What Went Wrong?

The Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations 1991-2000

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ABSTRACT

Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, Syria and Israel has been in a technical state of war. After the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights in the Six-Day War of 1967 and the following 1973-war, the border between the two states has been more or less calm, although tension has sometimes reached an alarming level. In 1991 Syrian and Israeli officials met for the first time during the International Peace Conference in Madrid. The conference led to peace negotiations between the two states, a process which endured the next 4 years and was reopened in 1999/2000, though without succeeding to produce a peace treaty.

The aim with this thesis is to examine causes of the failing negotiations. Why were the parties unable to reach agreement, what went wrong? My hypothesis is that internal opposition to the negotiations in Israel prevented the talks both from moving forwards and in the end, brought about the impasse. The background for the strong Israeli opposition was not first and foremost antagonism against Syria; rather it was related to regional factors. It consisted of radical Palestinian and Hezbollah violence which with their multiple attacks aimed at civilians disillusioned the Israeli public. Opposition to the peace process with Syria was thus not directly linked to Syria. In order to confirm this, I have used the acknowledged theory of "two-level games" by Robert Putnam. However, where Putnam asserts that international negotiations consist of a national and an international level, I have expanded the theory. My claim is that the Syrian-Israeli case was in fact a three-level game, and that a third factor in the form of a regional aspect proved to be the most important element.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Peace between Syria and Israel has often been presented as the easiest nut to crack in the Arab-Israeli peace process. In contrast with the Palestinian-Israeli track, existential and morale issues are not at the core and the conditions for achieving peace should apparently be present. In 1996, the parties appeared to be at the verge of a breakthrough, and it seemed that the conflict was finally going to be settled. Yet the years of negotiations ended in a disappointing collapse. What went wrong? Why were the two countries unable to produce a peace treaty?

In this thesis I will examine the background of the conflict and how the parties came to agree to attend the Madrid Conference to launch bilateral negotiations. My intention is to analyze causes of the failing negotiations, using Putnam's theory of two-level games. I shall demonstrate that the theory is applicable to the Syrian-Israeli negotiations in several ways: The interplay between domestic players and governmental leaders were indeed present and constituted an important factor in the discussions. However, although both national and international factors influenced the process, none of these seem to have been decisive. Instead, I believe that a third aspect in the form of a regional element caused the greatest impact on the negotiations. Ostensibly outsiders to the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, the Palestinians and to a certain degree the Hezbollah, seemed to have exerted a critical influence to the outcome of their peace process.

In chapter 1 of this thesis I will clarify my hypothesis, my method of research and describe the theoretical framework I am using. In chapter 2 I will give a short description of the background of the conflict, followed by an account of how the parties came to agree to break the first ice and attend the Madrid Peace Conference. Thereafter I shall present a clarification of the events surrounding the negotiations. In chapter 3 I will examine the relevancy of Putnam's theory and next discuss why it is inadequate. Thereafter I shall present my theory of "the three level game" that I believe was set during the negotiations.

1.1 Hypothesis

After nine years of irregularly conducted discussions, the negotiations between Syria and Israel finally stalemated in 2000. Allegedly, as much as 80 % of the treaty was agreed upon when the talks stalled. What caused the impasse and who was to blame for it?

Whereas other research has underlined security questions, the water issue and Syrian nationalism as the main obstacles for reaching an agreement,[1] my hypothesis is that the failure of the peace negotiations between Syria and Israel was due to internal conflict and opposition to the process in Israel. Indiscipline in the governing party and a strong, untameable opposition made it extremely difficult to carry out negotiations. The opposition intensified vigorously when a wave of radical Palestinian political violence took a tenfold of Israeli civilian lives and the government's opponents exploited the fear that spread among the public in order to gain support. I believe that the possibility of a peace settlement was at its closest during the leadership of Peres and that the prospects for peace were closed when Netanyahu became prime minister. Though Barak apparently opened a window of opportunity in 1999, he never agreed to Asad's uncompromising precondition of withdrawal and his intentions did not seem sincere. I shall explain this claim below.

During the nine-year long period from 1991 to 2000 five Israeli prime ministers came and left. Three of them, namely Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres and Ehud Barak conducted negotiations with Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad. Rabin was the first Israeli prime minister ever to accept the "land for peace" formula. However, making peace with Syria was not an issue when Rabin ran for office in 1992 and he felt he did not have a mandate to withdraw from the Golan. By this means, he operated cautiously and slowly when dealing with the negotiations with the Syrians in order to avoid upsetting the opposition both within and outside his own party. Nonetheless, his peace initiative had wide-ranging support and Rabin, as opposed to his predecessor Shamir was ready to make painful concessions to achieve a treaty. Most importantly, as long as Israel's needs were fulfilled Rabin accepted Asad's

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[1] See Ross, D. 2004, *The Missing Peace. The Inside Story of the Fight for the Middle East Peace*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, Slater, J. 2002, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Israel and Syria, 1948-2001" in *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 1 pp. 79-106, Slater, J. 2002, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict. Israel and Syria, 1948-2001" in *International Security*, Vol. 27, No. 1 pp. 79-106 and Rabinovich, I. 1998, *The Brink of Peace. The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations*, Princeton University Press, Princeton.

precondition that all negotiations must be based on full withdrawal to the 4th of June, 1967 lines. For that reason, I think that the foundations and opportunity for peace was laid during Rabin's reign.

However, progress of the talks went extremely slow, and as Rabin was assassinated only one and a half of the four "legs" they were basing the discussions on were agreed upon. It is of course impossible to say whether a deal could have been achieved had Rabin survived. I believe that the opposition to the process had grown so strong during the summer of 1995 that Rabin would have had small chances of reaching an agreement with Syria with the same, slow strategy: time was running out, the 1996 election was approaching. Yet as Rabin was killed, the peace climate in Israel changed. By supporting the dead prime minister's peace line, people were showing their condemnation. The assassination left Peres with a public wanting him to fulfil Rabin's peace legacy. Peres exploited the support for peace he inherited to launch intensive negotiations with the Syrians at the Wye Plantation in the US. The discussions progressed with an impressive speed, and as they were called off they had allegedly produced agreement on 75 – 80 percent of a final settlement. Then came the crucial election and Peres lost to his opponent, Benyamin Netanyahu.

When talks were reopened after Ehud Barak took office in 1999, the new Israeli prime minister refused to commit to withdrawal to the 4th of June, 1967 line. Barak may have thought that Asad with his deteriorating health was weak and that he would want to conclude a deal before he died. At this point however, Asad was preoccupied with crowning his son Bashar to undertake the presidency after his death. He was not interested in letting his son inherit a badly negotiated treaty with his former foe; he wanted to remove possible opposition, not risking increasing it. Even though Asad was the indisputable decision-maker in Syria, he depended on the support of a large amount of the public and had to act carefully. As Syrian political analyst Ibrahim al-Hamidi (author's interview, 2008) claimed, different mechanisms prevented Asad from making the concession Barak demanded, namely accepting withdrawal to something less than the 1967 line. Many people within the regime were strongly opposed to the process, one of its sharpest critics being the Vice President, Abd al-Halim al-Khaddam. In addition, the fact that the US did not remove Syria from the list of states sponsoring terrorism pushed the country into a closer alliance with Iran, who needless to say, was strongly opposed to the peace process. Because Asad could not risk ending up being excluded by both the US and Iran, he had to be cautious. What's more, Asad's concern was naturally not limited to

avoid creating new enemies, he had to consider his existing opponents as well. The brutally repressed, but not eradicated opposition consisted of groups with different ideologies, but had one thing in common: they opposed normalizing relations with the Israelis and demanded full withdrawal to the 4th of June, 1967 line (Hamidi, author's interview, 2008). Concessions on this demand would therefore be difficult and would have made Asad appear weak in front of all Syrians.

It is also expedient to question Barak's intentions to attend Shepherdstown. According to member of the Syrian delegation Riad Daoudi (2007), the Israeli prime minister told the Americans that he was unable to deliver already upon arrival. During the following months, he actually put forward new demands on water and territory (Kjorlien, 2000, p.128). As Barak was the one who pushed for the negotiations in the first place, why did he back off when the Syrians appeared more ready than ever to conclude a deal? A possible answer might be that he was afraid that he did not have the necessary political support. Although he won a convincing victory in the election, he emerged with a weak parliamentary basis. Moreover, the new Russian immigrants, of whom he based a considerable part of his support, opposed giving up the Golan. However, after campaigning in favour of peace with both the Palestinian and the Syrians and still winning the majority of the votes, he should have been ready to make some bold decisions. As Clinton (2004, p. 886) wrote in his memoirs, a peace agreement with Syria would have lifted his standing in both Israel and the rest of the world, and probably increased his chances of success on the Palestinian track. On that background, I believe a reasonable assumption for Barak's reluctance is that the Syrian process was pushed simply in order to freeze the far more delicate Palestinian track. Supporting the assertion is the fact that Barak continued the expansion of settlements on the West Bank throughout his period. His building of "facts on the ground" in the occupied territories did by no means signal readiness to pursue peace with the Palestinians, and pushing the Syrian track gave him a more legitimate way of deferring it. The Syrian flexibility and eagerness to conclude a treaty may have caught him off guard. His insisting of moving on to negotiations with Lebanon as soon as the Syrian track progressed, in addition to his putting forward new demands and refusing to commit to the Rabin pocket are other signs that Barak never went to Shepherdstown with the purpose of concluding a deal.

In accordance with this reasoning, the prospect of settling a treaty was at its greatest under Peres, and the election where he lost to Netanyahu became the turning point in the

negotiations. My analysis will therefore focus on the Peres era and the crucial Israeli election of 1996.

1.2 Sources

The available literature on the Syrian-Israeli peace process is relatively limited compared to the literature on the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. However, a few academic works on the Syrian-Israeli peace process do exist. Among the most important works are journalist and adjunct scholar, Helena Cobban's *The Israeli-Syrian Peace Talks. 1991-1996 and Beyond* (1999). This is a comprehensive and balanced account of the process, but it does not theorize over causes for the failure. Dennis Ross, the American envoy, mediator and negotiator under George Bush sr. and Bill Clinton, published his 800 page long memoir of the Syrian-Palestinian-Israeli peace talks in 2004. *The Missing Peace. The Inside Story of the Fight for the Middle East Peace* is a day-to-day tale of Ross' reflections. It is extremely detailed, but lacks references and is based almost exclusively on his notes. The book is also biased, blames Asad for most of what went wrong and is several times ignoring facts which can be interpreted as beneficial to Syria. The most famous work from an Israeli perspective is written by the chief negotiator in the Rabin and Peres era, Itamar Rabinovich. His *The Brink of Peace. The Israeli-Syrian Negotiations* from 1998 is also a very detailed book, but not surprisingly given the author's role in the process, it takes on an Israeli perspective and seldom tries to explain motives for Syrian actions. Another source is the dissertation of Ahmad Soltani Nejad, "The Syrian-Israeli Peace Process and the United States: From Hope to Impasse". The thesis is focusing on the American role as a mediator in the talks and is valuable for details on the different negotiation rounds.

During a 4-month long stay in Israel in autumn 2007, I followed the public debate regarding the country's relationship with Syria. Although I did not carry out formal fieldwork during my stay, my work as a trainee at the Norwegian embassy allowed me to attend conferences, lectures and meetings where Syria was on the agenda, giving me a tangible overview of both the past and present situation. In addition, I had the chance to read newspapers translated from Hebrew in addition to daily access of two Israeli newspapers in English: one of them, *The Jerusalem Post* is generally considered to hold conservative positions, while *Haaretz* is more liberal. Through non-committal conversations I participated in with a number of Israelis I got a general sense of various Israeli positions. All in all, the stay enabled me to get a solid

impression of different Israeli perspectives of the historical and contemporary negotiations with Syria.

The challenge when writing about the process was finding reliable Syrian sources. Compared to material on the Israeli and American perspective, there are very few Syrian sources. None of the central actors has produced any written material, and there are few articles written by Syrians on the subject. On the other hand, a few academics with Syria as their expertise area have published some articles on the matter. These articles are balanced and succeed in presenting the Syrian view, which in turn might explain Syrian actions. Two good and informative interviews with the most central decision-makers, namely President Hafiz al-Asad and his chief negotiator Walid al-Mu'allim are also accessible.

