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AND CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS  
IN THE ARAB-ISRAELI PEACE  
NEGOTIATIONS**

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## **Abstract**

*In the various Arab-Israeli peace negotiations that have taken place since the late 1970s, each party entered the process, and continues to function within it, from the vantage point of different political expectations and cultural perceptions. These differences derive from the political features and social structures of the Arab parties and the Israeli side, which range from hierarchical to networked. Israel leans toward hierarchical order, whereas the Arab parties are more networked; these differences in the social and political environments influence the negotiating culture of each party. Hierarchical states develop goal-oriented negotiating cultures, whereas networked states have process-oriented negotiating cultures. The expectations that each side has of the other side to fulfill its part of the bargain are different as well; in hierarchical states such expectations are based on contracts, whereas in networked states such expectations are based on trust. Because it is unlikely that different cultural perceptions and the gap between the parties can be significantly bridged, it may be possible to cope with mutual problems if all parties were willing to accept a reality of perceptual pluralism (i.e., negotiating asymmetric arrangements, rather than each party insisting on mutual accommodation based on its own perspective).*

*Keywords:* hierarchical states, networked states, goal-oriented negotiating cultures, process-oriented negotiating cultures, contract, trust, perceptual pluralism

Much of the history of Arab-Israeli peace negotiations can be described in terms of mistrust and a lack of understanding by each side with respect to the psychological and political needs of the other. Egyptians and Jordanians openly express disappointment and dissatisfaction with the quality and nature of relations with Israel after their recognition of the Jewish state and the signing of treaties with it. Similarly, the Palestinians blame the collapse of the peace process in September 2000 on what they perceive as Israel's unwillingness to recognize their national rights. Israelis, too, are not lacking in criticism of their neighbors, feeling that they received precious little in exchange for territorial compromise with the Arabs. Perceptions and expectations that both parties have of each other, and of the nature of the peace to be established between them, heighten the dissatisfaction that both sides feel with respect to the type and quality of normalization, economic ties, continued military rearmament, and the like.

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An understanding of the cultural perceptions and political expectations that each side brings with it to peace negotiations and peace implementation may help to (a) trace the sources of the political setbacks that have characterized much of the peace process, (b) follow the logic that lies behind the strategies adopted by the parties, and (c) suggest an alternative mode of thinking that may reveal the reality of the negotiating process in a way that might reduce the gap in the parties' mutual expectations that derive from differing perceptions. Our central argument is as follows:

First, the mistrust and misunderstanding that each side feels in the Egyptian-Israeli, Jordanian-Israeli, Palestinian-Israeli, and Syrian-Israeli peace negotiations is rooted in the differences between the negotiating cultures within which each party to the process operates. These can be characterized as *goal-oriented* or *process-oriented* policies.

Second, these two types of negotiating cultures are the result of different sociopolitical structures. These differing structures, *hierarchical* or *networked*, are associated with goal-oriented and process-oriented political cultures, respectively. Hierarchical political orders create contractually based states whose behavior is based on goal orientation. Networked political orders create trust-based societies in which the state and other social elements use process-oriented techniques.

Third, the Israeli and Arab positions vis-à-vis the negotiating process, and the ways that the positions of each side are understood by the other, are derived from the differences in their social structures and negotiating cultures. The Arab parties lean toward ad hoc process-oriented approaches as their primary negotiating method, whereas the Israeli approach reflects a goal-oriented perspective. The Arabs prefer to emphasize elements of trust in the relationship, whereas the Israelis insist on contractual, binding agreements.

Finally, because of these discrepancies between the parties' cultural perceptions, success in any future negotiations may require adopting what we refer to as a "perceptual pluralism" approach, in which key issues (security, economics, diplomatic relations, facets of normalization) should be considered simultaneously around a single table, thus making it possible to find points of agreement.



## **Goal-Oriented and Process-Oriented Negotiating Cultures**

Definitions of culture range from “historically transmitted pattern[s] of meanings embodied in symbols” (Geertz, 1973, p. 89), or a “shared system of meaning” (Hudson, 1997, pp. 10–11), to “everything we know, think and feel about the world” (Milton, 1996, p. 215). In the context of international ties, Kenneth Wilkenning’s (1999, p. 705) definition is particularly useful: that culture is an “ideas toolkit” that people use in order to analyze reality and make decisions based on this analysis.

