, 179.

any concessions unless it would receive generous rewards. Differences ultimately emerged among all three members of this triumvirate when each promoted a different approach towards the Arabs.²⁴⁷ It was under this constellation that the US threatened with its *reassessment* policy which induced the Israeli side to consider negotiations with Egypt and have Kissinger involved in his well-known shuttle diplomacy. The war led to United Nations Security Council Resolution 338 that would call for an immediate cease-fire and the implementation of the provisions of resolution 242 from then on, being present in each major negotiation process ever since.²⁴⁸

It was Secretary of State Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy that created the starting bridge between the Israeli and the Egyptian sides, yet its importance must not be overestimated. Even though it was due to Kissinger's efforts that the disengagement agreements were signed, yet Israel was by no means willing to accept the second, more important one, of Geneva September 1975 involving the first geopolitical realignment in respect to the Sinai after 1967. American pressure in the way the matter would develop²⁴⁹. Contrary to general perceptions it was the local actors, especially president Sadat of Egypt and Israeli prime-minister Begin that played the crucial role in getting the peace process among the two countries started in the late 1970's.²⁵⁰ Both leaders were motivated by personal considerations as well, wanting to change their past reputations and reduce the ongoing tensions between the two states.²⁵¹

In what regards the joint efforts of the US and the USSR, the two sides caught up in the negotiations were wary of deep superpower implication because the better the relations got between the two great powers the lesser the freedom for action remained for the two them, therefore neither was particularly interested in superpower involvement in the peace

²⁴⁷ Reich, 136.

²⁴⁸ Dieckhoff, 302.

²⁴⁹ Karsh, 180.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 181.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 182.

process.²⁵² That is why even before the Vance-Gromyko statement in October 1977 calling for the reconvening of the Geneva Conference the two sides had already begun negotiations, being even more determined to continue on their own after the joint statement of the two superpowers. The underlying fear and reluctance was that the two superpowers would impose their geopolitical and national interests in the region, an idea to which neither Israel nor Egypt was looking forward to, since both nourished serious doubts about the effectiveness of superpower policies and attitudes at that time in the Middle East.²⁵³ Under the political developments in Israel, Sadat was just waiting for the appropriate moment to make his next move, which was shortly after the elections which were won by Begin. A secret meeting in Rabat between Dayan and the Egyptian deputy prime-minister was convened in mid September 1977, an event from which Sadat's historical visit to Jerusalem was just a couple of steps away.²⁵⁴

President Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and speech in the Knesset a couple of months later took the American administration by surprise while it was still pushing for the implementation of the renewed Geneva peace conference but finally had to accept the collapse of its Middle East strategy.²⁵⁵ Endorsement of the process evolving in the region soon followed but the role of the Americans was more to narrow the gaps between the negotiating sides rather than determine it. The peace process was generated, fuelled and sustained entirely by the desire of the two sides to reach a comprehensive agreement,²⁵⁶ and by the spring of 1979 Israel and Egypt had reached a peace agreement which was fully implemented in the years to follow.

²⁵² Karsh, 182-183.

²⁵³ Ibid., 183.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 184.

The main points of the Accords were: relinquishment of the entire Sinai Peninsula, evacuation of settlements and airfields in the Sinai and establishment of a Palestinian administrative authority.²⁵⁷

Things were not clear within the Israeli political spectrum about the future of the Occupied Territories though: the left advocated the relinquishment of the territories in order to restore Israel to the family of nations, get rid of the huge military expenditures and cheap Arab labour, settling for peace which would provide extensive international credentials for the absorption of immigrants; while the right advocated keeping the territories in the hope that through further immigration the demographic balance would improve, and create the proper conditions for settlements; withdrawal was seen as giving up the heart of the country to people who do not actually want peace but the whole of Israel.²⁵⁸ Agreements had been included regarding the establishment of a Palestinian self-governing authority in Gaza and the West Bank for an interim period of about five years until a final solution could be reached but the future of the Occupied Territories was not entirely clear even under these circumstances. The future of the Golan was not addressed anywhere in the Accords, indeed it was an issue to be settled among Israel and Syria but soon it would turn out that it was very much linked to how things worked out with Egypt. Allon opposed the idea of autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip whereas Peres supported it and the Knesset voted in favour of the Camp David Accords ensuring at the same time the continued existence of settlement activities in the Rafah salient.²⁵⁹ This historic motion was passed in the Knesset on September 25th 1978, the peace agreement approved on March 21st 1979 and signed on March 26th.