All the same, the Syrian perspective is harder to grasp by the existing material than the Israeli. To find more information on the Syrian angle, I made a trip to Damascus at an early stage in my research where I carried out interviews with political analysts and academics. Unfortunately, my trip took place simultaneously with the Arab Summit, held in Damascus for the first time. As a consequence, I met some challenges when trying to schedule meetings with interviewees who were busier than usual due to the summit. Nevertheless, I was able to meet and consult a few prominent persons. This was first and foremost Dr. Samir al-Taqi, a former advisor to Hafiz al-Asad who also served as an advisor to the Syrian prime minister and is the director of the Orient Centre for Studies in Damascus. Taqi was particularly relevant as he is the Syrian official in charge of the current Turkish-mediated negotiations between Syria and Israel. He was also the bearer of Israel's main message to Syrian President Bashar al-Asad in April of this year. My interview with Taqi was conducted at his office at the Orient Centre for Studies in Damascus on the 18th of March, 2008. Furthermore, I contacted the political analyst Ibrahim al-Hamidi, who is the bureau chief and senior correspondent in Damascus of al-Hayat, al-Wasat and LBC TV, as well as a contributor to other newspapers and media such as the Daily Star (Beirut), The Daily Telegraph and the Arabic service of SBS radio of Australia. I wanted to interview Hamidi because of his insights into strategic issues and domestic politics, but especially because he covered the historical negotiations under Hafiz al-Asad. The interview was carried out at his al-Hayat office in Damascus on the 17th of March, 2008. In addition, I interviewed human rights lawyer and former leader of the Syrian Human Rights Organization, Haythem al-Maleh. Maleh has published several articles on the Syrian-Israeli relationship and is known as an outspoken

critic of the regime. His views were sought on the 12th of March, 2008 in order to get an idea of the opinion of the Syrian opposition. Last, I met a freelance journalist and member of the Syrian Media Centre for Freedom of Speech, Khaled Elekhtiyar on the 26th of March, 2008.

The interviews from Syria, my stay in Israel as well as the aforementioned articles gave me the understanding of the negotiations I needed in order to grasp the circumstances surrounding the event. Thus, my sources for writing this thesis have been books, news articles, academic articles, reports, governmental web pages, a speech, personally conducted interviews as well as interviews conducted by others.

1.3 Theoretical Framework: Two-Level Games

Although this thesis is structured as a historical study about a contemporary phenomenon, the theoretical framework I have used is derived from political science. Robert Putnam's theory of "two-level games" is an acknowledged and influential model on conflict resolution. Putnam published his article "Diplomacy and Domestic politics: the Logic of Two-Level games" in 1988. He criticized earlier rational theories which assumed that states are autonomous actors with clearly defined national interests related to general objectives rather than to the preferences of any particular group or class. In his theory, Putnam repudiates that the state can be regarded as a unitary rational actor and argues that the politics of international negotiations can be conceived as a two-level game. At the national level, domestic groups pressure the government to adopt policies favourable to their interests, while politicians construct coalitions among these groups in order to seek power and influence. At the international level, a government will try maximising their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the unfavourable consequences of foreign developments. The two games are equally important for the central decision-maker. If a key player at the international table is dissatisfied with the outcome, he may upset the game board and if he fails to satisfy fellow players at the domestic table, he runs the risk of being removed from his seat. The negotiator's task is building a package acceptable both to the other side and to his bureaucracy (1988, p. 434)

Putnam divides the negotiation process in two stages. At Level I bargaining between the negotiators lead to a tentative agreement. At Level II separate discussions are held within each group of constituents about whether to ratify the agreement or not. However, expectation of rejection at Level II may lead to abortion of negotiations at Level I without any formal action

at Level II. Prior to Level I negotiations, consultations and bargaining at Level II are likely to be held to hammer out an initial position for Level I (1988, p. 436).

There is only one formal constraint on the ratification process. Given that the agreement must be ratified by both sides, a preliminary Level I agreement cannot be amended at Level II without reopening the Level I negotiations. In other words, any modification to a Level I agreement equals rejection. This implies that unless modification is approved by all other parties, final ratification can only be voted up or down. Involuntary defection refers to the behaviour of an agent unable to deliver a promise because of failed ratification. In this event concerns of "deliver ability" will constitute a prominent element. If a negotiator is unable to guarantee ratification, his credibility will fall. Consequently, credibility and ability to strike deals at Level I is enhanced by a negotiator's demonstrated ability to deliver at Level II. A party's insecurity about its opponent's ability to deliver its commitments on Level II, no matter how well-intentioned, can constitute a serious obstacle (1988, pp. 437-8).

Putnam calls the set of all possible Level I agreements that will gain the necessary majority among the constituents in a given Level II constituency a "win-set". Successful agreement can only be obtained when the Level II win-sets of each of the parties to the accord overlap. The larger each win-set, the more likely they are to overlap and the greater the prospect of reaching agreement at Level I. Conversely, when the win-set is small, the risk of collapse is higher. Thus, to explain a stalemate in negotiations you need to look at parties' inability to create overlapping win-sets (1988, pp. 438-40).

If the size of a win-set is decisive to negotiations, what factors affect this size? First, Putnam claims that the size of a win-set depends on the distribution of power, preferences and possible coalitions among Level II constituents. The lower the cost of a no-agreement to the constituents, the smaller the win-set. A no-agreement can often represent status quo, although sometimes it may lead to a worsening situation. Further, some constituents may face low costs from a no-agreement and others will face high costs. The former will be more sceptical to an agreement then the latter. For example, it is reasonable to expect that members of a two-wage earner family are more ready to strike than sole breadwinners. Furthermore, when the costs or benefits of an agreement are relatively concentrated, the constituents whose interests are most affected are more likely to exert special influence on the ratification process. As negotiations may involve several issues, various groups at Level II might have dissimilar preferences

regarding the different issues. Typically, the group with the greatest interest in one issue will usually hold the most extreme position on that particular subject. This means that if each group is allowed to arrange the Level I position for its concern, the resulting win-set are likely to be unacceptable to the opponent. The chief negotiator is faced with different trade-offs across the various issues (1988, pp. 442-5). Putnam also asserts that the size of a win-set depends on the Level II political institutions. For example, ratification procedures have a particular affect. If a two-third vote is required for ratification, the win-set will probably be smaller than if a simple majority is required. This implies that a small group has veto power and subsequently, that an agreement may be rejected or never even considered for ratification (1988, p. 448).

In chapter 3 I will follow up the applicability of Putnam's theory to the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, look at the parties' win-sets and their implications to the talks. But before that, I shall account for the actual events of the negotiations in chapter 2.

2. SYRIA AND ISRAEL: FROM WAR TO PEACE?

From the Syrian point of view, Israel was an expansionist aggressor who continuously violated the armistice agreement between 1948 and 1967, and then launched an antagonistic war where they stole the Syrian Golan Heights. The Israeli version narrated a Syria that for 19 years shelled Israeli civilians and then plunged the region into the 1967 war. The occupation of the Golan Heights was in self-defence, and the retaining of the area was therefore lawful (Rabinovich pp. 41-2).

In this chapter, I will explain the historical events at the core of the conflict between the two countries, followed by a clarification of the circumstances around the launching of the first attempts of negotiations at the Madrid Conference. Last, I will give an account of the different negotiation rounds that was carried out under the command of Syria's Asad and the three Israeli prime ministers; Rabin, Peres and Barak.

2.1 Border War and Water Dispute

The border dispute between Israel and Syria emanated neither from the 1948 war, nor from the 1967 war. In fact, it has its origin even before the establishment of the two sovereign states, namely from the colonial era. After their victory in World War I, Britain and France seized large parts of the Ottoman Empire which they incorporated into their own empires. While the British took Iraq and Palestine, the French controlled Syria and Lebanon. The Anglo-French Agreement of 1923 drew up the Syrian-Palestinian border so that the Jordan River and Lake Tiberias were located within Palestine. However, two of the main rivers that feed the Jordan River, The Hazbani and the Banias, originate in Lebanon and Syria's Golan Heights. Although the 1923 border clearly places Lake Tiberias and the Jordan River in today's Israel, the agreement gave Syria villagers the right to use the Tiberias for fishing, drinking water and for feeding their cattle (Slater, 2002, p. 83-4).

The 1948 war ended with Israel conquering 21% more of Palestine than had been allocated by the UN partition plan from 1947. Syria on the other hand, captured the northeast shoreline of Lake Tiberias, a strip of land on the east of Jordan River as well as a small salient of Israeli land on the west of the river. In the following armistice negotiations with Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, Israel insisted on retaining these areas on the grounds that the armistice lines must reflect the war's military outcome. Nevertheless, when conducting bilateral talks with Syria,

Israel argued that military conquest could not be allowed to negate previous agreements on border and demanded Syrian withdrawal to the 1923 boundary. Syria disputed the legitimacy of the boundary which they viewed as a mere colonial imposition and was not willing to turn over the captured territories if Israel did not do the same (Slater, 2002, pp. 84-6).

In July 1949 the impasse was temporarily resolved in a compromise. The Israeli-Syrian Armistice Agreement created three demilitarized zones (DMZ) in the disputed areas. Syria was to withdraw its forces and Israel to refrain from moving their forces in, while the sovereignty of the disputed areas would remain undetermined until a peace settlement. Civilian life in these zones was to return to normal under the oversight of a UN-Israeli-Syrian commission (Slater, 2002, p. 86).

The first months after the signing of the agreement there were no violent incidents on the border. Then, in 1951 Israel sought to assure its sovereignty over the DMZ by evicting Syrian residents and replacing them with paramilitary agricultural settlements. Fields were divided, reaped and burned, and infiltrating peasants were regarded as guerrilla fighters. When Israeli settlers began cultivating formerly Arab land, Syrian forces overlooking the DMZ fired on them, provoking far larger Israeli retaliatory raids. The fighting in 1951 ended in a de facto division of the DMZ. Syria retained control over the village al-Hamma in the southern zone, the tiny northern zone and a narrow, uninhabited strip of land on the east side of the Jordan River. Israel gained the rest of the DMZ, which constituted about 75 % and included most of the southern part and the whole central sector west of the Jordan (Slater, 2002, p. 88).

There were additional shooting incidents between Syrian military positions and Israeli police boats and fishermen during the early 1950s. The most extensive single episode happened in 1955, when Israel raided Syrian positions by both land and sea. 50 Syrians were killed, 30 were taken prisoners, and in the course of the battle the Syrian position was allegedly reduced to rubble. The Israeli historian Avi Shlaim called the incident "an unprovoked act of aggression by Israel" (Shlaim, 2001, p. 149). According to Benny Morris, another Israeli historian, the underlying plan for the strike was to provoke Egypt into honouring its mutual defence pact with Syria by attacking Israel, thereby igniting the war Israel sought with Egypt (Morris, 1993, p. 366). In an interview from 1976, published for the first time in *Yediot Aharanot* in 1997, the Minister of Defence at the time, Moshe Dayan said in a comment about the confrontations,

> … I know how at least 80 percent of the clashes there started. In my opinion, more than 80 percent, but let's talk about 80 percent. It went this way: We would send a tractor to plow someplace where it wasn't possible to do anything, in the demilitarized area, and knew in advance that the Syrians would start to shoot. If they didn't shoot, we would tell the tractor to advance farther, until the end the Syrians would get annoyed and shoot. And then we would use artillery and later the air force also, and that's how it was (quoted in Schemann, 1997).

This is not to say that there were no provocations from the Syrians. There were periodically Syrian-initiated shooting incidents along the Israeli border, sometimes as a reaction to Israel's attempts to carry out a development project on the Jordan water. Nevertheless, due to Israel's military superiority and its British and French backing, Syria was not eager to face Israel on the battlefield and consequently, Syria's attacks were predominantly verbal (Neff, 1994).

Generally, the Syrian-Israeli relations fall into two different phases before the 1967 war. From 1951 to 1956 the main dispute concerned control of the DMZ, including an Israeli effort to harness the waters of the area. From 1957 until the war in 1967 the conflict was concentrated on water (Neff, 1994).

In the latter part of 1956, Israel started working on the National Water Carrier. This involved diverting water from the Tiberias and transporting it to the Negev Desert in the southern part of Israel for irrigation purpose. The project was initiated without consulting Syria or Jordan, although as riparian states, both countries had a right to be consulted. An attempt to oppose the diversion was carried out when Arab leaders gathered in Cairo as the project was nearly completed in 1964. However, the Arabs were too late, and in any event had no military force with which to back up their complaint (Neff, 1994, p. 36).

The violent incidents that occurred in the following period all concerned water issues. In 1962, an episode involving fishing rights on Lake Tiberias took place. After exchanges of fire between Israeli patrol boats and Syrian troops, Israel raided a Syrian village in the DMZ where Syrian troops had taken up position. At least 30 Syrians and five Israelis were killed. On 9th of April, the UN Security Council deplored the fighting and found Israel in flagrant violation of the General Armistice Agreement. Another incident erupted two years later, after Israel declared the River Dan, which is a reservoir, and all the springs in the northern part of the DMZ as its own. Syria claimed part of the reservoir and a number of the springs, and

complained that the road Israel had constructed to patrol the area intruded Syrian territory. On 13th of November 1964, Syrian troops opened fire on Israeli guards patrolling the road, and intense artillery and mortar exchange followed. Subsequently, Israel sent war planes which napalmed, strafed and rocketed Syrian positions in the DMZ and six miles inside Syria. At least seven Syrians were killed and 26 wounded, and on the Israeli side three were killed and nine wounded (Neff, 1994, pp. 36-7).