Political actors perceive events—and determine interests—through a cultural prism. This is not to say that decision-makers from different cultural backgrounds cannot “speak the same language” in terms of understanding the practical needs of their interlocutors. Yet even when technical arrangements can be worked out rather smoothly, opposing parties from different cultural backgrounds often are unable to fulfill each other’s expectations with respect to issues that lie in the spheres of psychology or principle. This is because each side’s cultural perception emphasizes different values, goals, and ways of interpreting reality—particularly when that reality is intangible and conceptual. This is true even if the negotiators themselves have similar educational backgrounds (such as having been educated at American universities—as many of them are) because they must still function within the social and political framework of the country and society that they represent.

Along these lines, we can differentiate between what we refer to as goal-oriented and process-oriented negotiating cultures. Goal-oriented negotiating cultures are present when unitary states negotiate on the basis of concrete interests and clear-cut priorities that each side tries to achieve—or, as Howard Aldrich (1979, p. 4) put it, “boundary-maintaining activity systems.” Each side is able to map its interests out relatively clearly, and negotiating outcomes are seen as static. Furthermore, interests are homogeneous and decisions are made by unitary decision-makers (Table I). Success for each side is based on the maximum achievement of interests with a minimum cost and is gauged by the nature of the contractual agreement signed by the parties at the end of the negotiating process (Lasswell, 1975, p. 122). In other words, the



goal-oriented approach is a unidirectional process, undertaken by parties that represent the interests of the states in question, that can lead to agreements based on contractual documents (Rondinelli, 1993, pp. 21, 106). The process-oriented approach, on the other hand, is a far more complex and varied process in which the parties to negotiations are not unitary (in other words, the state represents a range of interests and political forces) and in which issues between the parties include not only formal questions such as security arrangements and the like, but also other political and social issues that are intertwined with security issues (Grindle & Thomas, 1991, p. 126).

In goal-oriented negotiations, in which the rules of the game are clear and formal, agreements signed by two or more sovereign and domestically all-powerful states are supposed to bring an end to conflict and usher in an era of normalization based on mutual recognition and respect for the needs and interests of the other side. By contrast, process-oriented negotiations are based on an ongoing and essentially never-ending process of negotiation and conflict (although not necessarily military conflict) in which the parties to the conflict include not only governments, but a range of other political, economic, and social elements that are constantly changing the rules of the game (Table I). In such situations, one cannot

**Table I.** A Comparison Between Hierarchical and Networked States

Dimension	Hierarchical states	Networked states
Political structure is	Vertical	Horizontal
Social identity	Etatist	Sectorial
Nature of identities	Relatively solid	Ambivalent, many-faceted
The state is an outcome of	Political modernization	External imposition
Attributes of boundaries	Solid and fixed	Blurred and dynamic
Power structure	Monocentric	Polycentric
Nature of interests	Homogeneous, preconceived	Heterogeneous, post-factum
Preferences	Stable and consistent	Partially overlapping, competing and conflicting
Nature of decision-making	Unitary decision-makers, singular issue-space	Heterogeneous decision-makers, multidimensional issue-space
Rules of the game	Clear and formal procedures	Negotiated according to unofficial rules of the game based on informal ties
Level of state penetration in society	High	Low
Stability is reached via	Equilibrium point between overt, fixed interests	Network connectivity, linkages, social embeddedness
Political consequences	Relatively static reality	Permanent fluidity

speak of formal agreements between states as the be-all-end-all of the conflict, or of any real likelihood of ending the conflict altogether. Rather, although individual categories of conflict may be temporarily dealt with (such as the threat of war), other categories of conflict will be strengthened and may have a greater effect on the relationship. Moreover, in process-oriented negotiations, conflicts on levels that may have been temporarily “solved” through the signing of agreements can re-emerge as the constellation of power within the states in question changes.