Whereas the Accords dealt only with transitional arrangements regarding the Palestinians, they were fairly precise and definite about the Egyptian-Israeli arrangements.

²⁵⁷ William B. Quandt, "Appendix C: The Camp David Accords, September 17, 1978" in *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David*, ed. Quandt, William B., (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1988), 454-455.

²⁵⁸ Beilin, 168.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 167.

Jordan had been invited as a partner on behalf of the Palestinians. Interestingly enough Sadat did not raise any serious territorial claims in what regards the Gaza Strip which had been part of Egypt's territory at some point and was a protrusion of the Sinai along the Mediterranean coastline northwards but expressed his view on wanting to see Arab Jerusalem as integral part of the West Bank because it belonged to the Arab people.²⁶⁰ Sadat had known that the Gaza Strip with its refugee camps and dense Palestinian population would create a liability for him as well, regardless of the fact that Egypt was an Arab country; therefore he had not raised any renewed claims over that territory whereas Begin was not aware of the disrupting potential of the area.²⁶¹ Ten years later Gaza would turn out to mean one of the gravest geopolitical errors Israel could have ever made because it was there, in Jebalya, where the first Intifadah broke out in 1987 that would entail high human, financial and diplomatic costs for Israel.²⁶²

There is one more important moment after the peace treaty was signed that needs to be looked into. Following the agreements, withdrawal from the Sinai was to be done in several stages, accompanied by the exchange of ambassadors as well as the partial normalization of relations among the two countries.²⁶³ Autonomy discussions on the other hand came to a stand still. But the crucial move in terms of geopolitical action occurred between the approval of the Egyptian ambassador to Israel and the last stage of withdrawal from the Sinai when Begin took advantage of the circumstances and annexed the Golan Heights. This move was also a reply to President Assad's open rejection of the idea to establish peace between Syria and Israel. The annexation was carried out on the grounds that the Egyptian ambassador would not be recalled until the withdrawal was final, because this would have meant the end of the peace process.²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ Quandt, "Appendix C: The Camp David Accords, September 17, 1978", 458.

²⁶¹ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

²⁶² Encel, *Geopolitique d'Israel*, 173.

²⁶³ Beilin, 44.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 44.

The peace agreement at Camp David with Egypt marked a new era in Israeli history. It first meant geopolitical stability on the southern border: expanding into Egyptian territory was ruled out and the final status of the borders was negotiated as well. It secondly brought the Palestinian issue into a new phase. At this point when Israel's most dangerous and strongest neighbour was put at peace, focus shifted to Syria and the Arab-Israeli conflict changed into the Syrian-Israeli conflict,²⁶⁵ because of Syria's aspirations of achieving strategic parity with the Jewish state (aspiring to re-establish Greater Syria which encompassed most of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, the Occupied Territories and a small part of Turkey) and becoming the unquestioned leader of the struggle for Palestinian rights and interests.²⁶⁶ Yet the Egyptian *betrayal* as it was seen by the Arab world would create a further problem in respect to possible emerging negotiations with Syria in the future. The Camp David Agreements provided complete Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and Egypt received back 100% of its territories occupied earlier. In terms of geopolitics therefore the Camp David Agreement was a very bad result for the Syrians contrary to the Israelis and Egyptians, since it created a situation with which they could not come to grips. The settlement from Syria's perspective meant that if ever any agreement would be reached with Israel, the Jewish state would have to relinquish all territories that once belonged to it for if the traitor got back everything, Syria could by no means settle for less.²⁶⁷ On the other hand Camp David meant benediction as well from a certain perspective, because Syria's role in the region would change by being recognized by the Arab world as the undisputed leader of the struggle against Israel while enjoying substantial Soviet support.²⁶⁸

To have an even better perspective upon the geopolitical dimension of the agreements we need to point out a further issue beyond the return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, even

²⁶⁵ Daniel Pipes, "Is Damascus ready for peace?," *Foreign Affairs*, (1991), 5.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁶⁷ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

²⁶⁸ Ghassan Salame, "Inter-Arab Politics: The Return of Geography" in *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David*, ed. William B. Quandt, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1988), 332.

though this had involved some secret arrangements as well. By capturing the Sinai, Israel not only gained strategic positions but a number of important oilfields as well, which for peace it was ultimately willing to return to Egypt. This bargain for Egypt's petrol riches created an extra incentive for Sadat in the negotiations, coupled with the substantial American aid promised in case a deal was struck. Acquiring these would have meant one step forward in re-launching the countries' economy.²⁶⁹ Even though the agreements did not officially specify the arrangement, Egypt committed itself to provide Israel with petrol in secret.²⁷⁰ A peace agreement would have also implied the reduction of the defence budget that would create a further incentive for Egyptian economic development.