After a failed Arab attempt to draw off water from the two Jordan tributaries, the situation escalated until the so-called Six days war erupted on 5th of June 1967 between Israel, Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Parallel with celebrating their victorious triumph against Egypt and Jordan, Israel broke a cease-fire in effect and overran the Golan Heights, capturing 1250 of its square kilometres.[2] While about a quarter of the total population of 139.000 people fled during the war, approximately 95.000 were expelled during the next months by demolishing villages, cutting off food and water supplies, and by threats reinforced by torture and execution of those who refused to leave. Already on the 15th of July the same year, Israel established its first settlement on the Golan Heights (Sigvartsen, 2007).

2.2 The Road to Madrid

Many of the circumstances that previously prevented Syria and Israel from negotiating were starting to change in the 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the following Operation Desert Storm provided an opportunity for the U.S. to bring Arabs and Israelis to the negotiating table. Although Syria was on the American list of "states sponsoring terrorism", Syria's agreement to support the Western coalition against Iraq enabled the Americans to legitimate dialogue with this otherwise "rogue state". The Madrid Peace Conference was convened on the 30th of October, 1991 to advance the prospect for genuine peace between the Arab states, Israel and the Palestinians. It was the first time ever a Syrian and an Israeli official had sat down together at the negotiating table to discuss a final solution to their conflict. The road to Madrid however, was by far an easy one.

Israel's decision to join the conference was taken after several procedural and substantive preconditions. The Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir refused to recognise Palestinian rights of self-determination and continued to build settlements on occupied Arab land.

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[2] The occupied territory consisted of 70 % of the Heights' total area of 1750 square kilometres.

Further, Israel opposed Soviet, European, UN and Palestinian attendance. The Soviet Union had broken diplomatic ties with Israel after the 1967 war, and its position in the conflict was opposed to the American-Israeli position. In addition, Israel feared involvement from the European Community. This stand was embedded in Europe's belief in implementing relevant UN resolutions to resolve the conflict, and because the community supported the concept of an international conference with participation of all the parties concerned, including the PLO. In relation to the United Nations, Israel considered it to be disqualified in taking part in any Middle East peace conference. Israel viewed the UN as anti-Israeli and biased in favour of the Arabs, and referred to several anti-Israeli resolutions to support the claim (Nejad, 2004: Rabinovich, 1998)

Nevertheless, Israel agreed to join the conference after a string of premises were fulfilled. First, the Soviet Union restored their diplomatic ties with the country. Further, they got assurances that the UN would have a limited role. Next, their insistence on direct, bilateral negotiations with the Arabs was met and furthermore, their rejection to base the conference on the 'peace for land' principle was solved satisfactory. A compromise regarding the Palestinian representation to the talks was met after American pressure, although the Israelis insisted on approving the participants. Israel also refused to stop building settlements on the territories, but had to pay for it in terms of a delay in the much needed American loan guarantee. Last, President Shamir did not actually agree to attend the conference before his foe, President Asad stated Syria's participation (Nejad, 2004, pp. 80-5).

If the conference was launched solely on Israeli premises, a plausible question is why Syria decided to attend. Dennis Ross, the long-standing American diplomat and mediator to the negotiations between Israel and Syria, claims in his memoirs that Asad agreed to join just because he was convinced that Israel would not (Ross, 2004, p. 76). However, this is a relatively narrow interpretation. First of all, Syria was strategically weak after the end of the cold war. The extensive American backing of Israel made a strong alignment with Soviet natural for Syria when the world was bipolar. The Soviet Union's arms deliveries were vital to Syria's relative success in the 1973 war and thereafter in Asad's drive for parity. The superpower and its role as a patron-protector had a crucial deterrent effect on Israel's freedom of action against Syria. When the Soviet collapsed, Syria lost its main benefactors both military and financially, and thereby its credibility to appear as a serious threat to Israel (Hinnebusch, 2002, pp. 157-9). Second, Syria's decision to join was based on a trade-off with

the Americans: Asad got the green light to dispose of the anti-Syrian General Michel Aoun in Lebanon and to keep his forces inside the country. In exchange, he joined the American-led coalition against Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait and subsequently, the peace conference in Madrid (al-Hamidi, author's interview, 2008).

The structure of the Madrid Conference was based on bilateral discussions and multilateral negotiations on regional issues. While the U.S. and the Soviet Union were cosponsoring the conference, their role was merely as facilitators and they had no power to impose a solution to the parties. The UN was given the role as a silent observer (Nejad, 2004, p. 79). It became clear already during the plenary session that the Syrians and the Israelis were miles apart from anything even resembling peace. The Israeli prime minister denounced Syria as one of the most repressive and tyrannical regimes in the world, while Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shar'a replied by calling Israel a terrorist state led by a former terrorist. The next five rounds of bilateral talks were carried out in a similar way. By March 1992 however, the Syrians began talking about peace and not solely territory for the first time. The Israelis on the other hand, suggested that a partial withdrawal was not excluded. In addition, the head of the Syrian delegation, Muwaffaq al-Allaf, spoke for the first time of recognizing Israel and reaching a peace agreement with it, provided that Israel withdrew from the entire Golan Heights, as well as from the other occupied territories (Shlaim, 2001, pp. 490-4).

The Madrid Conference and the following rounds of talk between Syria and Israel did not accomplish anything concrete. This was due to the fact that both parties were reluctant to join the conference from the beginning, and neither was willing to make even the smallest gesture once the talks had started. What the conference did achieve though, was initiating contact between two foes that eventually made way for more fruitful discussions.

2.3 The Rabin Pocket

When Yitzhak Rabin and his Labour Party won the 1992 election, they brought with them a shift in the Israeli policy towards Syria. Rabin had a record of outspoken scepticism against the Syrians and considered the Golan as an important strategic asset. Besides, he was attached to the settlements since the majority of its settlers were supporting his party. Nevertheless, the differentiation between the previous prime minister and Rabin was substantial. During his campaigning ahead of the election, he intimated that there was a "limited room for territorial compromise" and that "their might be other compromises… like leasing the land" (Ma'oz,

1995, p. 223). What Rabin seemed to realize, was that peace without Syria would be impossible. He also understood that Asad would not be willing to accept to settle for less than Sadat did, namely a return of all the occupied territory.

In Syria, Asad was eager to test whether the new administration was more open to consider a full withdrawal. During a visit from the American Secretary of State in July 1992, James Baker assured Rabin that Asad was willing to offer Israel a genuine peace, and that the US was ready to commit to undertaking serious effort to reach it. Rabin was convinced, and consequently, the sixth round of negotiations saw a change in Israeli policy. The Israeli ambassador to the US and new head negotiator, Itamar Rabinovich declared that Israel accepted Resolution 242 "in all its part and provisions as a basis for the current peace talks, and views it as applicable also to the peace negotiations with Syria" (1998, p. 57). The statement implied that the new government did not support the "peace for peace" notion and suggested a certain readiness for at least an element of withdrawal.

The Syrian answer came a week later in the form of a "Draft Declaration of Principles" which consisted of a proposal over how to proceed with the talks. The document itself was separated in four items, namely withdrawal, security arrangements, normal peaceful relations and a timetable for the implementations. Rabinovich characterised the document as a starting point for further discussions, and considered it as the first serious Syrian initiative in negotiating peace. As for the content of the paper, he called it an "offer of a glorified non-belligerency in return for full withdrawal" (1998, p. 62). But despite Israel's apparent approval to proceed on the basis of the Syrian agenda, Rabin remained passive. For the next year he let the Palestinian and the Syrian tracks compete in order to see which of the two would have a breakthrough (Cobban, 1999, p. 46).

In short, the discussions during autumn of 1992 revolved around Syrian demand for full withdrawal and the Israeli counter-demand that Syria explain the nature of the peace it was offering. A factor which attributed to the deadlock and cast a pall over all tracks of the peace process was a decision Rabin made at the end of the year. In Gaza, the Palestinian organization Hamas had launched an offensive to derail the peace process. When three Israeli border soldiers and a border policeman were killed, Rabin decided to, in Rabinovich words "break the backbone of the Hamas" (1998, p. 84). Rabin arrested and ordered the expulsion of 416 Hamas activists to Lebanon, none of whom had been charged, tried or allowed to appeal.

The expellees were taken by bus and dropped of at the northern edge of the IDF-controlled security zone inside Lebanon. Naturally, Lebanese authorities were not enthusiastic about receiving the allegedly radical Islamists and declared them Israel's responsibility. As the expellees sat out tent camps along the border, stuck in a no-man's land, media all over the world condemned the act as opposed to international law. The Syrians, along with all the other Arabs, suspended the negotiations in protest (Cobban, 1999, p. 47).

In April 1993 it was agreed upon that the Palestinians should be allowed to return to their homes. In return, the Syrians and the Arabs accepted to go back to the negotiating table. President Asad played a significant role in the arrangement, by inviting PLO chairman Yasser Arafat to Syria and persuading him to resume the talks (Cobban, 1999, p. 48). In an interview with his biographer Patrick Seale which was published in May, Asad then offered a new formula to the Israelis. The notion "full peace for full withdrawal" was a departure from the previous "establishing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace". The underlying assumption was that whereas the old formula meant the return of all Arab occupied territories, the new applied to the Golan Heights only. The proposal was meant to challenge Rabin to demonstrate his readiness for peace, to "throw the ball over to his court" (quoted in Seale, 1993, pp. 112-3). The Israelis found the initiative welcoming, and Rabinovich wrote in *New York Times* that although it was miles away from the spectacular actions conducted by Anwar Sadat, the interview was the most impressive act of public diplomacy performed by Syria's president until then (Rabil, 2003, p. 204).

Meanwhile, the prospect of reaching a breakthrough on the Palestinian track led to deeper Israeli commitment to the Oslo channel. Rabin believed that Israel could not move forward on two tracks simultaneously because the Israeli public needed time to "absorb" the agreements. Given this tactic, progress on one track was bound to happen at the expense of another. By mid-June, Rabin had still not replied to Asad's challenge. Apparently in reaction to this lack of Israeli response, Asad resorted to old tactics of exerting military pressure against Israel through southern Lebanon. While Hizbullah intensified its attacks into northern Israel, the Israelis increased their assaults into the other side of the frontline. On 25th of July, Israel launched the large-scaled Operation Accountability in Lebanon. The ultimate goal of the attack was to exert pressure on the Lebanese government and eventually on its Syrian patrons by expelling hundreds of thousands of Lebanese civilians and forcing them to flee (Rabinovich, 1998, p. 103). The sights of Lebanese civilians fleeing their homes and

becoming refugees in their own country triggered worldwide criticism. Six days later, a ceasefire was obtained with American mediation. An oral agreement between the parties set out rules of engagement and obliged the parts to avoid civilian casualties (Cobban, 1999, p. 52).

Three days after the ceasefire, Rabin decided to test the Syrian peace track before devoting himself to Oslo. The Israeli prime minister requested Warren Christopher, the Clinton administration's new Secretary of State, to ask Asad a hypothetical question. Rabin wanted to explore whether the Syrian leader was willing to sign a peace treaty with Israel without linkage to the pace of progress with the other tracks if Asad's demands were met. Additionally, Rabin presented a package of his own demands that had to be fulfilled. These included embassies, open borders, trade and tourism, establishing of diplomatic relations and a five year long schedule for withdrawal. There had to be satisfactory security arrangements, an early-warning station being one of them. Last, Israel's water needs had to be safeguarded. Rabin insisted on total confidentiality, threatening to deny and withdraw the offer if anything was leaked (Ross, 2004, p. 111).

Asad accepted the basic equation, but was not willing to normalize relations before the withdrawal had been completed, and instead of the proposed timetable of five years, he suggested a six months schedule. But for Asad, who always insisted that withdrawal had to be to 4th of June, 1967 line, it was crucial that Rabin's "hypothetical question" did not refer to the 1923 international border. Back in Israel, Rabin was not satisfied with Asad's reply and refused to answer which border he had in mind. Before long he turned his head away from Damascus and gave the green light to complete the negotiations with the Palestinians through the Oslo channel (Cobban, 1999: Rabinovich 1998).

Disclosure of the Oslo channel and its achievements in September 1993 stroke like a bombshell to the Syrians. The agreement strongly undermined Syria's bargaining position and undercut all hopes Asad might have had regarding his anticipation that breakthrough in his own negotiations was getting close (Nejad, 2004, p. 104). Although Asad was not happy about the accord, being put on the backburner was even worse. On the other hand, he did not really have a better option than wait until Rabin was ready to return his focus to the Syrian track.

On the 16th of January 1994 the United States arranged a summit meeting between Clinton and Asad as part of their efforts to further the peace process. In the press conference following the meeting, Asad challenged Rabin for the second time by stating that Syria was ready for peace "…if the leader's of Israel have enough courage to respond to such a peace, a new era of security and stability and normal peaceful relations among all will emerge in the region" (quoted in Cobban, 1999, p. 61). This was the first time Asad defined peace as "normal, peaceful relations" and the announcement was interpreted as a significant development. President Clinton, when asked whether he thought Asad would commit himself to full diplomatic relations with Israel, confirmed that this was in accordance with his understanding (Nejad, 2004, p. 112).