Whether states operate according to the logic of goal-oriented or process-oriented negotiating cultures will depend on the cultural perceptions and social structure of the states under investigation. When one party to a conflict negotiates from the goal-oriented perspective while the other operates on the basis of process-oriented premises, one may assume that it will be difficult for each to fully understand the psychological needs of the other as their relationship evolves. The deeper the differences in the parties’ cultural perceptions and social structures, the greater the likelihood for misunderstanding.

A clear illustration of the difficulties in negotiations between goal-oriented and process-oriented interlocutors is provided by Geerte Hofstede (1996, pp. 49–50), who related a story about negotiations between Swedish and Saudi businessmen. The Swedes had spent a considerable period of time and accrued significant expenses in trying to woo a pair of Saudi brothers to sign a contract with them. After 2 years, the Saudis suddenly informed the Swedes that they were ready to sign. The Swedish company, being the product of a hierarchical society and exhibiting goal-oriented behavior, transferred the Swedish businessman who had built up the relationship over 2 years with the Saudis to a more senior position and sent a different employee to finalize the contractual arrangements with the Saudis. From the Swedish perspective, the contract was to be signed between two companies and the appropriate functionaries of the appropriate rank would be responsible for maintaining the corporate relationship. The Saudis, however, did not see things that way at all and immediately threatened to break off the negotiations once they realized that their Swedish interlocutor was no longer to be responsible for maintaining the relationship with them. Such behavior is typical of a networked society with process-oriented modes of behavior. From the Saudi perspective, the relationship with the Swedish

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company had to be based on the development of a trusting relationship with particular individuals and not with a faceless corporate bureaucracy—otherwise the contract would not be worth the paper on which it was written. The situation was not resolved until the Swedish company heads reassigned the original corporate official to the Saudi account.

### **Negotiating Strategies and Social Structure**

Fine (1984, p. 241) pointed out that negotiating styles are contingent on the internal structure of the parties. Although he was referring to organizations, his analysis is equally relevant to states engaged in negotiations. The world's states can, in general terms, be seen as occupying points along a continuum from hierarchical to networked (Mishal & Reich, 1996, pp. 7–8).

Hierarchical-type states are domestically powerful states in which the popular culture reinforces the role of the state as the sole legitimate representative for society. Although the inhabitants of such a state may have many cultural differences, the overwhelming majority of them view social unity among the various social groups and support for the state as an overriding goal. In hierarchical states, most activity is vertical in the sense that information and actions move from the government down to the populace or from the populace up to the government. Because most political, economic, and social activity is vertical, links between the hierarchical state and other states will mainly be at the official level. In the presence of a powerful, dominant central authority, laws and directives can be enforced by the state and there is little need for the state to engage in constant process-oriented domestic negotiations with various social factions in order to preserve the political, social, economic, and sometimes military balance of power within the state.

The hierarchical state is characterized by an *etatist* culture in which the population largely identifies with the state and does not view itself as having powerful links with other states and cultures outside its borders (Nordlinger, 1987, p. 364). In such states, the population is content to accept the primacy of the state and rarely questions its right to at least a partial monopoly on links between the state and other states. This reinforces the position of the state as the primary legitimate actor at the international level, thus ensuring that external links will be based on formal

agreements and negotiations will be characterized by goal-oriented approaches. The popular psychocultural perspective is affected by the reality of a powerful state that is able to resolve conflicts and make concrete and binding decisions within the society. In other words, although other elements of society may formulate their own outlooks regarding peace negotiations, the hierarchical state overwhelmingly dominates cultural *perceptions* with respect to the negotiating process. These include the nature of identity, which is relatively solid; the power structure, which tends to be monocentric; and a high level of state penetration in society (Table I).