Camp David had one last major impact on Israeli foreign policy once the withdrawal of the Israeli troops was completed. It provided the necessary background and assurances for Ariel Sharon, military general at that time, to step on the scene and, as soon as the last Israeli soldier withdrew from the Peninsula, strike at the PLO starting the Lebanon invasion of 1982. It is argued that had the demilitarization of the Sinai not happened and had Sadat not been killed six months before the final withdrawal, Israel would not have been so confident in striking at the PLO, regardless of the leadership's desire to finish off the radical movement directed against the Jewish state.²⁷¹

Ultimately the Israelis saw in Camp David with its transitional provisions towards the Palestinians a chance to postpone the hard decisions over borders and sovereignty, clearly geopolitical in nature,²⁷² underlining the reluctance to change the territorial status quo vis-à-vis any other actors apart from Egypt. The settlement created the same feeling within the Arabs as well, which is possibly one of the reasons why Camp David did not lead to any other

²⁶⁹ Encel, *Geopolitique d'Israel*, 86.

²⁷⁰ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

²⁷¹ William B. Quandt, "Introduction" to *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David*, ed. William B. Quandt, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1988), 7.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 4.

peace initiative in the subsequent years nor managed to serve as a basis for the Oslo process that would start more than a decade later.

It was unquestionably a success, yet not in the way it was expected creating a mere “cold peace” between the two sides, leaving further Israeli settlement in the Occupied Territories possible. As soon as it became clear that Egypt was eliminated from the conflict, the Arab countries had lowered their aggressive stance in respect to the Jewish state seeing military confrontation not as promising anymore, while talks became an acceptable approach.²⁷³ The peace with Egypt provided in some form or another the confidence for a more aggressive behaviour towards the surrounding territories creating a sudden shift from reconciliation to expansionism by striking at Iraq’s nuclear reactors near Baghdad, annexing the Golan, accelerating settlement in the West Bank and invading Lebanon.²⁷⁴ Evidence came to show that Israel had strongly pushed for the intensification of the settlement program in the West Bank in the immediate years after Camp David, having managed to alter the demographic balance in some places to the extent that the occupation could hardly be reversed.²⁷⁵ If the shift was indeed sudden, the ideology behind it was not. Out of the two major schools of thought that dominated Israeli politics, the one represented by Begin prevailed. This meant that with Camp David achieved, Israel received a free hand to focus on Greater Israel.²⁷⁶ Yet Labour maintained the opinion that holding on to the occupied territories would but destroy the Jewish identity of the state. The fundamental change in the Israeli posture towards the Arabs that was expected to occur, thus failed to materialize.²⁷⁷

²⁷³ Quandt, “Introduction”, 4-5.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 7.

²⁷⁵ Harold S. Saunders, “Reconstituting the Arab-Israeli Peace Process” in *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David*, ed. William B. Quandt, (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1988), 420.

²⁷⁶ Shamir, 193.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 191.

5.2 The Oslo Peace Process – Rise and Failure

By the early 1990's the international situation changed in a dramatic way bringing about shifts in attitudes all around the world including the Middle East. With the end of the Cold War, the implosion of the Soviet Union, the rise to sole superpower status of the United States and the implications of the Gulf crisis the Arab states in the Middle East were unwilling to continue the conflict with Israel under the same conditions as before and the PLO reached a low point that it had not encountered ever since its establishment.²⁷⁸ This atmosphere coupled with a the Intifadah of 1987-1989 which was seen as a deliberate attempt to come closer to independence, to challenge the existing status quo and engage in a policy of self-reliance, created the necessary background for initiating some form of discussions as early as 1991. The first event paving the way for the Oslo peace process took place in 1991 with the Madrid Peace Conference that had brought about a general improvement in Arab-Israeli relations and decreased the possibility of another conflict in the nearby future.²⁷⁹

Under these circumstances the prospects for another round of peace negotiations seemed to be positive and given the gradual decrease in importance of some of the Occupied Territories for the Jewish state, Israel was open to conduct talks under the provisions of a settlement based on the concept of territory for peace set down in UN Security Council Resolution 242.²⁸⁰ Territory therefore became once again the bargaining chip to drive negotiations, having lost some of its importance for the Israeli side while the opposite occurred for the still stateless Palestinian side. The gradual departure from pan-Arabism happened as well while the Gulf War also ended the effectiveness of oil as a weapon for producing countries,²⁸¹ a weapon that was effectively used during the Yom Kippur war.