The Israeli response was nevertheless relatively lukewarm. The next day, an Israeli official declared that in the event of a significant territorial concession on the Golan Heights, the issue would be put to a referendum. The proposal was meant to cool down domestic opposition and prepare the public for a potential withdrawal, as well as to throw the ball back into Asad's court. The proposition also intended to induce Asad into making gestures to the Israeli public and help Rabin to gain support for his peace policy. But the Syrians responded with criticism rather than public diplomacy. For Syria, an Israeli referendum implied that Syria might undertake difficult concessions to reach an agreement only to have it rejected by the Israeli public (Nejad, 2004, p. 113).

During the first months of 1994, Rabin's centre of attention was neither the Palestinian nor the Syrian track. On July 25, a declaration that was followed by a peace treaty two months later was reached between Jordan and Israel. Once again Syria's policy of comprehensive peace was undermined and all its credibility as an Arab peace coordinator was definitely lost. For Israel however, the agreement brought substantial benefits. Not only were they able to obstruct Syria from negotiating on other tracks, but now they could establish commercial relations with other Arab countries (Nejad, 2004, p. 119).

When Christopher returned to Middle East in July, he wanted to know whether Rabin could give Asad clarity in regard to the question of which border he was willing to withdraw from. Rabin answered cautiously. He told him that he could accept the Syrian territorial claim, provided that Asad accepted all his demands. Rabin refused to call this a "commitment", but told Christopher that he could keep the "clarification" in his pocket. When Asad would ask

whether Rabin would be willing to withdraw all the way to the 4th of June line, Christopher was to tell Asad that "this was his impression" (Rabinovich, 1998, p. 147).

The Syrians were satisfied with the "clarification" and what came to be referred to as the "ambassador's channel" was inaugurated before long. Rabinovich and the Syrian ambassador to the US, Walid al-Mu'allim met Dennis Ross informally at the latter's house for discussions. At this point, the structure of the negotiations was like "a table with four legs that cannot stand until all four have been constructed". The metaphor was used by both the Americans, the Israelis and the Syrians, and described the four main issues in the agreement. The first leg was withdrawal, followed by security arrangements, normalization and a time table for implementation. One "leg" was to be discussed at a time, and the parties agreed not to disclose the content of their discussion until they had reached understanding on all four legs (Rabinovich, 1998, p. 147: Rabil, 2003, p. 207).

Later that year, President Clinton went to Damascus as the first visiting American president to Syria in 20 years. In the following press conference, Asad repeated Syria's commitment to establish normal, peaceful relations with Israel in return for Israel's full withdrawal from the line of 4th of June, 1967. Clinton also informed Asad that Rabin wanted to start discussing security arrangements and that he had suggested that the talks take place in Washington by Syria and Israel's military chiefs of staffs. In December, Israel's Ehud Barak and Syria's Hikmat Shihabi met for the first time. However, the outcome of the meeting was not productive and the blame was put on an ill-prepared Barak. According to Rabinovich, the meeting was held almost spontaneously, and the apparent lack of Israeli seriousness augmented the Syrian suspicions that the meeting between the military chiefs were held just to delay the negotiations (Cobban, 1999, p. 66).

It was not until March 1995 that the talks were given more momentum. During the next two months, Secretary Christopher undertook a series of meetings between Jerusalem and Damascus, resulting in an agreed upon text titled "The Aims and Principles of the Security Arrangement". In accordance with the four legged table strategy, the exact text of what was agreed to was not to be publicly revealed. The document was designed to provide a framework for the talks and the negotiations were to be carried out by a combination of Ross' shuttle diplomacy to the region and meetings between the chiefs of staff in the US. Dominating the discussions in the second meeting was an Israeli pre-prepared plan that was

later leaked to the Israeli press. Although the Syrians slated almost all aspects of this document, particularly the demand of retaining an early warning station on the Golan's Mount Hermon, it created agitation among politicians in Israel. The Likud leader Netanyahu claimed that the text proved that Rabin had conceded the Golan and that he ignored his earlier commitment (Rabinovich, 1998, p. 182). In any event, talks were allowed to continue despite the leaking. Then, on the last day of the talks another document was leaked to the Israeli press. This text was an analysis of the "Aims and Principles" document where each portion of its analysis was preceded by introductory quotes citing clauses purporting to be the successive clauses of the original paper. Thus, it was quite simple for the media to publish its recreated version of the original document, thereby disclosing the carefully negotiated text to a sceptical, critical Israeli opposition (Cobban, 1999, p. 94).

Meanwhile, a suicide attack in Tel Aviv aggravated the increasingly charged atmosphere in Israel, and contributed to further the controversy of Rabin's peace policy. The attack occurred as the extra-parliamentary faction, The Third Way gained momentum among the Israeli public. The movement had been established in 1994 by discontented Labour party members, many of whom were settlers from the Golan (Rabinovich, 1998, pp. 189-90). The Third Way claimed to be a pro-peace movement, but at the same time they opposed withdrawal from Golan as they thought Israel was entitled to "retain territory captured in a war of defence". Their platform stated that "any peace with Syria must ensure Israeli sovereignty over the areas containing Israeli settlements, water sources and vital lines of defence" and that "Israel will accelerate and strengthen settlement and civilian development of the Golan Heights" (quotes from "The Third Way Platform"). In addition, right-wing parties started mobilizing for the election campaign that was due in October 1996. Tension rose further in Israeli cities as demonstrators went to the streets, rabbis described Rabin and Peres as traitors and some extreme nationalist called Rabin a Nazi. The pressure against the prime minister was already tense when two Third Way activists and Knesset members from Labour announced that they were prepared to run their own party for the 1996 elections (Morris, 1996a, p. 82: Diskin, 1996, p. 388).

Back in the US, the Americans continued to pressure the parties to elaborate their discussions. Following the Chief of Staff meeting, Dennis Ross met with Rabin before moving on to Syria. When Ross arrived in Damascus, he was faced with bad news. Asad refused outright to let military experts meet until Israel omitted the issue of the ground station. Sending officers to

Washington would only delay the negotiations he said, because officers could not reach a decision on their own. Asad did not want to cease the talks though, rather return to the ambassador's channel. He suggested that a military officer from each country join the discussions, but Rabin declined to recede from the agreed upon chief of staff meetings and consequently, the negotiations stalled (Ross, 2004, pp. 161-3).

At this point, the prospect of signing the Oslo II agreement with the Palestinians seemed ripe. Once again Rabin turned his focus to the track that seemed the closest to a breakthrough and put the Syrian track on the backburner for the second time. In September, the interim agreement was initialled with the Palestinians and voted on in the Knesset with a scarce majority of 61-57. To get there, Rabin had invested considerable political capital and he was therefore not eager to risk further upsetting the opposition or a domestic political crisis over negotiations he suspected Asad was not determined to conclude (Rabinovich, 1998, p. 191).

We will never know whether Rabin intended to return to the Syrian track when the political climate calmed down. Upon leaving a peace rally in Tel Aviv on the 4th of November, the Israeli nationalist Yigal Amir assassinated Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (Diskin, 1996, p. 390).

2.4 Flying High and Fast

In the hours and days that followed after the assassination, Shimon Peres took over as acting Prime Minister. While organizing an extensive investigation in addition to a massive state funeral, he composed his own government and prepared himself to take charge of Israel's ongoing peace diplomacy. As soon as Rabin's funeral was over on the 6th of November, Peres met with Clinton. The American President wanted to know whether Peres would stand by Rabin's commitment to withdrawal from Golan. Peres confirmed that he wished to advance towards an arrangement with Syria, and also that he wanted to act rapidly. He also expressed that he was prepared to lose the Golan or the elections, but not both (Ross, 2004, pp. 212-21). At the same time it became increasingly clear that Peres' approach would differ from Rabin's in several ways. As opposed to Rabin, Peres was not a military man and security issues were not at the centre of attention. Rather, Peres sought to make a comprehensive peace and had a vision that the agreement could be the last one in the Arab world. He considered the key to real security to be economic development, and wished to change the emphasis from security to development of economic interests along the border and between the two countries. His

idea was to transform the Golan Heights into a free economic zone (Rabinovich, 1998, pp. 201-2).

In early December the diplomatic pace heated up as Ross returned to the Middle East. While shuttling between Damascus and Jerusalem he tested intentions, plans and concerns of the parties. During this time, the Israeli media reported that Peres wanted to "obtain a commitment on the part of President Asad to conduct uninterrupted and serious negotiations in order to reach a breakthrough within six months". Another news broadcast said that "Israel would be prepared to forgo an early-warning station presence on the Golan and suffice with the presence of U.S. soldiers on Mount Hermon in exchange for a Syrian agreement to a deep demilitarization stretching all the way to the outskirts of Damascus" (quotes from Cobban, 1999, p. 118).

Cautious as always, Asad did not reply to the invitation immediately. He was anxious about political surprises in the course of the upcoming Israeli elections and asked Secretary Christopher why, given his 85 % support, Peres did not choose to go for early elections. Peres allegedly answered Christopher that he preferred peace to elections. Subsequently, Foreign Minister Shar'a surprisingly announced a Syrian counter-gambit to the Israeli opening and declared that a Syrian-Israeli peace treaty should be followed by an agreement between Israel and Lebanon (Cobban, 1999, pp. 120-2).

Thus, the prospect of advancing the discussions seemed good. When the two delegations met at the Wye Plantation in Maryland, U.S. on 27th of December, they agreed to a new, Israeli-introduced, radical formula that became known as "flying high and fast". This implied an abandoning of Rabin's way of discussing one issue at a time, and sat up an approach where a multiplicity of parallel discussions which would cover all aspects of the negotiations were to take place simultaneously (Cobban, 1999, pp. 121-9). Ross explained the premise for the Wye talks:

> …Based on the Rabin commitment – which was in our pocket, not the Syrian pocket – the Syrians would assume that full withdrawal from the Golan would take place once Israeli needs had been addressed. The Israelis would not discuss this issue, but also not openly contradict it. This way the two sides could focus on the preconditions for the withdrawal – peace, security, and the timeline for any agreement – rather than the territorial issue itself (2004, p. 239).

The new approach turned out productive. Negotiations on all aspects were started at once, though the ground rule was still that nothing was agreed until everything was agreed on. During the first round of talks, the parties reached an understanding on comprehensiveness, meaning that Syria was obliged to ensure that peace was extended to the whole region. Agreement was also achieved over what normalization implied; full diplomatic relations with embassies, trade and tourism. This also included ties such as banking, aviation, postal, customs, agriculture, health and environmental issues. In addition, a timeline for the withdrawal was designed (Ross, 2004, p. 239).

Round two at Wye occurred at the end of January, 1996. This time the talks centred on security issues with the "aims and principles" document serving as a framework. The main divergence concerned the location of the Syrian forces. The Israelis asserted that the farther removed the Syrian forces were from the Golan, the less Israel needed the early warning station. The Syrians on the other hand, emphasized that because of the proximity of Damascus to the Israeli border, forces were vital in order to defend the capital. Once again, security issues seemed to constitute the hardest obstacles. According to Ross (2004, p. 241-2), significant progress on the matter was made during a private meeting with Peres' new Chief negotiator Savir, Mu'allim, the respective countries' Chief of Staffs in addition to Ross himself. Allegedly, the party's were so close to finding a feasible solution that Ross described it as the basis of a breakthrough.

The optimistic atmosphere was abrupted when Christopher informed Mu'allim that Peres had decided to go for early election. The Israeli President had not yet informed his public on his decision though, and a few days later, Peres proposed to Christopher that he could forego early election if Asad agreed to see him in a summit. However, Asad did not think the talks were at a stage where they could make a summit understandable to his own public. Asad confirmed that he was ready to meet Peres at a later stage, but thought it to be premature at that point (Ross, 2004, p. 243). Shortly after Asad's decision, Peres announced to the Israeli public that he had decided to go for early elections (Cobban, 1999, p. 143).

Parallel with the discussions in the US a series of suicide bombs engulfed Israel. The killings not only shook the government and the public faith in the peace process, but fuelled the opposition's vociferous attack against Peres. The pressure against the negotiators and Peres

became increasingly intolerable and on March the 4th, the Israeli President suspended the talks and instructed the Israeli delegation to return home (Rabinovich, 1998, pp. 226-7).

2.4.1 Approaching the Election
To avoid another stalemate, President Clinton cooperated with Peres in organizing a hastily convened international meeting entitled "Summit of the Peacemakers". The summit was held in the Egyptian resort Sharm al-Sheikh and attempted to reverse the declining support for Labour's peace diplomacy. The gathering's objective was to enhance the peace process, promote security and combat terror. Syria, though invited, was notably not among the 13 Arab delegations that attended ("Statement by Prime Minister Peres at the Conference at Sharm el-Sheikh, 13 March, 1996").

