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# YEHOSHAFAT HARKABI AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

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*Yehoshafat Harkabi was the head of military intelligence for the Israel Defence Forces during the 1950s and an advisor to Prime Minister Begin on intelligence affairs. Currently he is the Hexter Professor of International Relations and Middle East Studies at Hebrew University in Jerusalem where he began teaching in 1959. Harkabi has spent over twenty-five years analyzing the Arab-Israeli conflict and has published numerous books, articles, and speeches which have been translated into many languages. Mark A. Berman traces the evolution of General Harkabi's thought from before the Six Day War in 1967 through the 1980s, and examines in particular Harkabi's reasons for advocating a return of the occupied territories to the Palestinians.*

There are two major factors that distinguish Yehoshafat Harkabi's work from that of other commentators on the Middle East. First, Harkabi began writing before the Six Day War, when few Israelis were seriously analyzing the conflict which had confronted their country since its creation; and he has continued to write through the 1980s, so that his thinking encompasses the evolution of the conflict with the Arabs over the course of three decades.

Second, with respect to this conflict, Harkabi has been accused of changing his political stance from hawk to dove. In 1968 Harkabi concluded that any attempt to assume a moderate negotiating position with the Arab states would be useless. More recently, however, Harkabi has written that Israel should agree to negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and allow the creation of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This seeming turnaround in Harkabi's position has been attacked by right-wing Israelis whose rejection of negotiations with the PLO and unwillingness to discuss territorial compromise in exchange for peace are often based on Harkabi's early characterization of the Arabs' attitude. In addition, the Israeli peace camp has all but ignored Harkabi's recent pronouncements, despite the seeming attractiveness of his message.

This paper will outline the evolution of Professor Harkabi's analysis of the Arab-Israeli conflict and, in doing so, will attempt to determine how his analysis has changed: whether Harkabi has radically abandoned his earlier approach or whether he has merely altered his position to conform to a changing reality. The paper will also examine the policy that Harkabi rec-

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ommends for Israel and will posit some reasons why his ideas have not been more widely accepted.

### The Early Arab Attitude

It is tempting to argue today that Arab statements during the first three decades of Israel's existence were misinterpreted. Even in the mid-1960s, at the peak of Arab rejectionism, many Israelis denied, for example, that President Gamal Abdel Nasser of the United Arab Republic meant what he said when he declared in 1965, "Arab unity means the liquidation of Israel and the expansionist dreams of Zionism."<sup>1</sup> The Israeli government itself did not publicize the Arab position, perhaps hoping that it was not as severe as it seemed. Harkabi's doctoral thesis, *The Arab Attitude in the Israel-Arab Conflict*, was an effort to expose the severity of the Arabs' rejection of Israel.

The title of the English edition, *Arab Attitudes to Israel*, is misleading. The Hebrew word *emdab* should have been correctly translated in the singular as "attitude" or "position." This mistranslation is significant because the thrust of Harkabi's argument is that from 1948 through the 1960s, there existed a single, homogeneous Arab attitude toward Israel.

According to Harkabi, political attitudes can be understood at three levels: emotions, ideology, and action. The first level reflects aspirations and ideals. They are expressed in terms of an objective, which is central to the attitude of any party to a conflict. The Arabs' attitude toward Israel was manifested by hostility and the desire for vengeance. The objective proclaimed by the Arab leaders was "the liquidation of the State of Israel."<sup>2</sup>

To disguise their objective and make it more acceptable to the world and to their own populations, Arab leaders would, on occasion, express their intentions ambiguously. Some of their vague slogans were cast in positive terms, calling for "the return of Palestine to its owners." Others were negative, such as "we shall not accept Zionist existence." Others used metaphorical or figurative expressions, such as "the light of Israel shall be extinguished."

Despite the different terms, Harkabi believed that the objective itself remained the same:

The different expressions present a single, but complex, objective. The objective is the liquidation of Israel, the rectification of the injustice done to the Arabs, the restoration of the refugees to their possessions, the restoration of the Palestinian people to its land, the removal of the aberrant factor, the restoration of the homeland to Arabism, the restoration of rights, rejection of the fact created by aggression, the implementation of justice, settlement according to legal rights, self-liberation, and so forth—it makes no difference

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1. President Gamal Abdel Nasser at the Festival of Unity, 22 February 1965, cited in Yehoshafat Harkabi, *The Arab Attitude in the Israel-Arab Conflict* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1972), 16.

2. *Ibid.*, 15.

what expression is used. The various formulas merely reflect different aspects of the same objective.<sup>3</sup>

The second level of Harkabi's social-psychological model of political attitudes is ideology. It is at this level that attempts are made to express emotions and aspirations verbally and to justify and explain the objective. The Arabs concentrated on denunciations of Zionism and exhortations of Arab grandeur, both of which were often anti-Semitic.<sup>4</sup> Although Arab literature has sometimes been excused by Orientalists as inherently extravagant, Harkabi insisted that it be assessed seriously:

If [ideology] does not indicate what [the Arabs] are going to do, it describes what they would like to do. It is a summation of the aims that beckon to them from afar, which, even if they do not mark out the road, determine the general direction of the journey. If it does not embody the policy, it represents the policy's foundations. It is the conscious-emotional background on which the policy is formed.<sup>5</sup>

The third level of Harkabi's model is action. At this level attempts are made to formulate the ideology and objective into an active policy or program. Historically, the program which the Arabs preferred varied from economic boycott and sporadic guerrilla attacks to all-out war. However, the unmistakable goal of each method was to realize the liquidation of the Israeli state.