²⁷⁸ Barry Rubin, "Israel's New Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, 85:4, (2006), 1.

²⁷⁹ Reich, 129.

²⁸⁰ Rubin, 2.

²⁸¹ Lewis, 2.

Nonetheless suspicions and painful memories were still strong in both the Arab and Israeli camps and would make the process difficult.

During the same time period a profound change occurred within the Israeli public opinion as well regarding the Occupied Territories and especially the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Yet even though this was a shift at the level of society we may address the issue from the standpoint of critical geopolitics.

As noted earlier, space and borders define identities. Yet in order for the Jewish state to retain its Jewish identity, full sovereignty over the West Bank and Gaza Strip was problematic, for the infusion of such a high number of Arab citizens would have severely unbalanced the demographic situation and demanded a re-evaluation of the Jewishness of the state and the society, an attribute that was fundamental to the Zionist state conception. In the 1990's this became a recurrent concern for both the public and the political elite, which implied either reducing or stopping the incorporation of further territories (the West Bank and Gaza Strip) populated mainly by Arabs.²⁸² Whereas in the 1970's the percentage of the population supporting the territorial status quo was approx. 70% this number had fallen to approx. 3-5% in the early 1990's, and a significant part of the population, approx. 30% manifested its clear acceptance of the idea of a Palestinian political entity either as part of an Israeli-Palestinian federation or a separate Palestinian state under an interim or permanent formula.²⁸³ Given these circumstances and the increasing support of the political elite for greater separation, even though the Likud had been the driving force for settlement over the last two decades, the proper mindset for peace negotiations developed. Yet subsequent events would unfold in a somewhat different way strongly marked by territorial considerations and their implications. Compared to former negotiations though, Israel had for the first time accepted considering a Palestinian state as a solution to peace.

²⁸² Barzilai, 65.

²⁸³ Ibid., 65-66.

The extent to which the Oslo agreements were based on the idea of territory for peace, taken up at earlier times as well, especially after the 1967 Six Day War, can be seen through the priorities of the peace agreement which included multiple considerations of geopolitical importance such as: deciding the status of Jerusalem, solving the settlement disagreements, delineating borders, improving the refugee problem,²⁸⁴ and dealing with water resources beyond which the general questions of security arrangements and relations with the neighbouring countries were addressed as well. Israel seemed for the first time open to the acceptance of the idea of a Palestinian state and considered the withdrawal from almost all of the territories occupied in 1967 as a tolerable compromise for solid promises and results, the Gaza strip being one of the first territories it opened negotiations about with the PLO as early as 1992.²⁸⁵ It even granted recognition to the PLO, yet things turned out as none of the parties would have expected in the early 1990's. The general feeling among the Israeli population was that if they were more engaged in sacrifices and more willing to give up land, peace could be achieved but apparently there was not even consensus within the Israeli political spectrum about this idea,²⁸⁶ which was the case within the Arab world as well, the PLO included. Arafat, leader of the PLO, himself came to accept the idea of a two-state solution already as early as 1988 and finally led his people into Oslo five years later, but this did not mean that all Palestinians were enchanted with the way negotiations were carried out and agreements reached.

The territories with significant Arab populations such as the Gaza Strip and the West Bank had also lost their former strategic relevance to some extent beyond their possible identity shaping impact, even though there was still a strong minority advocating holding on to them (the Religious Nationalists among others) for nationalistic and religious considerations. The reasons Israel had been reluctant to give up the two territories in the past

²⁸⁴ Selby, 340.

²⁸⁵ Rubin, 2.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 3.

were because they conveyed strategic depth against conventional military attacks but this was not a significant threat anymore; additionally they also represented bargaining chips in the territory for peace strategy which seemed inapplicable after the failure of the Oslo process.²⁸⁷ Therefore, what was once a vital interest for the Jewish state lost its importance to some extent and ultimately led to the unilateral withdrawal of Israeli troops and settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005. Thus the gradual thaw concerning the disputed territories seemed to mark the beginning of a period of transition within these mutually exclusive territorial conceptions from nation-building and perpetual conflict to consolidation and conflict resolution within Israel aiming to normalize relations with the Arabs within and outside the country.²⁸⁸