The escalation of the fighting in south Lebanon was another challenge. Both Syria and Israel had contained the tensions while the negotiations at Wye were being held. However, in the aftermath of the suspension of the talks and the heavily anti-terror rhetoric of the summit, the calculation regarding the need to limit escalation in Lebanon shifted. Within weeks the situation had risen towards a boiling point, and the pressure Peres faced to retaliate grew stronger every day. On the 11th of April, Israel launched Operation Grapes of Wrath by bombing civilian and military infrastructure throughout southern Lebanon and Beirut. The operation was Israel's biggest military incursion into Lebanon since its invasion in 1982 and aimed to pressure civilians in Hezbollah influenced areas. The anticipation was that inflicted civilians would pressure the Lebanese government to crack down on Hezbollah. The operation turned into a catastrophe. The campaign had relied on the forced evacuation of hundreds of thousands of civilians, and the attendant suffering, casualties and deaths were an integral part of the broader plan rather than a by-product of it. The Israeli Defence Force threatened the populations of 96 villages, towns and cities, demanding that communities should evacuate according to impossible deadlines or otherwise bear the consequences. On the 18th of April Israeli artillery fired on a UN base in Kafr Qana, killing more than a hundred civilians who had sought shelter there (Cobban, 1999, pp. 156-62).

A ceasefire was ultimately announced in Beirut, Damascus and Jerusalem on the 26th of April after assistance of French and American negotiation ("Israel-Lebanon Ceasefire Understanding"). At this point, there was only a month left for Peres to persuade his public that peace was still an option. But as all votes were counted in the end of May, it became clear

that Peres and his Labour Party had lost the election. Oppositional Benjamin Netanyahu of Likud had won a surprising victory, by a margin of less then one percent (Amanpour, et.al., 1996). Apparently, Peres' peace diplomacy did not fly high and fast enough for the Israeli public.

2.5 From Netanyahu to Barak

One of the new Prime Minister's first statements in the Knesset was declaring that peace had to be resumed without preconditions. In other words, the four preceding years of negotiations were to be erased completely. Netanyahu wanted to strike a different bargain with the Syrians: a gradual normalization with Syria without Israeli withdrawal from the Golan. All of a sudden the process was back to square one: instead of "land for peace" he offered the Syrians "peace for peace" and asserted that retaining the Golan would be the basis for an arrangement (Drake, 1996, p. 64). Netanyahu still insisted that he was in favour of negotiating with the Syrians. But as he knew very well, the conditions he demanded was unacceptable, and had always been unacceptable for Syria. As a result, there was never any official reopening of talks during Netanyahu's term.

However, for a period of two months during August and September in1998 secret negotiations took place in a backchannel outside any governmental framework. Two American businessmen forwarded Netanyahu's and Asad's ideas to each other in shuttles between Damascus and Jerusalem. There was never direct contact between Israelis and Syrians, and not even the US government knew about its existence. The parties came remarkably close to an agreement: apparently, Netanyahu agreed to withdraw to the 4th of June, 1967 line, while Asad approved to let Israel keep an early warning station on Mount Hermon as long as a UN team was manning it. If the few existing accounts of the secret backchannel are accurate, it means that Netanyahu was actually closer than both Rabin and Peres to close a deal. According to Daniel Pipes (1999), the reason why the short-lived and intensive negotiations did not lead to settlement was that Netanyahu did not have the political credibility to make such far-reaching concessions alone. He needed the support from at least a few high-level Likud politicians and a senior from the defence sector, a heavyweight that could endorse the deal. He found none. Consequently, the agreement was stillborn.

On the 17th of May, 1999 Ehud Barak was elected prime minister with an impressive majority. As Peres had done before him, Barak preferred a "Syria first" policy (Rabinovich,

2002, p.126). Asad welcomed the new initiative by describing the new Israeli leader as a strong and honest man and confirmed his eagerness to resume negotiations as long as these were based on withdrawal to the 4th of June, 1967 line. Though Barak refused to confer the Rabin pocket, saying he would neither confirm nor withdraw it, the Syrians agreed to go ahead after receiving assurances from the Clinton administration. On 15th of December that year, discussions began at the White House in Washington, with the highest-ranking participants ever; Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shar'a and Ehud Barak. The talks were two-day long and aimed to set a time frame and ground rule for the discussions (Nejad, 2004, pp. 156-61). Negotiations in Shepherdstown were opened on the 3rd of January, 2000. President Bill Clinton attended the meetings, which he described in the following words:

> …The Syrians came to Shepherdstown in a positive and flexible frame of mind, eager to make an agreement. By contrast, Barak, who had pushed hard for the talks, decided, apparently on the basis of polling data, that he needed to slow-walk the process for a few days in order to convince the public that he was being a tough negotiator … I thought he had gotten some very bad advice. In foreign affairs, polls are often useless; people hire leaders to win for them, and it's the results that matters. Many of my most important foreign policy decisions had been unpopular at first (2004, p. 885).

Syria showed flexibility on nearly everything Israel wanted. Normalization, including diplomatic, consular relations, tourism and establishing bilateral economic and trade relations, as well as their demand regarding water and security arrangements were all agreed to. They even permitted American and French surveillance on the early warning station on Mount Hermon, still without getting a commitment to withdrawal to the 4th of June, 1967 line. A draft peace agreement with the newly negotiated points was sat up, and meetings on border issues began. However, when Barak was confronted with the flexibility the Syrians had shown, the Israeli prime minister refused to respond. Instead, he said he wanted to resume peace negotiations with Lebanon. Apparently, Clinton tried to convince Barak to change his mind but it was all in vain. To make things worse, the draft agreement was leaked in the Israeli press, presenting the concessions Syria had offered without getting anything in return. The situation was extremely embarrassing to the Syrians, and Shar'a was subject to intense criticism at home (Clinton, 2004, 886). Before returning to a second round of talks, Shar'a therefore demanded that Israel committed to withdrawal all the way to the 4th of June line. When Barak refused, the Syrians decided to suspend the talks.

3. A THREE-LEVEL GAME

In the aftermath of the Rabin assassination, Peres experienced a wave of sympathy as the Israelis witnessed the burial of a man who "died in the struggle for peace". Labour reached a popularity peak in public opinion polls, while Likud, being associated with the emotions that led to the prime minister's death, declined considerably (Diskin, 1996, p. 391). In an interview with an Israeli TV channel broadcasted a few days after the killing, Peres surprisingly stated "give me peace and we will give up the atom" (Schemann, 1995). On this background, the chances of reaching an agreement seemed better than ever when negotiations resumed at the Wye Plantation in December. Still, only four months after Peres took office the negotiations stalled once again. Before long, Israel was invading Lebanon and Peres found himself losing the election to a man who practically used his first days in office to close down the process. How could it be that the optimistic prospect for peace was turned upside down in such a short while? What were the circumstances leading to the disappointing comedown and how could Peres lose so many supporters in so little time?

Of course, we will never know whether Peres would have been able to conclude a treaty with the Syrians had he won the election. What we do know is that Peres assured that he wanted to resume negotiations as soon as he had secured and extended his mandate. Assuming that he would have kept his pledge and succeeded in making a settlement, the answer to why there was no agreement during this period was simply that Peres lost the election. I what follows, I will therefore discuss *why* he lost the election. In the first part of the chapter I shall examine the relevancy of Putnam's theory to the Syrian-Israeli negotiations and afterwards, discuss why it is inadequate. Subsequently I will present my theory of "the three level game" that I believe was set both during the negotiations and throughout Peres' election campaign.

3.1 Israeli Bureaucracy and its Impact on the Syrian-Israeli Talks
In his Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: the Logic of Two-Level Games, Putnam describes how a negotiator's deliver ability at Level I is enhanced by his demonstrated ability to deliver at Level II. Accordingly, when Prime Minister Rabin declared that a potential Syrian-Israeli peace treaty would be put to a national referendum in 1994, he greatly reduced his deliver ability at Level I: He could no longer guarantee ratification on Level II or assure the Syrians that he was able to deliver his commitments. Likewise, Peres' calling for early elections two years later both decreased his deliver ability and at the same time, increased the risk of

defection. Pursuant to this logic, Rabin and Peres would have greatly reduced their credibility in front of the Syrians. However, when previous adviser to Hafiz al-Asad, Samir al-Taqi was confronted on this issue, he did not explicitly confirm that this was the case. In fact, Taqi emphasized Asad's great respect for Rabin and asserted that he was considered sincere. The two political leaders found each other to be trustworthy, probably because they had experienced indirect negotiations earlier; in 1974, Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy resulted in the Disengagement Agreement, a deal which in overall had been lived up to by both parties. Although the Syrians were displeased to the news of Rabin's plans of putting a Syrian-Israeli treaty up for a referendum, the mistrust that followed was not serious enough to cause a stalemate. On the other side, Peres was much less credible. First of all because of the devastating Operation Grapes of Wrath, and second since he called for early election after assuring that he would not. However, Taqi pointed out, despite the mistrust, it was not Syria who suspended the talks; it was Israel (Taqi, author's interview, 2008). On this background, increased risk of defection and poor deliver ability did not seem to influent the sides' willingness to continue negotiations. In other words, poor deliver ability cannot explain the reason for the impasse.

Yet another aspect in negotiations is that in which Putnam holds decisive; the size of the parties' win-set. Several of the factors he claims affect the size of a win-set are indeed recognized in the Israeli case. First, Putnam asserts that the lower the cost of a no-agreement to the constituents, the smaller the win-set. As Taqi stressed, a no-agreement for Israel would have represented a status quo: retaining both the Golan and political, economical as well as military support from the world's only superpower. Status quo for Syria on the other hand, would signify a high cost: no return of the Heights and no prospects of a closer relationship with the West (Taqi, author's interview, 2008). Given that the alternative to peace was not dreaded, Israel could afford having a small win-set that would increase the risk of a stalemate.

Putnam asserts that the size of a win-set depends on the distribution of power, preferences and possible coalitions among Level II constituents. In Israel, political institutions are based on proportional representation where the entire country constitutes a single electoral constituency. This means that the number of seats each list receives in the Knesset[3] is proportional to the number of votes it receives. In other words, if a party polls 25% of the

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[3] The Israeli parliament

total votes, it gets 25% of the seats in the parliament. The only exception is that a party needs to pass the qualifying threshold. In the 1992 and 1996 elections, the threshold line was only 1.5 %[4] ("The Electoral System in Israel"). Because the whole country is one electoral district and the threshold line is low, small minorities with special interests are able to elect a representative. Subsequently, the parliament consists of many constituents with very different aims. Since Israel has a multi-party system where a single party is unable to form a government, the parties are required to form coalitions supported by a majority of the voters or elected candidates (Riggs, 1999).

The system aims to ensure that all interested parties are fairly represented. However, in practice it is favouring the small parties which are receiving a disproportionate amount of power. In return for their support of the coalition, minor factions make demands inconsistent with their size and are in the last instance, capable of overturning a government. Fragile coalitions subsequently results in vulnerable governments. The many small parties in the legislature and/or the government increases the obstacles to agreement, thereby making the Israeli electoral system somewhat fragmenting (Riggs, 1999).

We know that some constituents may face higher costs from a negotiated agreement than others and naturally, the former will be more sceptical of an agreement than the latter. As Putnam stresses, when the costs of a proposed agreement are relatively concentrated, it is reasonable to expect that the constituents with the most affected interests will exert special influence on the ratification process. This group is also more likely to hold the most extreme position. In Israel, the anti-withdrawal movement who opposed the Syrian-Israeli treaty was led by settlers from the Golan. Given that they would have to leave their homes in the event of a settlement, the price they would have to pay would be greater than the price other Israelis would have to pay.

Next, Putnam claims that the size of a win-set depends on the Level II political institutions. This means that ratification procedures have a particular affect and that small parties in effect might have veto power. If a two-third vote is required for ratification, the win-set will probably be smaller than if a simple majority is required. During the summer of 1995, Prime Minister Rabin experienced an increasing pressure from both within his own party and the

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[4] The threshold line has now been raised to 2 %.

opposition. Many Labour party members and activists were settlers from the Golan Heights and naturally, opposed withdrawing from the area of which their homes were located. As the discussions with Syria evolved, two Knesset members and Golan settlers from Labour established the anti-withdrawal movement The Third Way. The dissenter group as well as Knesset members from Labour declared that they were going to run their own party for the 1996 elections. This announcement effected their practical participation in the government coalition to the point where their actions became questionable. In fact, several times the movement joined the opposition and voted against its own government. This was particularly so in an instance when they put forward a bill called "Golan Entrenchment Law" that would have made future withdrawal from the Golan subject to a special majority of at least 70 Knesset members and a 65 % majority in a referendum. If the Knesset had approved the bill, this small Level II constituent would have managed to reduce the Israeli win-set considerably. The Israeli bureaucracy was indeed doing their utmost in order to inflict international negotiations. Anyhow, the government defeated the bill by a tie vote of 59-59 (Diskin, 1996, p. 388), just barely preventing the constituent to change the ratification process. As the example illustrates, a movement and holder of an extreme position almost succeeded in changing the ratification procedures when putting forward the Golan Entrenchment Law. The instance indicates how internal division made progress on the Syrian track practically impossible.