Due to the tension created by the incongruity between Arab goals (liquidation) and reality (Israeli strength), it was clear even to Arab analysts that the Arabs feared the transition from ideas to action and consequently avoided taking that step. Not until the 1960s did Nasser develop a specific military program whose goal was the elimination of Israel. Harkabi believed that if the Arabs had realistically evaluated their objective in relation to their power from the beginning, they would have been spared much disquietude.<sup>6</sup>

Questioning by Arabs of their objectives was directed only at the feasibility of the methods and their likelihood of success. The objectives themselves remained clear: first, to eliminate the state of Israel, what Harkabi termed "politicide," and second, to annihilate its inhabitants—genocide.<sup>7</sup> According to Harkabi, the Arabs had developed a rigid ideology to justify this objective and, under Nasser's leadership, had begun to pursue an active policy which

3. *Ibid.*, 25.

4. For more on Arab anti-Semitism see Bernard Lewis, *Semites and anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (New York: Norton Publishing, 1986).

5. Harkabi, *Arab Attitude*, 379.

6. *Ibid.*, 377-378. For example, Harkabi cites Hasannin Haykal, who wrote in *al-Abram* (17 January 1964): "Sometimes it appears to me that the Arabs are more afraid to employ their power than the enemy. We have tremendous, unlimited strength at our disposal in the political, economic and military fields, but our hands tremble even before we start to employ it. Why? Because we do not possess a realistic estimate of this strength. Its utilization is therefore an adventure into the unknown."

7. Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Israel's Position in the Israel-Arab Conflict* (Tel-Aviv: Dvir Publishing, 1967), 19.

culminated in the Arab declarations and military preparations prior to the Six Day War of June 1967.

### The Possibility of Change

Despite his perception of the severity of the Arab attitude, Harkabi never asserted that it could not change or would not change. He merely cautioned Israelis not to exaggerate indications of a transformation in Arab opinions.

Harkabi outlined several factors which he thought might lead to an "incongruent" change in the Arab attitude toward Israel.<sup>8</sup> A greater Arab emphasis on internal industrialization and development might result in a decline in the importance of external considerations. The emergence of a new generation of Arab youth, which had not experienced the shame of subordination, might lead to a reconsideration of the maximalist goal of liquidation. The Arabs might become exhausted and despair of ever eliminating Israel, which would strengthen their tendency to acquiesce in the existing situation. External influences such as a change in the world's political climate—a thaw in the Cold War, for example—might lead the Arabs to reevaluate their objective. Finally, there might be a radical change of attitude among Arab leaders.<sup>9</sup>

The difficulty with respect to change in the Arab position was that any significant change would require a quantum jump from rejection to acceptance, for there obviously could be no such thing as partial liquidation. Harkabi recognized that the creation of Israel was, by its nature, an injustice to the Arab inhabitants of Palestine, and he stresses throughout his writings that Israelis must be aware of the depths of the Arabs' sense of injustice:

To understand the Arab attitude, the Israeli must understand what he would do were he an Arab, and what attitude he would adopt towards Israel; he should try to visualize the depths of the Arab conviction of injustice. Let him imagine that he is a Palestinian refugee, who has been uprooted from his neighborhood . . . who has been deprived of his property by strangers, and who regards its restitution as a matter of fundamental right and justice. Let him try to evaluate the force of the blow to Arab nationalism inflicted by Israel's existence and consolidation . . . let him ask himself what he would demand of Israel and what price he would exact for compromise.<sup>10</sup>

Harkabi rejected the Arab solution to this injustice—the destruction of the state of Israel—with two contentions. First, the injustice done to the Arabs was not completely the fault of the Jews, regardless of Arab claims to the

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8. *Ibid.*, 407. Harkabi differentiated between a "congruent" change, which leaves the basic attitude the same, and an "incongruent" change, which involves a reversal in attitude.

9. *Ibid.*, 406-419.

10. *Ibid.*, 405-406.

contrary. The Arabs themselves had to bear a large portion of the blame for their situation. Second, the elimination of Israel would be a further injustice:

I see the real tragedy as this—that it is not possible to correct the injustice in the way that the Arabs desire that it be corrected except by committing a greater injustice, the destruction of Israel.<sup>11</sup>

Despite his sympathy for the Arabs' feeling of injustice, Harkabi's point of embarkation has always been the existence of Israel, and his objective has always been for Israel to arrive at an agreement with the Arabs which is as beneficial to Israel as can be realistically expected.

### The Early Israeli Attitude

Harkabi's analysis of Israeli attitudes in the 1950s and 1960s is laid out in *Israel's Position in the Israel-Arab Conflict*.<sup>12</sup> Here he set up a polarity between two competing Israeli attitudes: "rigid," characterized by radical nationalism, and "soft," representing liberal-pacifism. The cornerstone of the rigid school's outlook was the Jews' historic and divine right to the land of Israel. This school's proponents approached the conflict as if they expected the Arabs to concede the Jews' greater rights to the land and willingly relinquish their own claims. Because this seemed impossible, the rigid school viewed the conflict as a war of existence. This group, according to Harkabi, possessed repressed expansionist tendencies which were defined in terms of a vision of "Greater Israel" which were justified by divine promises to the children of Israel and the exigency of expanded strategic objectives. They saw no possibility of appeasing the Arabs and suggested no peace plan for settling the conflict. They expected that the conflict would continue until the Arabs reconciled themselves to Israel's existence.

Harkabi criticized the rigid approach's reliance on military power. One of the many asymmetries that Harkabi sees in the Arab-Israeli conflict is that war can bring about a solution only for the Arabs. An Israeli military victory will only provide a temporary respite from the conflict because it is not possible for Israel to destroy all Arabs, nor can Israel inflict a military defeat so overwhelming as to pressure the Arabs into making peace.

Harkabi did not see widespread acceptance of the simplistic, radical-nationalistic approach in Israel and therefore devoted a considerably larger portion of this book to analyzing the more complicated "soft" approach. The focus of the soft approach was a desire for peace. Proponents of this school often attempted to disregard the severity of the conflict. They explained away

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11. Harkabi, *Israel's Position*, 55.