To further complicate things the United States administration in the early 1990's virtually praised the expansion of settlements and never questioned Israeli moves in East Jerusalem, but Clinton would soon change his policies to a certain degree openly criticizing Israeli settlement during his second term in office. This was not the only shift that occurred in US foreign policy towards Israel. Now that the Cold War was ending the strategic importance of the Jewish state diminished as well, a fact that could be seen most clearly by US demands on Israel to keep out of the Gulf crisis.²⁸⁹

In unfolding the events surrounding the Oslo peace process we need to focus our attention on several key moments that triggered various reactions on both Arab and Israeli sides. The first such moment was the Israel-PLO agreement also known as the Declaration of Principles of 1993 that raised some existential questions for Jordan.²⁹⁰ This was a crucial development in the Arab-Israeli relations because the PLO for the first time ever since its existence recognized Israel's right to exist in both peace and security. Now that Israel negotiated directly with the PLO the future status of Jordan was at stake as well: would it

²⁸⁷ Rubin, 2.

²⁸⁸ Schnell, 214.

²⁸⁹ Lewis, 6-7.

²⁹⁰ Lawrence Tal, "Is Jordan Doomed?," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 5 (1993), 45.

become part of a future Palestinian state or con(federation) or would it continue to remain an independent political entity? These questions were even more salient given the fact that the West Bank had once been part of the Jordanian state and a Jordanian Palestinian identity had developed as well among part of the population of the country. Total disengagement with the Palestinians had been realized already in 1992 when Jordan commenced separate peace negotiations with Israel.

Not that Jordan and Israel had not maintained formal ties since 1967, but King Hussein was reluctant to make peace or start any negotiations before any significant developments occurred with the Palestinians. The rationale for this attitude was that all concerns about the refugees, water, border security and the status of Jerusalem were inextricably linked to the Palestinian issue and could not be solved in isolation.²⁹¹ The Declaration of Principles, thus as a first step in the improvement of Palestinian Israeli relations, created an incentive for Jordanian Israeli negotiations as well, which had been conducted under secrecy for many years and could from then on be moved to the public front.²⁹² Israel by this time however had built up a strong interest in the maintenance of a stable Jordan on its eastern flank²⁹³ and was ready for a further round of border stabilization agreements after the peace concluded with Egypt almost 20 years before. A peace agreement with the Jordanians was signed in 1994 and marked one of the most significant successes of the Oslo process. The agreement resolved the main issues between the two sides: peace, borders and water distribution.²⁹⁴ As a consequence of the negotiations surrounding the distribution of water the peace agreement dealt in proportion of about 50% with water. One of the demands of the Jordanians was to obtain approximately 50 million m³ of water per year which Israel had been initially reluctant to accept. Ultimately this request had been included

²⁹¹ Tal, 52.

²⁹² Reich, 128.

²⁹³ Tal, 57.

²⁹⁴ Reich, 128.

into one of the clauses of the peace treaty. The peace treaty thus created the basis for the most unique example of active cooperation in the field of hydrology in the region.

The urgency to secure water by peaceful means proved that Jordan was incapable of conducting war for water, which is used as an argument by scholars to contradict the inevitability of water wars. Therefore only those can be engaged in water wars who have the necessary means to conduct warfare.²⁹⁵ Yet control of water provides an increased leverage upon the actors who are dependant upon it, similarly as Russia has upon the countries importing gas from it.

The second significant development was seen in the high degree of engagement between the Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams. The Preparatory Transfer of Power and Responsibility was signed on the 29th of August 1994 providing the basis for the Interim Agreements on the West Bank and Gaza Strip one year later on September the 28th, cumulative agreements that triggered intensive joint efforts in the fields of education, culture, healthcare, social welfare, tourism and taxation.²⁹⁶ The September agreement committed the signatories to fulfilling a comprehensive 300 page long document. At this point a crucial thing happened in the Israeli leadership, Labour had lost elections and a coalition government led by Benjamin Netanyahu was formed who deeply dismissed the spirit of the entire Oslo process.²⁹⁷ Combined with a period of deep Palestinian frustration over how little they had managed to achieve during negotiations with Labour, marginal US involvement and outspoken criticism of Netanyahu's settlement expansion plans, the situation seemed to have reached stalemate if not a gradual decline.

A further significant moment was Syria's willingness in the early 1990's to start talking to Israel and engage in a possible peace process if certain conditions would be met.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁵ Frederic Encel, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 11 May 2009.

²⁹⁶ James H. Noyes, "Does Washington Really Support Israel?," *Foreign Policy*, 106 (2006), 150.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Pipes, 4.