Networked-type states, on the other hand, have fragmented societies and sectorial polities. The various subgroups and communities undergo different socialization experiences, often have different cultural backgrounds, and possess different patterns of social communication. This induces members of the various communities to view each other and the state in differing ways. Consequently, the popular culture does not uniformly view the state as legitimate in the same way, and many social factions question its right to speak for them. Many members of the populace cling to old ethnic/communal affiliations and identities, and many tend to view the state and its institutions with suspicion (Dunshire, 1996, p. 300). As a result, the likelihood that the state will enjoy the same level of legitimacy in the eyes of the population as is the case in hierarchical states is very low. The society is made up of what Migdal (1988, p. 28) referred to as a *melange* of social organizations, of which the state is only one, and much of the society will keep it at a distance, as Clifford Geertz (1973) suggested:

The populations of the . . . states tend to regard the immediate, concrete, and to them inherently meaningful sorting implicit in . . . diversity as the substantial content of their individuality. To subordinate these specific and familiar identifications in favor of a generalized commitment to an overarching and somewhat alien civil order is to risk a loss of definition as an autonomous person, either through absorption into a culturally undifferentiated mass or, what is even worse, through a domination by some other rival ethnic, racial or linguistic community that is able to imbue that order with the temper of its own personality. (pp. 258–259)

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This does not mean that the state is totally incapable of penetrating the society, or that it does not enjoy any popular legitimacy. In fact, in virtually all cases, the state and its institutions—for historical, military, political, or economic reasons—will come to be associated with a particular community within the society. That element views the state as a legitimate expression of its nationalist aspirations while other communities in the society view the state either in a negative light, or functionally in terms of the services and benefits it can provide them with, but without a sense of emotional identification.

Networked states are thus operating in an environment in which societies are in constant conflict and balance-of-power struggles are ongoing and never-ending. More specifically, in such an environment, social identity is marked by sectorial division, the nature of identities is multifaceted, boundaries tend to be blurred and dynamic, and the nature of interest is heterogeneous (Table I). As a result, their psychocultural perspectives are grounded in process-oriented modes of thinking. Under such circumstances, the state does not enjoy dominance in formulating perceptions of the other side in negotiations or in the determination of the type of relationship that should be the outcome of such negotiations.

Negotiators from hierarchical and networked states thus approach the task of negotiation in fundamentally different ways. Raymond Cohen (1991, pp. 30–31), in his discussion of American and Japanese negotiating styles, described the differences in approaches between what are essentially a hierarchical state and a networked state. The American negotiating style reflected a “can-do” approach based on a conception of the environment as something that could be manipulated; the negotiator could set an objective, develop a plan to reach that objective, and then change the environment in accordance with the plan. The Japanese, on the other hand, focused more on the cultivation of personal relationships between the negotiators and did not consider the choices before them to be of an “either-or” nature. The Japanese negotiating style was based on the conception that people cannot manipulate the environment but rather must adapt to it. Hence, dichotomous choices do not really exist and the world is seen as a much more complex and ambiguous place.

Israelis and Arabs, too, entered the negotiating process with fundamentally different approaches and expectations. The Israelis, like the Americans, came from a largely hierarchical political tradition (originating in European political culture) and tended to view negotiations in concrete, dichotomous terms and to set clear goals for the negotiations, including the achievement of a clear-cut contractual document to be signed by both sides and adhered to word for word. The Arabs, like the Japanese, came from networked political traditions and tended to avoid dichotomous approaches to reality (such as “total peace” or “no peace at all”), and they did not consider it realistic or desirable to achieve contractual agreements, favoring instead the development of a climate of trust and personal relationships. Hence, the two sides may develop different expectations of the negotiating process conditioned by their societal and cultural backgrounds.

### **Negotiating Cultures and Types of Agreements: Contract or Trust**

Negotiators from hierarchical states will, presumably, think in terms of solutions to conflicts via goal-oriented actions vis-à-vis other states. Hence, they will emphasize the importance of *contracts* in bringing about an end to conflict through binding formalistic and legalistic documents. Once drawn up and signed, such a document behooves its signatories to accept its stipulations and to view it as the be-all-end-all of the relationship between them. In contrast, negotiators from networked states will put less stock in signed agreements, viewing them as only one element in the multifaceted relationship between their state and that of their interlocutors. Consequently, as they are used to thinking in terms of process-oriented modes, the negotiators will view the building of informal agreements based on *trust* to be far more critical, and ultimately binding, than contracts. Even with the development of trust, however, one may expect that it is immensely difficult for networked societies to think in terms of ending conflicts, instead viewing conflict in circular terms—just like within their own societies—with changes in relationships with other states constantly evolving and not necessarily leading to the permanent ending of conflict.