12. Even before publishing *Arab Attitude*, Harkabi had analyzed the different Israeli approaches to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although completed in 1966, *Israel's Position in the Israel-Arab Conflict* was not published until after the Six Day War in 1967. At the time of publication Harkabi added an introductory chapter in which he considered the immediate effect that the June war had on Israeli attitudes. A partial version of this work was initially written for Jean-Paul Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* Vol. 293, which was published in late June, 1967. Harkabi agreed to wait until that volume was released to publish the study in Hebrew.

the confrontation between Israeli and Arab nationalisms by blaming various external factors, such as incitement by the British mandatory authorities and the importation of fascism and Nazism into the Middle East during the 1930s and 1940s. Supporters of this approach anticipated that nationalist, left-leaning Arab governments would be more receptive to Zionism and Israel.

This second school described the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a series of missed opportunities resulting from the stubbornness of Jewish leadership or a few radical Arabs. Because it was the Israelis who prevented a peaceful settlement, the key to peace rested in Israel's hands alone. Proponents of the soft approach supported the concept of a binational state. They believed that there were groups of Arabs who not only accepted the existence of Israel but also hoped for its prosperity. They suggested that the conflict emanated from a mere misunderstanding by the Arabs of Zionism's good intentions.

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Harkabi rejected the soft approach in its entirety. He believed that by trying to mitigate the severity of the Arab-Israeli conflict, this school demonstrated a basic misunderstanding of the conflict's nature. Harkabi repeated his view that the "source of the Arab's irritation is our [the Jews'] coming to Palestine and its essence is our [the state of Israel's] existence."<sup>13</sup> The Arab position allowed no room for compromise.

Harkabi dismissed the desirability and the feasibility of a binational state. Supporters of the soft approach were willing to concede too high a price for peace—the central tenet of Zionism, the renewal of Jewish statehood. In addition, Harkabi considered a non-national solution to a nationalistic conflict as all but irrelevant.

Harkabi also rejected the possibility of a just solution to the conflict. The conflict was a clash between demands for justice on *both* sides. Therefore, according to Harkabi, there could be no such thing as a just solution. Those Arabs and Israelis who believed that their side would eventually triumph because of the justness of their cause were deluded. In *Arab Attitude* Harkabi wrote, "There is not always a 'natural justice' which has only to be revealed."<sup>14</sup>

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13. Harkabi, *Israel's Position*, 23.

14. Harkabi, *Arab Attitude*, 424.

There are only convenient solutions to political conflicts which are rationalized, after the fact, as just or good.

Neither extreme approach, Harkabi argued, would bring peace to Israel. The rigid approach failed because it disguised itself "in a facade of false reality" and because it strengthened the Arab position by stressing that the conflict was a "war of existence." The soft approach failed, despite its yearning for peace, because it viewed the conflict as an aberration, a product of Arab delusions with no basis in reality.

In *Israel's Position* Harkabi did not present a specific peace program. In fact, in none of his writings does he outline such a program. Harkabi is chiefly concerned with attitudes because he believes that the correct attitude will eventually lead to desired actions. Thus he constantly stresses the importance of Israeli cognizance of Arab feelings: "Our not recognizing the injustice done to the Arabs is understood by the Arabs as an insult, as if they are the dust of the earth."<sup>15</sup> The Arabs, for their part, need to recognize that the starting point of any compromise will have to be the existence of the state of Israel:

Renouncing the goal of liquidation is not an act of mercy on the part of the Arabs that entitles them to unlimited recompense. The Arabs cannot renounce liquidation in exchange for a similar goal and, thus, reinstate the initial objective.<sup>16</sup>

Peace will be attained only "by emphasizing that there is no alternative but for both sides to reconcile themselves with the reality of co-existence."<sup>17</sup>

### After the Six Day War

The Six Day War had a significant effect on the proponents of the soft approach:

In the face of Nasser's threats and the exhortations of Arab propaganda, which declared their aim in unambiguous language, it was impossible to deceive one's self with regard to the Arab objective . . . the soft approach was forced to reconcile itself to the reality [of the Arab objective] as it was clearly revealed.<sup>18</sup>

The war, in essence, led to a narrowing of political opinion and attitude in Israel, bringing the two extreme approaches closer together. Most of the movement, however, was made by proponents of the soft approach.

Harkabi also predicted that the new situation might one day bring about change within the rigid, radical-nationalist approach:

Perhaps the rigid approach will be influenced by their encounter with the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Israel has

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15. *Ibid.*, 58.

16. *Ibid.*, 61.

17. *Ibid.*, 59.

18. *Ibid.*, 6

been placed face to face with the severe problem of the Palestinian Arabs and their suffering, and it will be difficult to ignore those problems. The human aspects of the conflict have been revealed in full force.<sup>19</sup>

Despite the inherent difficulties Harkabi saw in maintaining the occupation, the same existential threat that justified Israel's preemptive attack on June 5 also justified Israel's occupation of the territories as long as the Arabs refused to enter into peace negotiations.<sup>20</sup>

In contradistinction to Israeli attitudes, there was little movement in the Arab position in the immediate aftermath of the war. The Arabs described their crushing defeat as a mere "set-back."<sup>21</sup> At the September 1967 Arab League Summit in Khartoum, Sudan, the Arabs issued a proclamation declaring there would be no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel. The three no's, in effect, reiterated the rejectionist position.