Syrian president Assad signalled his willingness to engage in discussions with the Israelis to former president Jimmy Carter who was deeply involved in the peace process. The Gulf war had created the framework for Syria to shift its policies towards the West, now that the Soviet Union had collapsed. Israel as well seemed eager to settle its dispute about water sharing in respect to the Litani River, but the Golan Heights proved far more problematic since both sides desired full control of the region, although some tacit accords already existed.²⁹⁹ Not only were the Heights a strategic point from where Israeli settlements had been shelled before 1967, but they were seen as key in the defence of northern Israel as well.

Yet what was highly peculiar was that shortly after signing the Oslo agreements in 1993 Israel confiscated land of about 16000 hectares in the West Bank violating this way both the Geneva Convention from 1949 and the Oslo agreements that stipulated that disputed issues were to be settled peacefully from then on rather than by forceful measures.³⁰⁰

Another significant impediment in the easy flow of negotiations was Raphael Eitan's (Minister of Agriculture) determined view of retaining the West Bank since if it fell under Palestinian rule uncontrolled extraction of water as well as pollution would affect Israel's water supplies in his view.³⁰¹ Eitan's party as well as Likud shared these views thus creating a strong opposition to negotiations. Once the peace agreement was reached with Jordan though, an understanding regarding the apportioning of water was reached as well, even though the two states had adhered to such an agreement several decades ago, along the lines of the Johnston plan until 1967.³⁰² On the issue of cooperation in the field of water, talks with the Palestinians had been much older and much more varied than with Jordan even though there had never been actual peace talks between the two parties.³⁰³ Water was not the exclusive source of cooperation, it more often tended to follow rather than lead peacemaking, yet it

²⁹⁹ Pipes, 6.

³⁰⁰ Noyes, 146-147.

³⁰¹ Sharif S., "The Land-Water Nexus in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", 73.

³⁰² Morag, 195.

³⁰³ Selby, 330.

facilitated various forms of it, without leading to any significant political spillovers though.³⁰⁴ Therefore water failed to become an important issue of the Oslo agreements per se which dedicated only a secondary role to this problem whereas it was among the agenda headlines of the Jordanian-Israeli peace negotiations.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's role in the peace process is also unquestionable, after having come back to office in 1992. The process launched by him and Arafat earned them both the enmity of extremists, which lead to Rabin's branding as a traitor by radical Israelis and subsequent murder by such an extremist on the 4th of November 1995,³⁰⁵ bringing the peace process into a fragile situation.

In 2000 Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered the Palestinians a form of an independent state with its capital in East Jerusalem yet the Palestinians refused and the situation ended up in a renewed armed conflict. Both Syrians and Palestinians declined the offer for peace and thus the Oslo peace process came to an end. It is considered that the ultimate failure of the peace process is due to the fact that it was based on anachronistic politico-geographic solutions, whereby exclusive rights over territories could hardly be determined unless by total separation, and have managed to do more damage to the peace and reconciliation efforts in general and the Palestinian aspirations in particular than they managed to help.³⁰⁶

Even though the peace process failed utterly due to growing discontent on the Palestinian side and decreasing Israeli implication and reluctance to cope with Palestinian requests and demands, Oslo contributed to Israel's broader international acceptance, making cooperation with the Jewish state for several other states an acceptable option in the future.³⁰⁷ It was opposition leader Ariel Sharon's visit to the Temple Mount and his declaration that Jerusalem would remain undivided that put the Oslo peace process to a final end by triggering

³⁰⁴ Selby, 342.

³⁰⁵ Oren, 313.

³⁰⁶ Agnew, 30-31.

³⁰⁷ Reich, 129.

the second Intifadah. Even this seemingly small event shows the forces such a small territory and the controversy around it was able to let loose.³⁰⁸ The events must be seen of course in the context of rising Palestinian dissatisfaction with the way negotiations were carried on and demands and requests answered, especially the ones regarding the Law of Return which Israel was unwilling to revoke and the future of Jerusalem, in respect to which Arafat rejected all proposals forwarded by the Israeli side.³⁰⁹

As both peace processes showed peace is more than negotiations, it is a political process during which moves need to be made back and forth between the two arenas, the negotiating and the political one, there rarely being linearity from politics to negotiation.³¹⁰ Camp David and the Jordanian peace agreements pointed out the necessity of timely preparations and of breaking down the process into transitional steps that facilitate implementation and accommodation with new situations, something the Oslo peace process failed to live up to. In what regards geopolitical concerns these were more salient in the case of the Camp David Accords, where the “land for peace” formula clearly guided the events as did the need for free shipping in the Gulf of Aqaba. In the Oslo peace process water played a secondary role, being hardly mentioned in the agreements whereas anachronistic arrangements and claims upon the lands triggered discontent and the second Intifadah instead of leading to any lasting solution. A particular case was the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty that was based on cooperation in respect to water distribution. Had it not been for the issue of water, the agreement would have probably taken some more years to be concluded.