Furthermore, Putnam argues that strong discipline within a governing party will increase the win-set as it will widen the set of arrangements the Level I negotiator can expect to receive backing for. In Israel, strong discipline within the government was by no means present. In fact, party indiscipline grew during Rabin's era and flourished after the summer of 1995. When winning the 1992 election, Rabin and his Labour Party had formed a coalition with Meretz and Shas. The volatility of the government was demonstrated by frequent replacements of ministers and even parties; the ultra-orthodox Shas withdrew from the coalition in 1993, and Yi'ud joined the coalition in 1995. Following the withdrawal of Shas, the cabinet became a minority government, but continued to enjoy the support of the two left-wing Arab factions Hadash and Arab Democratic List (Diskin, 1996, p. 386). Even more pressing was nevertheless the division within Labour. The dissenter group from the coalition's main party created substantial problems for the government, and in the end it went to the election as an individual political party. What's more, one of the most prominent critics to the government's peace politics in the Peres era came from Labour, namely former Chief of Staff

and then Defence Minister Ehud Barak. Several times he went public with utterances that cast serious doubts about his party colleagues' peace policies. For example, he said that he did not expect the negotiations to solve the problems between Israel and Syria and that it "would not stand to reason" that the talks would result in an agreement (quoted in Cobban, 1999, p. 137). According to Ross' memoirs, Barak also claimed publicly that Israel would never withdraw to the 4th of June, 1967 line (Ross, 2004, p. 242). In a news broadcast, he said

> …We want and say that the peace may include twenty Arab leaders. So, twenty men wearing jellabas will show up. Will this influence jellaba-owners? No, but it creates great expectations in the Israeli public (quoted in Cobban, 1999, p. 137).

The statements demonstrated that the government consisted of a fragmented coalition with a leader in lack of control of his ministers. As Barak must have known, the deriding statements enraged the Syrians and could have harmed the negotiations. Moreover, a prominent minister casting doubts about the process certainly did not convince the Israeli public that peace was within reach. Hence, when the Israelis repeatedly stressed that the severe domestic constraints the prime minister was under limited what he could promise, it was harsh reality and not merely bargaining tactic.

As seen, many of the factors described by Putnam were present in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations. The small Israeli win-set may very well have been the reason why the negotiations went so slow. Had the win-set been larger, e.g. if the Israelis had not insisted on keeping the early warning station, progress could have gone faster. Likewise, had Syria's win-set been larger, for example if Asad had been willing to modify his demands on withdrawal, the Israelis might have been prepared to loosen their demands on other issues. In that case, the parties could perhaps have been able to conclude a deal before the 1996 election.

However, the reason for the stalemate could not have been small win-sets. Despite the fact that the sizes of Rabin's and Peres' win-sets were more or less the same, the talks at the Wye Plantation under Peres gave unprecedented results in a very short period of time. The good result was rather due to the change of strategy that was implemented, than the size of the win-sets. Whereas Rabin's "four legged table" implied achieving agreement on one leg before beginning to discuss the next, Peres organized the negotiations into working groups where all issues were discussed independent of each other. Peres' approach allowed a parallel progress

on each issue which was not achievable under Rabin's rule. Both the Syrians and the Israelis stated their satisfaction with the negotiations; Asad said the Wye talks were "conducted in a better atmosphere than in the past" while Savir asserted that "a peace agreement could be reached before the end of 1996", and that "the real remaining problem between Israel and Syria was mainly psychological". Dennis Ross was equally enthusiastic and reported that "they have achieved more than all the negotiations between the two parties since the Madrid Conference" (quotes from Nejad, 2004, pp. 133 and 139). When the talks were suspended, the parties had allegedly reached agreement on both withdrawal, a time schedule for withdrawal, normalization and comprehensiveness. Significant progress were achieved on the security question and though not settled, discussions were also initiated on the water question. Conditions for an agreement were clearly present; the win-sets of the parties appeared to overlap. Thus, when Peres cancelled the discussions, it was neither due to slow progress nor small win-sets; it was because of the enormous pressure from the Israeli opposition.

Considering these matters, there is no doubt that internal factors in Israel threatened to undermine the negotiations. But the question yet to be answered is *why* these elements grew so strong.

3.2 Regional Influences on the Two-Level Game

When Asad heard the news of the assassination of Rabin in November 1995, he allegedly placed his country's military forces on full alert. Under the circumstances, with tensions running high in South Lebanon he may have feared that Rabin's murderer was an Arab, and that Israel would respond by hitting Syria (Cobban, 1999, p. 105).

As we know, Asad's fear did not materialize. In the following investigation, the police concluded that Rabin's Jewish assassin Yigal Amir had acted independently. The political left and others blamed the leaders of the right-wing opposition for creating an atmosphere that pushed Amir to commit the murder. As a number of rabbis where investigated, the police uncovered that several of them had given the green light to the assassination of Rabin by agreeing that his fate should be that of a *mosser*, one who hands over Jews or parts of the Land of Israel to non-Jews. A curse which posited his murder and consigned his soul to utter darkness was also issued against Rabin. According to Morris (1996a, pp. 85-6), Amir probably sought and received sanction for his crime from at least one rabbi. Nevertheless, no one except Amir was charged, and the reaction of the majority of the right-wing opposition,

the settlers and the prominent religious leaders, was that of condemnation. Not more than two weeks after the assassination though, walls of Jerusalem buildings were covered by graffiti pronouncing "Death to Peres". A number of soldiers came under investigation for supporting the assassin Yigal Amir and several teachers declared similar expressions. Right-wingers, particularly from religious parties, continued to utter outspokenly that no government could give up parts of the God-given Land of Israel. Again, placards of Israeli leaders wearing Nazi or Arab dress, with slogans like "murderer" and "traitors" were used in large-scale rallies and demonstrations. With the police and IDF passively overlooking the activities, West Bank settlers and their supporters were rioting against Palestinians in Hebron, illegally squatting on Palestinian land, blocking traffic on highways and harassing peace-supporters (Morris, 1996a, p. 82).

The commotion described above indicates that the harsh and sometimes violent opposition to any dialogue with Arabs was present even at a time when support for the peace process was at an all time high. At this point, the opposition consisted mostly of nationalists and religious groups. These included ultra-orthodox currents which placed their interpretation of God's command above the law of man or an elected legislature. They regarded the victory of the 1967 war to be a result of divine intervention, thus giving up any part of Israel would be against God's will (Morris, 1996b, p. 71). This faction had never been part of the overwhelming support Peres experienced after Rabin's death and they never lost their belief in peace, as they had been fiercely opposed to it from the start. Though present and by no means insignificant, this group can therefore not explain Peres' failing attempt to get re-elected. Rather, we needs to find the reasons why supporters of the process changed their mind and went into opposition. Of course, there might have been separate reasons for every single change of political heart, and the peace process might not have been the decisive issue at all. But when looking at the media rhetoric and reading political analysis of the time, most seem to conclude that the peace process indeed was the one most important topic for the election. Could it be that the new system of separately electing a prime minister and a parliament somehow had an impact on the voting patterns of the Israeli electorate? According to Peters (1997), the new structure was purportedly aimed at reducing the political clout of small parties, though in reality it produced the opposite effect: the double vote gave the Israelis an opportunity to vote for their preferred prime minister candidate whilst simultaneously choosing the party which best reflected their interests. It is true that the largest parties lost several seats in the Knesset, giving additional leverage to small parties. Still, this

cannot explain why people discarded Peres. In fact, there is only one aspect that affected all Israelis in some way or another during these turbulent months. The element that shaped the opinion of the Israeli electorate and influenced both the national and the international negotiation level, was internal conflicts caused by political violence carried out by radical Palestinians and perhaps to a lesser degree, guerrilla activity conducted by Hezbollah.

3.2.1 The Palestinian Element: Spoiling Peace?
In theory, the Palestinians were outsiders to the peace process between Syria and Israel. In effect they played a decisive role in the negotiations between the two countries. Several radical Palestinian movements which were opposed to the peace process in general and the Israeli-Palestinian in particular had launched a number of attacks against both military and civilian targets after the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993. Another wave of suicide bombs engulfed Israel as the Peres government was conducting talks with Syria in the US in early 1996. Three attacks were carried out in a few days: On 25th of February, a suicide bomb in a Jerusalem bus killed 27 people (Kessel, 1996c), followed by another bomb on the same bus route one week later, leaving 19 people dead. The day after that, a third bomb exploded outside a Tel Aviv mall, killing 13 (Schemann, 1996a).

When Syria refused to denounce the blasts, the pressure against the negotiators and Peres became increasingly intolerable and ultimately Peres suspended the talks. However, the reason for the suspension was not lack of regrets from the Syrian president, but actions conducted by Palestinians. In other words, Peres' suspension of the talks with the Syrians was due to a regional factor rather than a national or international. If it were not for Palestinian spoilers, the talks at Wye would probably have continued. This is not to say that there were no Israeli opposition to the peace process with the Syrians as well. The greatest opponent to Labour in this regard was its own dissenter group, The Third Way. The party that was created to prevent withdrawal from the Golan managed to mobilize a not inconsiderable part of the public. Withdrawing from the Golan they claimed, was impossible given that Syria had used the territory to shell them for 19 years. Retaining the Heights was therefore essential to the security of the state. The Third Way was supported by Likud's Netanyahu, who did his best in order to split traditional Labour voters away from their party. He played the Golan card for all it was worth, repeating how Peres would bring Israel down from the Golan Heights to the banks of Lake Tiberias (Cobban, 1999, p. 144). However, the borders with Syria had been quiet since 1974 and did not seem to represent an imminent danger, at least not compared to

the unstable situation in south of Lebanon and in the Palestinian territories. Even if the public was sceptic to the negotiations with the Syrians, the pressure to suspend the talks rose first and foremost after the lethal, Palestinian blasts. Hence, it seems that it was the regional factor which caused the Israelis to suspend the international negotiations with Syria. This suggests interaction both between the national, regional and international level. But what caused the interplay to develop?

On the 26th of February, only minutes after the second blast Patrick Cockburn from *The Independent* reported from the scene. Noteworthy, the rage and despair of passers-by were not only directed at Palestinians, but also at the prime minister. One yelled out that Peres should resign, while others shouted out his tribute to Rabin's assassin, Yigal Amir. Another repeated the suggestion of a far-right politician that they should blow up two buses in Palestinian cities for every bus blown up in Israel (Cockburn, 1996).

Naturally, sayings of traumatized people who have just been witnessed to the killings of 19 people and the injuring of a tenfold will be uttered in a state of affect. The sayings as such did not reflect the average opinion of the Israeli public. However, the Israeli mood did in fact change considerably in the aftermath of the three lethal blasts. After the first bombing, Shimon Peres had stated that peace, like war had its sacrifices. Now, people started feeling that peace was not worth these sacrifices. A conception that was to become increasingly more common was that the Israelis had been giving "everything" to the Palestinians but had gotten nothing in return. Instead, they lived their daily lives in fear, anxious for doing ordinary things like taking the bus and going shopping.

This tense atmosphere was exploited fully by the opposition. The prime minister candidate Netanyahu played on Israeli fears and insecurities and repeatedly hammered in the message "peace with security" and the need to "combat terrorism", though without mentioning how he was going to do it. In fact, the different strategies the two candidates used were an important determinant for the election outcome. Netanyahu had spent a great part of his life in the USA and had a knack for how to campaign in the new system. With the help of an American republican media advisor he used American-style television ads to attack Peres. By focusing on the lack of security the Oslo accord had brought Israel, Netanyahu succeeded in discrediting Peres as a weak leader who was neither able to bring peace nor security to the country (Peters, 1997). One of his methods was making commercials linking pictures of a

suicide blast with images of Peres walking hand in hand with Arafat (Rubin, 1997). That way he made a direct connection between the prime minister's peace policy and Palestinian violence and put the blame for innocent Israeli victims on Peres and his "partner in peace", Arafat. The opposition portrayed the upsurge in the violence as proof of the government's failure. Violence, they claimed, was increasing because of the compromises that were implemented, and continuing this policy would only intensify anti-Israeli aggression.

To further discredit the prime minister, Netanyahu exploited the public's long-standing low confidence in Peres. Peres, an intellectual rather than a soldier, who lacked both military credentials and moral credibility, was easily presented as a man prepared to sacrifice everything for the sake of peace. Peres' appearance on television after the explosions fuelled the impressions his opponent tried to seed: wearing a double-breasted suit and incapable of displaying the grief and anger that the public wanted to see, he talked of the importance of sticking to the peace effort when what the public wanted was blood and action (Schemann, 1996c).