The discrepancy between the Arabs' continuing calls for the liquidation of Israel and their manifest inability to fulfill that goal would, Harkabi believed, eventually lead some Arabs to conceal the goal of liquidation. He initially sensed such a change before the Yom Kippur War of 1973 in the attitude of King Hussein of Jordan, within some groups in Egypt, and among West Bank Palestinians. He wrote in 1972:

The basic change brought by the Six Day War is that groups were formed which support the view that it is necessary to make peace with Israel. . . . The fact that [Egyptian] supporters of this point of view cannot express their position publicly is significant . . . it is possible that at the present stage the practical importance of these revelations is restricted to the fact that they serve as a warning to the leaders with respect to the public's commitment to the official position and its willingness to work and sacrifice for it.<sup>22</sup>

The Yom Kippur War complicated matters by obscuring Egypt's final objective: was it to make peace with Israel or simply to return Israel to its pre-1967 borders and prolong the conflict?

In 1975 Harkabi wrote in *Arab Strategies and Israel's Response* that the overall Arab attitude had generally remained unchanged, but what *had* changed was the shift in emphasis from discussions of the objective to deliberations on the program. He outlined three Arab schools of thought with respect to a preferred political program.

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19. Ibid., 7.

20. Ibid., 8.

21. Ibid., 9. See in particular Harkabi's compilation of Arab writings from the period after the Six-Day War, entitled *Arab Lessons from their Defeat* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1969). See also "The Israel-Arab Conflict at the 25th Anniversary of the State," *Gesher* No. 3-4 (December 1972), 147.

22. Harkabi, "The 25th Anniversary of the State," 138-139.

The first of these schools anticipated the eventual disintegration and self-liquidation of Israel. This school occupied the middle ground between the two other schools. Expounded by some intellectuals but associated with no particular constituency, this school served as a reservoir of ideas for the other two.

The second school, which Harkabi associated with moderate Arab states, particularly Egypt, and some West Bank Palestinians, was pragmatic—preferring to “reduce Israel to its natural dimensions” and to leave the question of peace or liquidation to the distant future. Its means were mainly political, although war might be used to stimulate the political process. It was this school that Harkabi hoped would eventually moderate its position to the point that it would be willing to make peace with Israel.

The third school, which Harkabi associated with the PLO and the rejectionist Arab states, viewed liquidation as a rapid process in which withdrawal from the occupied territories would simply be the first step. The violent rejection of Israel remained this school’s fundamental strategy, and liquidation was to be pursued through guerrilla attacks and occasional warfare.

All three schools demanded Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and a solution to the Palestinian problem. Yet, whereas previously, the objective was to be realized by an all-out war, now an incremental process starting with Israeli contraction is prognosticated.<sup>23</sup> Harkabi viewed this new approach as a significant moderation in the Arab position. A slower and gentler process, Harkabi thought, might allow diplomacy to create a situation in which the Arabs would agree to recover most of the territories they lost during the war in exchange for their termination of the conflict with Israel.

Aside from the changing Arab program vis-à-vis Israel, Harkabi stressed two other factors that evolved from Israel’s military victories in 1967 and 1973 and have come to dominate his more recent analyses. The first is the withering of international support for Israel and its policies. The second is the reemergence of the Palestinian problem as the primary issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

### *International Opinion*

Most alarming to Harkabi was the evaporation of international support for Israel, which became obvious during and after the Yom Kippur War. World opinion had supported Israel in 1948, when the Zionist leadership was receptive to compromise and the Arabs were not. Once the state was established, Israel was accepted as a legitimate status quo power by most of the world. World opinion continued to support Israel through the 1950s and 1960s when the Arab objective was to liquidate Israel. Thus, despite a preemptive attack by Israel in 1967, world opinion generally viewed the Six Day War as justified by Arab provocation.

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23. Harkabi, *Arab Strategies*, xii.

As the Arabs' emphasis began to shift away from their extreme ideology to a more moderate, incremental program, their position became less odious to world opinion. This shift coincided with both a growing movement in Israel that supported holding onto the territories and increasing international sympathy for the plight of the Palestinians.

A large, powerful state can often ignore public opinion. A small state which depends upon Western arms and goods for its survival cannot. The unprecedented size of the American military airlifts to Israel during the Yom Kippur War made it obvious to Harkabi that Israel fell into the latter category. Consequently, it was imperative that Israel retain the support of world public opinion, and particularly American opinion.

### *The Palestinians*

The re-emergence of the centrality of the Palestinian problem also complicated Arab-Israeli relations. Until 1948, the conflict in Palestine was primarily between Jewish Zionists and Palestinian Arabs. After the Arab defeat in 1948, the Palestinian role in the conflict receded and the conflict assumed an inter-state character.

As early as 1969, Harkabi made clear that there had been a fundamental change in the way the Arabs presented the conflict to the world:

As a result of the war . . . the confrontation with the Palestinians is presented as the basis of the conflict, as if it is a struggle for national liberation. The Arabs explain, in particular to foreigners, that the confrontation is not between the large Arab countries and a small Israel, rather between an oppressed people and an oppressing, aggressive, and colonialist state.<sup>24</sup>

Even though guerilla warfare could not succeed in eliminating Israel, especially after the Palestinian organizations were expelled from Jordan in the wake of Black September in 1970, it could make life in the Jewish state uncomfortable for Israelis and unattractive to immigrants.<sup>25</sup> Potentially more harmful to Israel's interests was that guerrilla attacks and terrorist incidents would keep the world's attention focused on Israel and its management of the Palestinian problem.

### *Israeli Policy*

Harkabi concluded that Israel should pursue a policy that took all of these factors into consideration. As long as the Arabs remained unwilling to accept

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24. Yehoshafat Harkabi, "The Palestinian Problem," from a speech delivered at Tel-Aviv University, 18 May 1969, in *Arabs, Palestinians and Israel*, 38-39.

25. On Sunday September 6, 1970, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) hijacked several commercial flights in reaction to the acceptance by Jordan and Egypt of US Secretary of State William Rogers' peace plan for the Middle East. During Black September the PFLP held more than four hundred airline passengers for varying periods of time while the PFLP demanded the release of imprisoned PFLP members in Western Europe.