³⁰⁸ Beatrice Giblin, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

³⁰⁹ Bregman, 208.

³¹⁰ Saunders, 424.

CONCLUSIONS

Ultimately this research shows that Israeli foreign policy is determined to an important extent by the state's geopolitical consciousness and especially by the considerations regarding territory. As the four cases come to show possession of certain territories was the most important factor in fueling the events surrounding Israel, whereas water played a significant role only in determining parts of the conflicts or peace resolutions, but was nonetheless present in most of them (to a lesser extent in the Oslo Peace Process per se). Actions due to demographic considerations on the other hand present themselves as much more complex and difficult to analyze given the conflict between having a uniquely Jewish identity or a mixed one where the Arabs would become part of the modern Israeli. The issue of the identity border is still unresolved and fuels further contention within the Middle East.

As could be seen in the tumultuous history of modern Israel, supported by the four instances provided as well, land played a crucial role in the conflicts and peace negotiations Israel took part in.³¹¹ Regardless if the piece of land under discussion was seen as part of the heart of Israel such as Judea and Samaria which constitute the West Bank, whether it was seen as a strategically vital asset such as the Golan Heights or the Gaza Strip, the latter which ultimately turned into a liability or the symbolic capital, Jerusalem, land has been the uttermost concern of the Israeli-Palestinian / Israeli-Arab dispute.

The other dimension that came along with the problem of the land was that of water resources meant to develop the land and sustain the growing population. This is the reason why negotiations were always concerned to some extent with the problem of water, and the Camp David Accords with Egypt were no exception to this, while the Oslo process with the Palestinians on the other hand did not grant it so much attention. Whereas with Egypt it was more a problem of waterways: free navigation and use of the Straits of Tiran and the Suez

³¹¹ Sharif S., "The Land-Water Nexus in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", 69.

Canal, with Jordan it actually concerned water distribution because of Jordanian claims on the waters of the Jordan and on the aquifers in the region, but failed to become an important part of the negotiations with the Palestinians to whom water was a secondary concern in comparison to the problem of statehood, land and Jerusalem as future capital. Water in respect to the Palestinians became a more salient issue after the end of the peace process.

Yet until the two sides: Arab and Israeli fail to understand and embrace each other's story about their mutual claims on the same territory the conflict is prone to continue.³¹² Oslo was in this respect an important case to learn from being based on anachronistic politico-geographic solutions doing more harm to the peace and reconciliation efforts than use.³¹³

Territory had and has its most important say in how Israel is portrayed: a minute and unique nation within the Middle-East. This is an important geo-regional component of the security discourse³¹⁴ which is a major reason for why so overwhelmingly much attention is given to the state by world media. This minute territory and even smaller parts within have showed in various instances their capability to spark major events in the region, constantly proving that the state cannot act without its taking into consideration its geopolitical consciousness. Even more, its whole understanding of security is based on geography: land and water, these being the ultimate concerns for national security. Ultimately every state makes the politics of its geography,³¹⁵ and Israel is an excellent case for this.

In what regards the importance of water behind Israeli military actions or decisions, this aspect is somewhat more problematic than that of land.³¹⁶ In the two cases provided water played a more significant role in the Six Day rather than in the Independence War. This is reasonable since the War of Independence was different in so many ways from all other Israeli wars, implying a definite change in the regional status quo after British withdrawal.

³¹² Agnew, 28.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Newman, 13.

³¹⁵ Philippe Moreau Defarges, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

³¹⁶ Sharif S., "The Land-Water Nexus in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict", 72.

Therefore each of the sides caught tried to maximize its goals and Israel indeed secured itself areas important in terms of water but hardly defined its aims exclusively in terms of that.