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The concept of trust implies the reduction of complexity through “pruning the future” (Luhmann, 1979, p. 13). In effect, trust requires that one believe that his or her interests will be safeguarded by other parties and that no one will try to take advantage of a given situation in order to advance interests that are contrary to those of the person doing the trusting. Indeed, one can only trust a partner who is not only in a position in which he or she can abuse the trust, but in fact has a *substantial interest in doing so*. The act of trusting is one in which the parties realize that, by trusting, they are making themselves vulnerable (Giddens, 1990, part 1). The choice, therefore, to depend on informal agreements based on trust (rather than formal contractual agreements) is taken when no real alternative exists for binding contractual relationships—in other words, when networked states must negotiate and reach agreements with each other.

Trust requires openness through the provision of rapid and direct disclosure of information (Zand, 1997, p. 114), and this clearly makes those doing the trusting vulnerable because they are providing their interlocutors—and potential adversaries—with important information that could presumably be used against them. However, we are dealing in such cases primarily with networked states, and sensitive information will most likely be available regardless because of the pluralistic nature of power and information in networked states as opposed to hierarchical ones.

Relationships involving trust may be frequently re-evaluated, and the most effective way of doing this is through creating a sense of *familiarity* between the parties. Familiarity makes it easier to predict the future actions of a partner on the basis of his or her past or present behavior, and thus serves as a prerequisite for informal understandings based on trust.

Clearly, from the point of view of the unitary state, contractual binding agreements are preferable to informal ones based on trust. Contractual agreements seem to provide a greater degree of security, and hence it is not surprising that powerful states usually gravitate toward the signing of such agreements in order to codify the relationship between them. Codification of the rules of the game between parties could be seen as a way of diminishing uncertainty and establishing “concrete” guarantees as to the future behavior of an interlocutor, because detailed contracts provide

guidelines for behavior for each of the parties as well as yardsticks for what each side can expect of the other (Mishal & Morag, 2000, p. 523). However, because the international system possesses no court that can effectively rule on breaches of contract and force compliance to its rulings, international negotiations that lead to the signing of a peace treaty (as well as other types of international agreements) must also rely on a certain degree of trust. This fact notwithstanding, a qualitative difference exists between interstate relations based on such formal agreements and those based on unwritten “understandings.”

Informal agreements are based on trust to a far greater extent because they possess both deniability and flexibility. Presumably, it is more difficult for states whose relations are based on codified agreements to operate outside the clauses of the agreement without risking putting the entire agreement in jeopardy. Hence, there is a certain rigidity involved: States may still enjoy some leeway in *interpreting* the agreement, but they must more or less stick to its dictates. In this rigidity lies the strength of such agreements, but they can only be carried out by states with a high degree of domestic power and social penetration—that are able to force significant elements of their respective societies to comply with the agreement.

In cases in which one hierarchical state is negotiating with another, one may assume that the “currency” of reciprocity is equivalent, or at least mutually translatable. In other words, it is reasonable to expect that the give-and-take process in negotiations will be understood in a similar fashion by both sides, and that the values that each side would like to achieve will be perceived in a similar fashion by the interlocutors. Both sides can rank values—security, economic ties, diplomatic relations—and possess a similar ranking pattern. As a result, such states engage in goal-oriented negotiations, and, when agreements are reached, they are carried out in a contractual manner with little need for reliance on a great degree of mutual trust.

Networked states, because they represent multiple entities as far as power is concerned, can be expected to negotiate with each other on several levels, and informal agreements may be reached at some levels and not at others. In any case, most of the agreements reached between two networked states will be informal and based



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on trust, because most of the interlocutors will not represent the formal power of the state—and the official echelon in such states represents only one of a number of social actors within the state. Each negotiating level will base its reciprocity (Keohane, 1986) on similar kinds of values (although these values may differ widely between negotiating levels), and the mechanisms of reciprocity will be based on informal arrangements rooted in mutual trust. The negotiating culture will thus be based on process-oriented approaches.