Israel's existence, there would be no chance of attaining a peace settlement. Thus, Israel had to strive to keep world opinion on its side so that it would not be pressured into a partial agreement that threatened Israeli security.

To mitigate the detrimental effect of growing world sympathy for the Palestinians, Harkabi recommended a two-pronged policy. First, he recommended that the Israeli government change its policy of refraining from publicizing the severity of the Arab attitude towards Israel:

Describing the harshness of the conflict and the depth of the Arab opposition was frowned upon in many Israeli circles as gloomy paranoia . . . [as if] a harsh description of the conflict might aggravate it, whereas a moderate portrayal of the Arab viewpoints would exercise a moderating influence on them.<sup>26</sup>

The only way to influence the hard-line Arabs to change their political attitude was to constantly castigate it. The only way to close the open-endedness of the more moderate demands of the second Arab school was to gather the support of public opinion and to demand clarity of Arab leaders.

Harkabi's second recommendation was, and remains, to offer concessions to the Palestinians. The international community decided in United Nations Resolution 242 that Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories in exchange for a peace agreement with security guarantees. Harkabi argued that Israel should reiterate its acceptance of Resolution 242 and align its policy with the United Nations:

The debate would then shift from the principle of withdrawal, yes or no, to the security conditions that would have to be satisfied as a *quid pro quo* for withdrawal.<sup>27</sup>

Israel should therefore announce its willingness to accept a Palestinian state on the West Bank and to negotiate with the PLO, provided that the latter recognized the legitimacy of Israel's existence. This would switch the political burden onto the Palestinians. Harkabi was convinced that the Arabs would not respond to any Israeli acceptance of the "territory for peace" principle and that the PLO would not recognize Israel's right to exist. On a tactical level, therefore, this policy would improve Israel's standing in the world by aligning Israeli policy with the consensus position of the international community. It also might lead to a weakening of the PLO by creating tensions between its moderate and more extreme branches.

Of course, the possibility existed that the Arabs and the PLO would match Israel's willingness to make concessions. In that case, Israel's tactical position would become a strategic one, demanding security guarantees in exchange for withdrawal. If the Arabs were willing to do only a little to satisfy Israel's concerns, then the withdrawal would be partial. If the Arabs were willing to

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26. Harkabi, *Arab Strategies*, 97.

27. *Ibid.*, 112.

make larger security concessions, then Israel should return most of the territory with only minor border alterations.

### The Rise of the Likud

When Menachem Begin came to power in 1977, Harkabi was asked to be advisor to the prime minister on intelligence affairs. He quickly discovered that his policy ideas were irreconcilable with those of Prime Minister Begin, however, and he resigned. Harkabi considered Israel's continued rule over the territories, upon which Begin insisted, to be impossible.

This was true for three reasons. First, the twentieth century had been distinguished by the world's acceptance of the principle of self-determination. The Arabs would refuse to make peace with Israel unless the territories were returned and Palestinian self-determination recognized. This position would never be abandoned because it was supported by most states. Second, Israel had not succeeded in convincing even one other state that Israel should be allowed to keep the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Harkabi did not believe that Israel could indefinitely maintain a political position which was in opposition to the entire international community. Third, Harkabi did not think that even a high level of economic development in the territories would eventually convince the Palestinians to accept Israeli rule. Also, the territories' economic development would only encourage the Palestinians to stay put.<sup>28</sup>

Harkabi was not blind to the security risks that withdrawal from the territories would pose for Israel. Yet remaining in the territories, he believed, would pose greater risks because it would slowly alienate the American support upon which Israel continues to depend for its military supplies. A willingness to make territorial concessions, Harkabi believed, would empower Israel to mandate the "character of the peace." Israel could then demand not only practical security stipulations but also conditions which would alter the national mood of the Arab masses:

The diplomatic effort must be directed to accomplish one goal: how to bring about that any breakdown of the negotiations will result from the Arabs' refusal to accept the "character of the peace" and not from our refusal to withdraw in accordance with 242.<sup>29</sup>

In November of 1977 Egyptian president Anwar Sadat made his historic trip to Jerusalem. As early as 1971 Sadat had hinted at a willingness to make peace with Israel, but his ambiguity caused many, including Harkabi, to question Sadat's approach and ponder his true intention. However, Harkabi believed that with respect to Egypt, the time had come to switch from a

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28. The Israeli government still defends itself by pointing to the improved standard of living in the occupied territories. For a recent example see Joel Brinkley, "Angry at U.S. Rebuff, Jerusalem Tries to Show How Well It Treats Arabs," *New York Times*, 11 March 1990, 3.

29. Harkabi, "Letter to the Prime Minister," 135.

tactical position of offering concessions to a strategic one of making concessions in exchange for peace.

Following the signing of the Camp David Accords (1978) and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty (1979), it became clear that although Begin was willing to return all of the Sinai Desert to Egypt, he was unwilling to agree to any commitment which would lead to an end of Israeli rule in the occupied territories. Harkabi deplored the policy of Begin and the Likud. He believed that Begin's retreat from Resolution 242 and the principle of land for peace was unrealistic. As world opinion rapidly turned against Israel, particularly after Israel became bogged down in Lebanon in 1982, Harkabi became increasingly convinced that Begin's ideology was leading the country to ruin. In Harkabi's most recent book, *Fateful Decisions*, published in Hebrew in 1986, he critically examines the catastrophic effects that Begin's revisionist policies have had on Israel and warns of the national ruin to which revisionist ideology is leading. What is needed, according to Harkabi, is a nationwide reappraisal of political attitudes:

The assurance of our national existence demands a fundamental change in the political outlook that is dominant today, a change which depends on the public's understanding that the tribulations that have beset us in the past few years—the Lebanon War, the economy, our internal situation—emanate from an erroneous view of our situation, and that what has failed is not just a group of leaders who have left us a menacing inheritance, but a worldview that is the foundation of these failures.<sup>30</sup>

The first section of the book presents an overview of the evolution of the Arab and Israeli attitudes toward the conflict, and describes recent changes in the Arab and Palestinian position which Harkabi believes Israel should exploit in order to make peace. The second, longer section is an examination of the revisionist and Jewish nationalist ideologies which have come to dominate Israeli policymaking since 1977.