Given the overwhelming concern for water in the past and even in the present Israel managed to develop high end technologies of irrigation, water distribution, desalination and water processing which undermine the classical importance of this resource in the region (especially to Israel). If surface waters were once important, their significance has clearly diminished as new technologies developed. This is not to say that water is not a scarce resource anymore in the Middle-East, especially for some countries, but domestic technological developments can have a clear impact on its importance and may actually prove that the problem is by far not as great as it is portrayed nor does it have the weight to lead to water wars. Relatively recent analyses show that technological, economic and institutional inefficiency are major causes of water problems.³¹⁷ Yet this is not meant to downplay the importance of possessing water it just illuminates a more recent take on the claims that water crises are the products of the relative ability or inability of different states and societies to address their economic and social needs and control and produce water in accordance.³¹⁸ Israel is a model state in this respect given its highly integrated national water network and technological know-how in the field, yet contrary to most expectations under such a framework, Israel is actually importing water from Turkey nowadays to cover its entire needs.

Even though the Oslo peace process had failed, the two-state solution has been severely undermined for the time being, Arafat had died, Sharon pulled out of the Gaza Strip, southern Lebanon had been attacked once more and a recent war in the Gaza Strip shook the area as well, there still seem to be positive outlooks concerning the conflict, outlooks that marginalize classical geopolitics in a world that is becoming more and more interdependent.

³¹⁷ Selby, 332.

³¹⁸ Ibid., 333.

In this sense Cohen suggests that now that globalisation is well on its way, traditional perceptions of the state will gradually fade. Globalisation already eroded various attributes of national sovereignty to the point where a state's national interest may lie in maintaining the neighbouring state's borders while creating agreements by which a framework could be created to maintain ties with the adjacent territories without the need of annexation.³¹⁹ In this sense it is expected that globalisation will strengthen the forces willing to look beyond pure nationalism and classical geopolitical discourses as they seek to secure the future of Israel.

On the other hand globalization does not necessarily imply the erosion of ones self identity³²⁰ that is of the Jewishness of the state, for there are many examples of states that are well engaged in the process of globalization yet retain their identity in a highly specific way, this being particularly applicable to developed countries. Israel is no exception to this either. Even so, in order to become a state fully integrated in the region Israel would be required to give up its *raison d'être* which means giving up its Jewish identity and its status as a safe haven for Jewish people,³²¹ which is not the case for the time being.

Peace would bring about a deep change within Israeli society. Built on various myths in which the warrior and the settler image played a defining role, once peace was achieved Israeli society would be faced with the new challenge of redefining its identity. A feeling of emptiness, of loss of the role everyone had to play and of the purpose of life is expected to overcome the Israeli society once relations with the neighbouring countries are completely normalized.³²² This does not mean that peace is not desired but that it will have repercussions which can only be dealt with gradually, therefore adding another hurdle to the process.

Taking all of the above mentioned into consideration and combined with the analysis provided in the paper, Israeli foreign policy does not anymore present itself as problematic

³¹⁹ Cohen, 33.

³²⁰ Philippe Moreau Defarges, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

³²¹ Ibid.

³²² Beilin, 266.

and peculiar. Israel always acted according to its geopolitical consciousness because this was part of its security conception as long as certain circumstances prevailed. The sometimes erratic character of Israel's foreign policy was due to internal struggles where one side prevailed over the other or was defined by the circumstances that arose at different times.

Israel was established in order to serve as a safe haven for the Jewish people where they could flourish as citizens of a modern nation state, having a home of their own after almost 2000 years of exile. Even though in 1948 it hosted only about 600.000 Jews, the imperatives driving its policies, both domestic and foreign, created a state which attracted so many immigrants as to become in 2007 the home of the world's largest Jewish population (over 6 million) superseding the US by a couple of percentages.³²³

During its tumultuous history the basic concern of Israel came to be survival: cultural and physical.³²⁴ Survival triggered a series of possibilities which clearly embedded geopolitical considerations. Had the region been willing to accept the Jewish state, the events might have unfolded differently and would not have created three distinct types of behaviors that would be combined considering various circumstances. Geopolitics, with clear considerations embedded into Zionism, was thus a clear determinant of isolationism, expansionism and reconciliatory action yet the present research provided only the framework and basics of a vaster analysis that can be carried further on, incorporating a larger number of cases and focusing on all aspects of what can be defined as the geopolitical consciousness of the state and how this then influences foreign policy. Given the fact that geopolitics is an exceptional tool to analyze the events in the Middle East, I recommend therefore looking even deeper into the mechanisms that set in motion Israeli foreign policy for a better understanding of the events in the region, taking up a track of research yet unexploited as the size of the literature on specifically Israeli geopolitics comes to suggest.

³²³ Calev Ben-David, "A dream come true?," *Jerusalem Post*, (May 7, 2008)

³²⁴ Philippe Moreau Defarges, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.

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