Another illustrative aspect was the way the two prime minister candidates approached the public after a violent scene. A typical sight was Peres telling the public "this is an effort to kill the peace process" and Netanyahu responding "the attack is an additional proof of Peres' failure for depending on Arafat to bring security to the citizens of Israel" (Schemann, 1996b). As many Israelis felt that Peres' peace had only caused them harm, his remarks were not very convincing. Was peace more important to the prime minister than security? The Israelis wondered how they could believe in peace as long as Palestinians were blowing themselves up in order to take their lives. They did not understand why Peres was not pressuring the Palestinian president to end the violence. Peres however, claimed that Arafat was doing a reasonable job and that he generally lived up to his commitments. He stressed that Arafat had ceased involvement in anti-Israeli violent activities, and continuing the peace process would increase his ability to do more. In turn, this would enhance Israel's security, he said. Netanyahu on the other hand, argued that Arafat was unwilling to constrain the radical Palestinian groups, and in addition suggested that he was secretly helping them (Rubin, 1997).

Arafat did in fact undertake action to contain violence; after the four suicide bombs in March, he cracked down on Hamas and arrested hundreds of activists. Although this greatly reduced violence in the last two months of the election campaign, it was probably too late to reverse

his lost credibility. Likewise, the steps Peres undertook to contain the violence were not enough to comfort the Israelis. The fear had already slipped into their minds, and the opposition leader did his best in order to keep it that way. In the last TV debate before the election, Netanyahu constantly repeated the threat of an attack, using the word "fear" 11 times in 14 minutes. Peres ignored his opponent's accusations of being responsible for not obstructing the violence and uttered "The choice is a clear choice, between going forward with the peace process or backward to the old business of settlements, confrontations and violence" (quoted in Rodgers, 1996). Netanyahu's reply was once again that national security and saving Israeli lives should be Israel's primary concern, not peace policy.

The rhetoric illustrated how one of the candidates played on hope and the other on fear. It also revealed which of the two who held the deepest insight to the Israeli mind. It was the fear of becoming victim to haphazardly hit suicide attacks or other kinds of political violence that characterized the public's daily lives, not the hope for peace. Consequently, the electors turned to the candidate that seemed the most capable of changing their situation. Already after the first suicide bomb occurred in February, the polls suggested that this man was not the prime minister: whereas Peres had been leading over Netanyahu by over 15 points prior to the blast, a poll conducted immediately after showed that his lead dropped from 15 to three points (Kessel, 1996c). Thus it seems apparent that a third level in the form of radical Palestinian violence tore down the belief in Peres' peace policy. But could Peres have done anything differently in order to reverse the decreasing support?

For one, we can question whether calling for early elections was a strategically wise decision. According to Rabinovich (1998, p. 200), Peres felt he needed an impressive achievement during the intervening period if he were to hold the elections on the scheduled date on 29th of October. His promise of not holding early elections were based on a judgement that a satisfactory agreement with Syria would provide the key to a comprehensive peace of the Arab-Israeli conflict, which in turn would become a substantial platform for the elections. However, the pressure exerted against Peres both from within his own party and from the opposition was mounting already in early January. This made Peres conclude that rather than wait until November, he should call for early elections to obtain a clear mandate to pursue his peace policy as soon as possible (Cobban, 1999, p. 141). In retrospect, we can speculate if this decision cost him the victory. Given Israel's history of similar attacks, Peres should have realized the risk of a Palestinian bomb hitting civilians and reflected on the impact this would

have on the public. A violent attack could sway the support of the peace process. As we know, this is exactly what happened. Peres never managed to regain the support he lost during these fatal days. Had Peres decided to keep the election on the original date and additional blasts had not happened, Netanyahu's fear-based rhetoric would possibly not have had the same convincing force on the public. Enough voters could perhaps have been persuaded to back Peres.

Further and more specific, Peres should have taken advantage of the benefits of peace which had risen in the wake of the process. He could have stressed the fact that Arab states moving towards normalization with Israel demonstrated that there indeed was a new Middle East and that continuing the peace process would reduce the risk of war. Besides, the improved relations between neighbouring countries gave Israel new foreign investment and trade opportunities. For example, commercial relations had been established with the Gulf Council Cooperation and the process had also paved the way for participation in the first regional economic conference in Casablanca. Peres could also have used the peace treaty with Jordan as an example of the great gains that would follow peace: after almost 50 years of conflict between the two neighbours, borders had been opened and friendly exchanges both in forms of business and tourism had begun. In addition, countries like Morocco, Tunisia, Oman, Qatar as well as Muslim states such as Mauretania and Indonesia warmed their ties with the Jewish state (Nejad, 2004, p. 119). Stressing the achievements of peace would undoubtedly have made Peres' policy look better. However, the prime minister was only modestly exploiting these accomplishments.

Next, he could have used the Rabin murder to blacken Netanyahu and the right wing incitement that had led to the assassination. Moreover, Netanyahu was depending on the support of the religious parties, and being a secular politician, divorced and a self-confessed philanderer, Netanyahu had an unconvincing morale. If exploited by Peres, his past could easily have cost him religious votes. Other parts of Netanyahu's life were also vulnerable, among them his personal tie and loyalty to Israel. While still young, his parents had abandoned Israel for the US and as he grew up he had Americanized his name and allegedly considered settling there for good. Last, but not least the Likud leader lacked experience in high governmental office; he had never served in the cabinet (Morris, 1996b, p. 75). Thus, Peres could have had attacked his opponent in a number of ways in order to cast doubts about

his person. Paying him back in his own coin may very well have ensured Peres much-needed votes.

In addition, Peres never confronted Netanyahu on how he was planning on realizing "peace and security" or how he would carry out his "peace for peace" strategy. Neither did he force him to spell out how he would combat violence. Instead, he became an easy target for Netanyahu's accusations of not taking charge of the situation and allowing radical Palestinians to operate freely. When stressing the need to pursue peace irrespective of the political violence that terrified the public, Peres appeared to be more engaged over the political prestige a peace treaty would have brought than the concern of the Israeli public.

Summarizing events, we can say that although the personalities and strategies of the two candidates played a role in the election campaign that was vital to the future of the peace process, the focus was primarily on one element: the Palestinian. Parts of the Level II constituents played on the public's fear of the Level III regional element and managed to convince a majority, albeit a small one, that the Level I negotiations was damaging the country. So,whereas the turning point in the negotiations with Syria was the 1996 election, we can say that the turning point during the election campaign was the three suicide blasts. It was after these bombs that Peres lost support. And it was due to them that he suspended the talks at the Wye Plantation. Though out of Syria's control, the blasts obliterated the chances of resuming the talks before the election. This indicates that the actions of the regional factor not only influenced the national and international negotiation level, but that they in fact turned out decisive.

3.2.2 Hezbollah and Syria
The regional factor consisted not only of political violence carried out by radical Palestinians. Although this element was the main cause of the troubles Peres experienced prior to the election, he had problems in Northern Israel and South-Lebanon as well. The Lebanese Islamic Organization Hezbollah, labelled as terrorists by some and as a resistance movement by others, had carried out attacks against soldiers in Israeli occupied South-Lebanon and across the border in the north of Israel since the Lebanese Civil War. As Lebanon was something close to a Syrian satellite, these raids were usually controlled and permitted by Syria, at least to a certain extent. During the negotiations with Israel, Asad contained the activity of Hezbollah. After Peres suspended the talks, Syria saw no need to limit an

escalation in Lebanon anymore. The result was a dramatic increase in confrontations between Israel and the Islamic movement, with a series of attacks from both sides. The situation pressured Peres into taking action, which we know resulted in the extensive operation Grapes of Wrath in April.

The justification for the invasion may have been the need to defend the country against Hezbollah attacks, but Grapes of Wrath served other objectives as well. Peres' desire to win the election was one of them. After the suicide blasts in February/March, the prime minister wanted to change his dovish image and show the Israelis that he would never compromise on security. With the incursion of Lebanon, Peres refuted the opposition's greatest argument, which were accusations of him being soft on security matters. In that respect, Peres succeeded, as the invasion proved widely popular among the Israelis. There were also regional and international considerations: cracking down on Hezbollah was an attempt to minimize their threat and subsequently, change the Syrian-Israeli power balance in South Lebanon in Israel's favour (Nejad, 2004, p. 141-2).

Not surprisingly, the operation created deep resentment in Syria and the Arab world. The sense of betrayal was particularly tense in the Syrian leadership, as they had come close to normalize relations and conclude a peace treaty with the man responsible for the incursion only a few weeks earlier. World public opinion followed the Arabs and condemned the actions when news of the Qana massacre came out and pictures of the enormous damage the Israeli bombs had caused were broadcasted (Cobban, 1999, p. 163). Back in Syria, Asad was enraged by the events. According to his biographer Patrick Seale, he interpreted the assault as revealing Israel's true nature. Peres' goal he said, with his vision of economic cooperation and joint prosperity, was eliminating the concept of Arabism, and by extension the Arabs as a nation (Seale, 1996, p. 36). In a remark broadcasted by Syrian television, Asad addressed the Israeli Prime Minister as a "killer of children" and suggested that this title could help him win the election. Furthermore, he told the Syrian public that all events following the suspensions of the talks had been part of Peres' plan to apart and abandon the peace process (Cobban, 1999, p. 163).

While the operation may have had a positive effect on Peres' popularity among the Jewish population in Israel, it had the opposite outcome on Arab electors. Since Labour's victory in 1992, the government had been able to count on support from the approximately 14 %

electors from the Arab-Israeli community in Israel. This was only partly the case in the 1996 election. Many Arab-Israelis felt a loathing for the government responsible for the air and artillery strikes of fellow Arabs in Lebanon, and some community leaders urged Arabs not to vote for the prime minister in protest (Kessel, 1996b). The result was a large number of Arabs boycotting the polls or casting a blank ballot, while some 20.000 even voted for Netanyahu. Hence, the votes Peres gained among the Jewish public, he probably lost in the Arab community. When we know that Netanyahu won the election by only 30.000 votes, less than a 1 % margin (Peters, 1997), the Arab vote could very well have tipped the scale to the prime minister's advantage.

Thus there is no doubt that indirectly, Hezbollah played a part in the election outcome, albeit not as significant as that of radical Palestinians. Yet the role of the Islamic movement was somewhat different to that of the Palestinians because Hezbollah was closely linked to and supported by Syria. Syria had been a political and military force in Lebanon since they intervened in the Lebanese civil war in 1976, and with thousands of soldiers stationed in the country it played a pivotal role between Israel and Hezbollah. The importance of their influence was demonstrated in their key contribution in achieving a cease-fire between the parties after the operation Grapes of Wrath (Nejad, 2004, pp. 143-4). Although there is no clear evidence as to claim that Asad gave orders to conduct attacks into Israel or even that he gave them the green light, he most likely had the power to stop them. However, as he considered Hezbollah to be a legitimate resistance movement, he only exerted himself to do so if it paid Syria's national interests. This way, Asad managed to use the regional dimension as a bargaining card, despite the fact that he had been forced to give up his vision of comprehensive peace when the Palestinians and subsequently the Jordanians struck independent accords with Israel in 1993 and 1994.

Regardless of the extent of Asad's influence over Hezbollah, their activities had a similar effect in Israel as the actions of radical Palestinian groups: it spread fright among the public. In as much as fear of political violence was one of the main determinants of the electors' voting patterns and this fear was exploited by the opposition, we can assert that Hezbollah was indeed part of a third, regional factor that influenced the negotiations on both the national and the international level.

3.2.3 Peres versus Asad

As seen, the regional factor constituted a major spoiler in the negotiations between Syria and Israel. Notwithstanding, the play between Peres and Asad, the way they approach the regional element as well as each others was also important. Since Israel launched negotiations with the Palestinians parallel with the talks with Syria, the two different tracks were repeatedly referred to as "the peace process" in Israeli media, suggesting that the two paths were linked to each other. But after the Declaration of Principles was signed in 1993, Asad gave up the trail of a comprehensive peace, and Israel had always treated the two tracks separately. Thus, there was no obvious reason to consider them as dependent of each other. However, since Peres worked to advance both processes and his challenger was equally opposed to them, a vote for Peres was also a vote for the Israeli-Palestinian track. The interplay between the two tracks was thus inevitable. But were the two state leaders able to, or even willing to overlook the complicating third level in their approach to each others?

The first test concerning this challenge became evident in the aftermath of the suicide blasts which occurred parallel with the Wye Plantation talks. As seen, the result of the bombings was a prime minister experiencing the pressure against the negotiators and himself as close to an intolerable level, and even more so when Asad refused to denounce the attacks. Although the violence was Palestinian and not Syrian-initiated, Peres felt he could no longer justify continuing talks with a counterpart who was ignoring the traumas inflicted on Israeli civilians by a people many Israelis viewed as Syria's fellow Arabs. Arguably, had Asad condemned the attacks, Peres could perhaps have been able to defend the negotiations. When he did not, Peres instructed the delegation to return home. The incident indicates that Peres seemed incapable of treating the Syrian track unaffectedly of the Palestinian element.