The basis of Harkabi's updated analysis is his differentiation between "grand design" and "policy"—between the ideal which a group hopes to achieve and the realistic objective which it believes is actually possible. What distinguished the Arab position for years was that both its grand design and its policy were committed to the liquidation of Israel. However, after the wars of 1967 and 1973 the Arabs began the process of separating grand design and policy. The most prominent illustration of this shift was provided by Sadat, who at one time supported the liquidation of Israel but eventually travelled to Jerusalem and made peace.

Harkabi believes that a similar change has slowly been taking place during the 1980s in other Arab countries and among Palestinians. To document this change Harkabi singles out several recent Arab political statements. The 1982

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30. Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Fateful Decisions* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1986), 7.

Fez Declaration, which was affirmed by every Arab state except Libya, called for the UN Security Council to draw up "guarantees for peace for all states of the region." Israel was not mentioned by name but the declaration was a significant improvement over previous ones which used to call for Israel's destruction. The "Agreement Between Jordan and the Palestinian Liberation Organization" of February 11, 1985, explicitly recognized the principle of "land in exchange for peace." In addition, high-ranking officials in the PLO have begun to write about the need for realistic, non-rejectionist positions which would require concessions even from the Palestinians.<sup>31</sup>

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. . . In the Arab-Israeli conflict, war can bring about a solution only for the Arabs. An Israeli military victory will only provide a temporary respite from the conflict because Israel can neither destroy all Arabs nor inflict a military defeat so overwhelming as to pressure the Arabs into making peace.

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In the preface of the English edition of *Fateful Decisions*, Harkabi cites "The Final Statement of the 19th Meeting of the Palestinian National Council," "The Palestinian Declaration of Independence," and the comments of Yasir Arafat at a news conference on December 14, 1988, at the conclusion of the Geneva Session of the General Assembly, as clear indications that the PLO has accepted Israel's existence and is willing to negotiate a two-state solution to the conflict.<sup>32</sup>

Harkabi argues that at the same time that the Arab position was moderating, the official Israeli position rejected the idea of withdrawing from Judea, Samaria, or the Gaza Strip, and Likud policies resulted in the de facto annexation of the occupied territories. In short, there was an historic reversal in the conflict. Israel replaced the Palestinians as the party which exclusively claimed the right of self-determination for itself but denied the right to its opponent. Harkabi insists that this policy and other unrealistic policies pursued by the Likud emanated from a basic misperception of reality.

Historically, according to Harkabi, it was mainstream (Labor) Zionism which had its worldview based in reality and whose ideology had evolved from the Jews' experience in the land of Palestine. Initially, the goal of

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31. For the texts of the Fez Declaration, the Hussein-Arafat Agreement, and other relevant documents, see the appendices in William Quandt ed., *The Middle East: Ten Years After Camp David* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1988).

32. For a more critical analysis of the PLO's recent statements see Phil Baum and Raphael Danziger, "A Regenerated PLO? The Palestine National Council's 1988 Resolutions and Their Repercussions," *Middle East Review* (Fall 1989), 17-25.

Zionism was to build a homeland in Palestine with an economic and social infrastructure. Only later did that goal include transforming the homeland into a state. Labor emphasized *process*, valued cumulative achievements, and tried to avoid making outside enemies.

In contradistinction to mainstream Zionism, revisionist Zionism, as propagated by Vladimir Jabotinsky and put into effect by Menachem Begin, was based on the Jews' experience in Eastern Europe.<sup>33</sup> Revisionism focused on intentions instead of results, possessed an exaggerated belief in the power of will, and considered reality as something which could be molded like clay in a potter's hands. The Jabotinsky-Begin ethos was *event* oriented, stressing the importance of the single dramatic act or occurrence. All that was needed to bridge the gap between reality and desired accomplishments was willpower and audacity.

Mainstream Zionism pursued two goals: national independence and social development. It was also open to compromise when maximal goals could not realistically be achieved. Harkabi calls this "instrumentalism." The revisionists were interested in only one goal: placing nationalism at the core of their ethos. They demonstrated a tendency toward nationalistic rhetoric and pomp which Harkabi calls "expressivism." According to Harkabi:

The Revisionists elevated risk-taking to the level of political strategy—"to die or to conquer the mountain," in the words of their anthem, as if only facing the danger of death could inspire the attempts to reach the summit and as if there were no intermediate achievements.<sup>34</sup>

Because the event-oriented approach fostered the idea that change could be brought about quickly, it was predisposed to militarism and the expressive use of force.

From the outset Harkabi has tried to convince Israelis to view the Arab-Israeli conflict objectively. The choices that Israel has had to make have never been between good and bad, as Harkabi is fond of saying, but between bad and worse. During the 1960s, for Israel to have chosen a continued state of war would have been bad; to have given in to Arab demands for the elimination of the Jewish state would have been worse. Today, to withdraw from the occupied territories in exchange for a fragile peace would be bad; to maintain control of the territories and do nothing while international support and the country itself deteriorate is worse. The perfect peace, which many in Israel demand, does not exist. Harkabi has warned Israelis that any solution to the conflict would not be permanent. "Even a settlement of the conflict does not mean the beginning of a 'golden age.' Nations have repeatedly made war and

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33. For contrasting analyses of Jabotinsky's writings see Shlomo Avineri, "The Political Thought of Vladimir Jabotinsky," and Yisrael Eldad, "Jabotinsky Distorted," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* No. 16 (Summer 1980), 3-39.

34. Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Israel's Fateful Hour* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 72.

made peace, and with each reconciliation the seed of a future conflict was sown."<sup>35</sup>

Harkabi provides Israel with no comprehensive peace plan, nor with any model peace treaty, as is the fashion among many Middle East commentators. He merely presents facts and imperatives derived from his analysis of Israel's situation. Chief among these is the fact that the world does not accept Israel's continued rule over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. On the contrary, the world recognizes the Palestinians' right of self-determination in the territories in a form that does not threaten Israel's legitimate security concerns.

The existence of a large Arab minority in the territories poses a demographic problem not only for Israeli democracy but also for Israeli security. Harkabi insists that it is difficult, but possible, for a state to defend poor borders, but a state cannot defend itself if half its population is loyal to the enemy. To continue to administer the occupation is a practical impossibility, only highlighted by the *intifada* which Harkabi foresaw as early as 1982 when he warned of a "Belfastization" of Jewish and Arab relations.

The solution, therefore, is withdrawal in exchange for peace and substantial security guarantees:

A bad agreement is better than none at all. By its very existence, an agreement will give rise to elements that diminish distrust and create parties with vested interests in the perpetuation of the agreement . . . the negotiators will have to create facts and guarantees which make a return to hostilities difficult.<sup>36</sup>

Reality will eventually force Israel to negotiate with the PLO and to withdraw from the territories. The danger, Harkabi warns, is that time has begun to work against Israel. In the past, Israel might have been able to reach a compromise with King Hussein for some type of Palestinian confederation with Jordan. That opportunity no longer exists. Now there will not be peace without an independent Palestinian state. The longer Israel waits, the more numerous the concessions it will eventually have to grant, and the fewer the guarantees it will receive in return.

### Evaluating Harkabi

Nearly every one of Harkabi's earlier conclusions has been superseded by a new and often contradictory one. Change, particularly political change, is not often accepted graciously in Israel. It is not surprising therefore that Harkabi's analyses have lost favor with supporters of the Likud, one of whose members of Knesset has accused Harkabi of being "emotionally unbalanced and suffering from a terminal disease that has inexplicably turned him against his country."<sup>37</sup>

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35. Harkabi, *Arab Attitude*, 419.

36. Yehoshafat Harkabi, "A Policy for the Moment of Truth," *The Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 13 February 1988, 10.

37. Robert Friedman, "Israel's Fateful Hour," *World Policy Journal* No. 6 (Spring 1989), 360.

Harkabi explained the evolution of his outlook in the Hebrew edition of *Fateful Decisions*:

A political book grows old quickly, with the change of time. I have written a large number of essays on the conflict, yet there have been individuals who have, on the basis of one of my essays, "frozen" my position, as if it were permanently fixed and does not change in relation to developments in the historical situation.<sup>38</sup>

Some of Harkabi's predictions have come true—while there are still groups of Arabs who are in favor of the original objective Harkabi outlined in *Arab Attitude*, it is apparent from some of the Arabs' more recent writings that their attitude has moderated. In fact, Harkabi has been told that it was his analysis and criticism of the Palestinian position that was most responsible for Yasir Arafat's decision to reconsider the PLO's policies and recognize Israel.<sup>39</sup>

Harkabi's changed political recommendations are the result of historical developments. For example, prior to the 1967 war there was nothing that Israel could offer to its opponents who demanded the Jewish state's liquidation. After the war, however, the situation had changed; Israel could offer to return the conquered territories. Harkabi never argued that Israel should control the

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West Bank and Gaza Strip forever; he argued that Israel should hold onto the area only so long as the Arabs refused to make peace. He recognized immediately the dilemmas that occupation would pose and thought it would force proponents of the rigid approach to recognize that there was no military solution. This did not occur, and as soon as pressure began to mount within Israel to annex the occupied territories, Harkabi made his position explicit.

When international support for Israel began to evaporate in the early 1970s and the Palestinian problem emerged in full force, Harkabi recognized that there were tactical political gains which Israel could reap short of a peace agreement. Therefore he recommended a moderate policy that recognized the principle of land for peace, and he did not categorically refuse to deal with

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38. Harkabi, *Fateful Decisions*, 349.

39. Author's interview with Harkabi.

the PLO. Harkabi believed that the Arabs would reject Israel's initiatives and that their rejection would in turn benefit Israel. By the mid-1980s any opportunity which once existed for Israel to capitalize on a moderate position had evaporated. By then, Harkabi believed, the PLO had co-opted this momentum leaving Israel with no choice but to agree to concessions in order to rid itself of a situation in the occupied territories which had become unbearable and threatened Israel's democratic existence.

Harkabi's contention that Israeli moderation is warranted by important changes in the Arab position, particularly in that of the PLO, is not as convincing as his analysis of Israel's situation. Neither the Fez Declaration nor the Hussein-Arafat Agreement mention Israel by name, and the meanings of both become clear only after some strained interpretation. In addition, the latter agreement was abrogated by King Hussein when he lost confidence in Arafat's pledge to accept Resolution 242.

Harkabi has asserted that he recognizes the difficulty the Palestinians face in abolishing the Palestinian Covenant and that they have, in effect, made it inoperative by refusing to refer to it. It is not surprising, however, that there are Israelis who remain skeptical. In the 1960s Harkabi wrote that it was necessary to examine numerous textual illustrations of Arab pronouncements to document the Arab aim to liquidate Israel. Certainly a parallel situation exists today. The fact that Harkabi does not provide extensive textual proof of the change in the Arab attitude suggests that, perhaps, he cannot.

It is true that one can find examples of more moderate PLO pronouncements. Yasir Arafat's deputy, Abu Iyad, wrote recently:

The plan itself is simple. The state of Israel would live in peace with the state of Palestine, which would be established in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with East Jerusalem as its capital. This final settlement would be part of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli agreement that would establish peace between the Jewish and Arab states, thus allaying Israel's security concerns . . . The proposal of a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli problem is *not* the first phase of a plan to liquidate the Jewish state.<sup>40</sup>

At the same time, we find statements by Arafat such as:

Our oppressive enemies, the enemies of life and God, will be destroyed, and their schemes and those of their masters will not harm our blessed *intifada* nor stop the sweeping current of the masses, which takes on its way the strongest fortresses of injustice, oppression, aggression and occupation. . . . The *intifada* will continue and escalate until the last soldier of the Zionist occupation is removed from our homeland.<sup>41</sup>

40. Salah Khalaf, "Lowering the Sword," *Foreign Policy* No. 78 (Spring 1990), 96-98.

41. "Arafat's 'Monthly Message' to Palestinians," from Baghdad Voice of the PLO (Arabic), 10 February 1990, translated in *Near East Daily Reports*, 20 February 1990.

The contrast between the language that the PLO uses to address its own people and that which it uses in conversation with Western countries does not instill confidence in the sincerity of the Palestinians' new political attitude.

Harkabi's attack on revisionist Zionism is also problematic. If his intention is to influence Israelis to change their own attitudes, a more effective approach might have been to also examine, in greater depth, the faults and mistakes of mainstream Zionist ideology and the Labor party. After all, it was Labor Zionism which ignored the problem posed by the Arab inhabitants of Palestine. Labor created the socialist-based economy which began to crumble even before the Likud took power. By focusing his criticism on the Likud, Harkabi gives the impression that he is satisfied with Labor. Although this is not true, Harkabi only mentions Labor's flaws in passing.

One critic has singled out Harkabi's preoccupation with revisionism as the major flaw in *Fateful Decisions*.<sup>42</sup> By assuming a dualist approach to Zionism, critics argue that Harkabi has pushed the Zionist ideological debate backwards.

One of Harkabi's most admirable traits is his effort to analyze his own motivations in order to maintain objectivity. In *Arab Attitude* he wrote:

My own tendency is to believe in the importance of ideology, though not as an abstract system but as a dimension of history, and I have been interested for several years in the question of the relationship between ideology and action. Hence I am liable to exaggerate the importance of ideology.<sup>43</sup>

With respect to revisionism, Harkabi has fallen into the trap of exaggerating ideology. In fact it was the ultra-nationalist Begin who returned Sinai to Egypt and agreed to an autonomy program for the West Bank, both of which indicate his willingness to compromise on ideology.

Harkabi is correct in asserting that withdrawal from the occupied territories will solve the demographic problem posed by the Arab population. Withdrawal will not, however, eliminate the military threat posed by Iraqi or Syrian ballistic missiles. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait has brought this fact home to Israelis and non-Israelis alike. The Palestinian problem may have emerged as the central problem in the Arab-Israeli conflict but it is not the only one. Once Israel withdraws from the territories it will have nothing left to offer the other Arab states who still call for Israel's destruction, leaving Israel in a somewhat similar position to that which existed before 1967. Although Harkabi attempts to frame the choices open to Israel as "bad and worse," which alternative is bad and which is worse is not as clear as Harkabi suggests.

Despite its deficiencies, the core of Harkabi's analysis in *Arab Strategies* still offers the most convincing rationale for Israel to pursue a moderate foreign

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42. Rosenberg, "About Fateful Decisions: Antitheses," in *Kivunim* No. 36 (1987), 197-206.

43. Harkabi, *Arab Attitude*, 423.

policy. Israel's backbone is the support it receives from the United States, and it is essential that Israel avoid alienating that backing. This can only be assured by an Israeli willingness to negotiate with all Arab representatives, including the PLO. At present, it is unnecessary for Israel to recognize a Palestinian right to statehood. Such a right is not recognized by the United States government, it is not a right which would presently be accepted by the majority of Israel's electorate, and it is not a prerequisite for the PLO to commence negotiations.

The best guideline for Israeli policy is that outlined by Harkabi in 1975:

The diplomatic effort must be directed to accomplish one goal: how to bring about that any breakdown of the negotiations will result from the Arabs' refusal to accept the "character of the peace" and not from our refusal to withdraw in accordance with 242.<sup>44</sup>

If Israel were to pursue a policy which was open to territorial concessions, the focus would shift to Israel's legitimate security demands—which is where the focus should be—and away from the Palestinians' demands. Negotiations will undoubtedly be protracted, but a process-oriented approach would allow attitudes in Israel to moderate as Israelis see what they could receive in return for withdrawal.

Harkabi observed in 1966 that a leader generally has more influence on the attitude of the people than the people on the attitude of the leader:

It is more reasonable to assume that a change in policy will bring about a change in ideology than the reverse, that a change in ideology will bring about a change in policy.<sup>45</sup>

What Israel lacks most is a leader who is courageous enough to break with old policies and outmoded ideology. Despite Harkabi's harsh criticisms of Menachem Begin, it was chiefly Begin who orchestrated Israel's most remarkable diplomatic triumph, the Peace Treaty with Egypt. It was also Begin who persuaded Israelis, from all political spectrums, that the West Bank and Gaza Strip were beyond any diplomatic solution. Walter Lippman, who believes that the essential responsibility of all leaders is diplomacy, writes: "For a diplomat to think that rival and unfriendly powers cannot be brought to a settlement is to forget what diplomacy is about."<sup>46</sup> It will take a leader with charisma comparable to that of Menachem Begin's, regardless of political affiliation, to convince Israelis that the time has come for Israel to return to the path of diplomacy. Unfortunately, no such leader seems to be on the political horizon.

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44. Harkabi, "Letter to the Prime Minister," 135.

45. Harkabi, *Arab Attitude*, 413.

46. Thomas G. Peterson, ed., *Containment and the Cold War* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1973), 41-51.