What happened next was The Third Way exploiting the moment to criticize Syria, ally with Likud and start a strident anti-Asad campaign. They claimed that he had involved his country in the peace process only to improve Syria's relation with the US and that he had no real intentions to conclude a deal with Israel. Their argument was reinforced when Syria abstained from attending the Sharm al-Sheikh peace conference. When Asad did not counter the assertion, the scepticism of Syria's commitment to make peace with Syria increased further. Many Israelis started questioning why Asad did not constrain radical Palestinians in Damascus as well as Hezbollah in south Lebanon. When the Americans sided with Israel and enquired Asad to restrain Palestinian violence in order to advance the negotiations between

the PLO and Israel, Asad replied by turning the question around, asking why he was urged to silence Palestinian opposition, while no one was requesting the Israeli government to silence Israeli opposition. He underlined his point by stating that even if Syria was elated with the agreement, "it has no right to act as a policeman, preventing other people from expressing their views on a central cause which has been the focus of their struggle for several decades" (quoted in Nejad, 2004, p. 104). The Palestinians in Syria he asserted, were indigenous to the occupied territories and was part of legitimate expressions of national resistance to occupation (Nejad, 2004, p. 104).

The reason for Asad's statement was clearly that he used the Palestinian violence which ran out from bases within the borders of his country as a bargaining card. The Israelis knew that he had the power to contain the violence, but that he refused to take action unless he got something in return. Israel was still the stronger negotiating part, with the least to lose in case of failure and so Asad would not give away the few cards he held for free. While controlling radical Palestinians based outside Damascus as well as Hezbollah in South-Lebanon was one of these cards, normalization was the other. He was no more willing to give up this card for nothing, and reminded his critics that Syria and Israel were still officially in a state of war. Thus, it was easy for Peres to blame Asad's silence for the deteriorating Israeli belief in the Syrian peace talks. The intense pressure exerted against him in the weeks prior to the election could have been relieved had Asad agreed to meet him in a summit or conduct public diplomacy, he said.

Pinning the blame on Asad was of course a comfortable way for Peres of explaining why the negotiations stalled. He may even have been correct when he claimed that Syrian denouncements would have allowed the talks to continue. There is no doubt that confidence measures from Asad would have had a positive effect in Israeli society. Public diplomacy can have a decisive effect in order to build trust among foes and the parties need to get confirmation of the other side's sincerity in order to believe in it. As Putnam stresses (1988, p. 455), "messages from abroad can change minds, move the undecided and hearten those in the domestic minority". However, while Peres continued to press the Israeli emotional need to be convinced of Arab sincerity, he did not reflect on Syria's fear of Israeli domination. What's more, his focusing on Asad did not free him for the fact that he alone had the responsibility of suspending the negotiations. Although he attempted to undertake measures in order to change the situation, his initiatives did not appear thoroughly thought through. Take his suggestion of

a summit. Though it would probably have had a positive effect in the public, the viability of carrying it out in practice was minor. Peres' motive was most likely to revive the twenty year old picture of Egypt's Sadat travelling to Jerusalem to make peace; certain environments in the Israeli public actually expected Asad to do so to prove his good intentions. But as Jouejati asserted (2001) the Syrian President was not Sadat, and emulating the late Egyptian President was more difficult for Asad given Syria's Arabist role conception.

The main problem with the proposition however, concerned the nature of summits. Issues to be solved in a summit should be defined beforehand, gaps between the positions must be narrowed and it is important to be sure that the meeting will be the final stage of the agreement. More diplomatic prestige is at risk at the head of state level. When a summit fails, all other opportunities might close. Because neither the Israelis nor the Americans attempted to make preparations to such a meeting and the gaps were still wide and unresolved the summit could have resulted in failure. The two countries' relationship may have deteriorated seriously and created a crisis (Mu'allim, 1997, p. 82). Peres must have known this, and so it is plausible that his motives were merely to create a photo opportunity with Asad. Posing with the Syrian president would undoubtedly have increased his chances of success in the election. Noteworthy, Asad never dismissed the idea of attending a summit with Peres, in fact he asserted that he was ready to meet the Israeli prime minister at a later stage.

Peres continued to insist on having Asad assist him in persuading his people of the benefits of his peace line when his support decreased. In order to help him win the election, he asked the president for gestures and to reach out to the Israeli public. While Asad may have been hesitant in giving up too much and Israel felt he gave too little, he had in fact provided goodwill on several issues. One of them was lifting travel restrictions and renewing exit visas for the Syrian Jewish community back in 1993. With regards to normalization, Foreign Minister Shar'a had accepted questions from Israeli journalists in 1994 and later granted a lengthy interview to an Israeli news channel, an act which violated strict political taboos. Then, in January 1996, Mu'allim made an unprecedented move as he finally admitted to the Syrian public that his government was discussing to establish normal peaceful relations with Israel (Azm, 2000). In addition, Asad had taken considerable domestic steps to prepare the Syrians for normal relations with Israel. In the past, Israelis were usually being referred to as "the Zionists", and images of an Israeli had never been published in the strictly government-controlled media, as photographs were considered to humanize the enemy. Although the news

covered the negotiations only briefly, the media started to show pictures of Israelis already after the Madrid Conference, sometimes sitting together with Syrian officials (Elekhtiyar, author's interview, 2008). Similarly, the media rhetoric started referring to Israel and Israeli leaders by their proper names and titles instead of using words such as "the so-called prime minister of the Zionist entity" (Azm, 2000). Asad expected Peres to invest the same job in preparing his public as he had done himself. His negotiator, Mu'allim said in an interview,

> …They wanted *us* to convince *their* public that peace was in their interests. We prepared our public for peace with Israel … But they wanted us to speak in the Israeli media to prepare Israeli public opinion. They wanted us to allow Israelis to visit Syria. We considered such insistence a negative sign: When you do not prepare your own public for peace with your neighbour, this means you do not really have the intentions to make peace (1997, p.87).

Syrian reluctance to normalize relations and Israeli appeal to conduct public diplomacy was in fact the two main aspects that characterized the situation between Asad and Peres both prior to and in the aftermath of the suspension of the talks. A discrepancy between Syrian behaviour and Israeli expectancy of Syrian behaviour aroused immediately after the Rabin assassination. Peres had declared that he wished to resume negotiations with Syria, and Foreign Minister Shar'a had responded just hours later by stating that "something good might result from something bad" (quoted in Cobban, 1999, p. 108). Although this announcement actually represented a tonal change in the Syrian media, the Israelis were furious. Why was Asad not willing to pass his condolences, at least privately? The Israelis viewed this as a reflection of basic humanity and besides, Rabin and Peres had sent their condolences after the death of Asad's son Basil.

On that background, one can question whether Asad understood how serious the opposition to the peace process was in Israel. Did he realize that without Peres' winning the election, the negotiations were dead? An analysis published in a Syrian newspaper during the election campaign suggests that he did not. The analysis asserted that Israel's elections were of no importance to Syria and concluded by stressing that regardless of the party in power, the Israeli position towards the Golan Heights was the same (Nejad, 2004, p. 149).

In his two-level games theory, Putnam (1988, p. 452) argues that Level I negotiators are often badly misinformed about Level II politics on the opposing side and generally do not analyze each others internal policies well. In this case it appears that both of the two leaders failed to

grasp the situation on the opposite side. Peres did not consider that the important pan-Arab role Syria served in the region obstructed Asad from making certain concessions. He did not realize that by normalizing relations, Asad would have given up his strongest bargaining card before he was offered anything in return. It was Asad's observation of the Israeli reluctance to fulfil the Oslo Accord after the Palestinians normalized their relations with the Israelis that prevented him to do the same mistake (Taqi, author's interview, 2008). So, whereas Asad seemed unaware of the domestic situation in Israel, Peres did not understand Asad's reluctance for giving gestures and conducting public diplomacy. Could the outcome of the election have been different if the two leaders had used a different approach?

First of all, Peres should have stressed the distinction between Netanyahu and himself to Asad. He should have spelled out that the consequences of his opponent winning the election would be tantamount to an end of the peace process. An Israel without Peres would be an impossible negotiating partner and thus, he should have underlined the necessity that Asad ought to seize the opportunity.

However, Peres did not manage to convince the president to "cave into the Israeli agenda" as Azm called it (2000). As he considered it a pure domestic affair, Asad refused to interfere in the Israeli election. Furthermore, Asad failed to understand that the Israeli opposition did not differentiate between Syrians and Palestinians. Syrian condemnation of Palestinian violence could have created a distance between the two peace tracks and allowed the Israeli public to observe that the Syrians did not take part in political violence. Perhaps Israelis would have become more positive to the Syrian track.

But as observed, voting for Peres was not just voting for peace with Syria, but also for peace with the Palestinians. Neither of the Israeli political parties went to the election wanting to pursue just the Syrian track. The lone party in favour of only one track was The Third Way, which supported peace with the Palestinians. As long as Peres wanted to withdraw from the Golan Heights, The Third Way voters would never have supported Peres. Some undecided electors might of course have voted for Peres had they been convinced that at least one of the tracks - namely the Syrian - had realistic chances of achieving real peace. As the most important issue in the election campaign was the Palestinian rather than the Syrian track, this scenario is questionable.

Summing up, it appears that although good leadership could have altered the conditions, the third, regional level complicated the relation between Peres and Asad, and ultimately Syria and Israel. When Peres took office, he put all his eggs in one basket: Peace with Syria. As Asad refused to conduct public diplomacy or reach out to the Israelis in the hostile climate following the fatal suicide bombings, Netanyahu was able to describe Peres as having offered major concessions to a Syrian president uninterested in peace. Peres was portrayed as being fooled by the Syrians and was attacked for showing weakness in his impetuous rush for peace. With no Asad to disclaim the allegations, Peres became an easy target for Netanyahu. But at the end of the day it was an *Israeli* lection, and Peres should have taken charge of preparing his people for peace himself, instead of leaning to Asad's good will.

4. CONCLUSION

When Syrian and Israeli officials met for the first time during the International Peace Conference in Madrid, the prospects of achieving peace between the two neighbours appeared minor, to say the least. But with political shifts in Israel, and with the awakening to a new political reality for Syria in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet block, both sides softened their stands. Syria, Israel and the outside world seemed to be ready for peace.

As we know, peace was never achieved. In this thesis I have examined possible causes for the failure and my findings include a complex set of explanations. First, it was due to the strong, domestic pressure within Israel and next, the opposition's exploitation of the public's fear of violence. It was Peres' failed strategies; it was Asad's reluctance to reach out to the Israeli public. These explanations had one particular element in common: they arouse as a result of radical, political violence carried out by Palestinians and Hezbollah.

The most central aspect in the negotiations between Syria and Israel was all the way the regional element. This means that Putnam's two-level game theory is inadequate as solitary working tool. It was the interaction not only on two, but three levels that shaped the negotiations. The influence the third level exerted on Level I and Level II changed the game completely. In Israel, Level II acceptance to negotiate on Level I was bound up with actions of the regional actors on Level III. As seen, the consequence in Israel of regionally instigated violence was fierce national opposition to international negotiations. When the national Level II saw the disturbances caused by the regional Level III and Asad at the adversary's Level I refused to condemn the Level III actions, the Israeli Level II pressured Peres at Level I to suspend the negotiations.

This three-level game was also acted on by independent actors. Rabin used Level II as an excuse to put the Syrian talks on the backburner when progress on the Palestinian process was obtained. He played the different tracks against each other, blaming it on the Israelis' need to digest one track at a time. Peres on the other hand, not only called for early elections and suspended the international meetings at Wye, but additionally launched a war, all due to the regional aspect. Operation Grapes of Wrath had an immense impact on Peres popularity on both the national and international level: But while his support increased inside Israel, he was slated by his adversary in Syria. Whereas the Israeli Level II expected Asad to "deliver" on condemnation and constrain of the Level III, Asad was using the regional element as a

bargaining card. Though having the ability to contain Hezbollah and Damascus-based Palestinian violence, he did so only if it gained his interests.

Thus, the three-level game that was set during the negotiations between Syria and Israel influenced the negotiations on several aspects. It was the internal division in Israel caused by radical regional violence which turned out detrimental for the negotiations between Syria and Israel. The question is; would there have been serious enough obstacles to threaten the peace between the two states had the regional factor not been present?

I believe not. Syria and Israel had reached agreement on several of the core issues at the time of the suspension, like the depth of withdrawal, a timetable for extraction, the water question and normalization. The last issue to be discussed were security matters, and although not resolved, the American mediator Dennis Ross said the parties was so close to find a feasible solution that he characterized it as a basis for a breakthrough. This strongly indicates that peace was within reach. When Peres decided to go for early elections, an election campaign was initiated where Peres' opponent Netanyahu was able to discredit everything the prime minister had accomplished. The Likud leader also linked the Palestinian and the Syrian tracks together in order to distract the attention of the achievements at the Wye Plantation. It was fear of violence, not from Syria but Palestinians and the Lebanese Hezbollah, which made the Israelis choose a man that blamed Peres for the aggression. This was easy as long as Asad refused to play Peres' game and reach out to the Israeli public to demonstrate good will. Had the regional factor not been present, Peres would most likely have won the election and the negotiations with Syria would presumably have continued. Perhaps they would have managed to settle. But as long as a third party was standing in the shadows with its own agenda, the easiest nut to crack was apparently not so easy after all.

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