The negotiating process between networked states is thus infinitely more complex, more reliant on trust as the mechanism of reciprocity, and will contain numerous levels of relationships, some of which may be temporarily settled while others may continue to be in conflict. Networked states, such as those of the Arab world, may cooperate to a large extent in the diplomatic sphere, developing bilateral relationships based on trust, and yet compete intensively with one another in the domestic political sphere as each tries to woo support from its rival's population. Such complex relationships are typical of ties between networked states.

The most complex and problematic type of negotiations and agreements occur when a hierarchical state and a networked state negotiate important agreements over critical issues. Under such circumstances, the representatives of the hierarchical state may assume that their colleagues on the other side of the negotiating table represent similar modes of thinking—rather than viewing them as particular political players among a range of others that exist in their particular state. Hence, particular issues at one level of the relationship will be discussed in order, perhaps, to pave the way for informal understandings based on trust. When such different expectations, norms, and values are being exchanged, neither side may have a true grasp of the goals and viewpoint of the other. Consequently, agreements reached between them will result in mutual misunderstandings and disappointment as post-agreement realities fall far short of the expectations on both sides.

## **Negotiating Cultures and Social Structures in the Arab-Israeli Context**

To a great extent, the complex reality of hierarchical and networked structures exists in the Arab-Israeli arena. It is useful to describe the political structure of the Arab state as a triangle. The three poles of the triad enact, reproduce, and modify the relationship structure. More specifically, one may argue that Arab political systems resemble a social network comprising three interrelated spheres: state authority, supra-state (pan-Arab or pan-Islamic) movements, and ethnic or clan communal affiliations (Talmud & Mishal, 2000, p. 182). In most cases, one element is more dominant at the expense of the others, but all three are present to some degree. There is also a rising business elite that thrives outside the state apparatus and often constitutes a fourth element in Arab society (Ya'ari, 2000, p. 1). Hence, informal groups—cliques or factions—remain central to political and social action in all Arab societies, and social relations are ever-changing, with groups alternately fusing and splitting (Bill & Springborg, 1990, pp. 87–99).

Traditional Arab culture is based on a set of social and normative values that are anchored in Arab and Islamic history. On the whole, it emphasizes the importance of preservation and protection of communal and individual honor and the unity of families, villages, and regions in facing outside challenges (Abu-Nimer, 1996, p. 44). The emphasis on honor and group unity thus assures the construction of several levels of group affiliation in which the perceived rights and prerogatives of each group are to be jealously guarded. Individual Arabs may have familial, regional, religious, national, and pan-Arab identities that uneasily coexist in their minds. Naturally, these varying—and often competitive—identities do not have the same kind of hold over the individual. These identities are ranked in order of preference according to the background and outlook of the individual. Thus, for some Arabs, the most powerful identification is religious (such as for many Shi'ite Muslims in southern Iraq, Alawis in northwestern Syria, Copts in Egypt, and Maronites in Lebanon) while for others it can be national (such as for many Egyptians, Moroccans, and Palestinians) and for still others it can be familial/tribal (such as for many Saudis, Yemenis, and Jordanians). The “pluralism of identities” that most Arabs deal with was bound to

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create heterogeneous, multifaceted societies in which there was a range of affiliations and loyalties (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996, chapter 4).

Consequently, the social orders created in Arab states are characterized by ongoing conflicts, negotiations, and changing balances of power between various groups anxious to increase their influence, defend their honor, and strengthen their internal cohesion. Although group cohesion of one sort or another is encouraged by all human societies, Arab societies are considered more collectivist in mentality than most Western cultures. They thus constitute what Hofstede (1996, p. 62) called “high context societies” in which the virtues of ingroup harmony and maintenance of “face” are of supreme importance.

The modern Arab states created during the 1940s and 1950s were thus bound to function as mirrors of their society—as any state does. Initially, many Arab states appeared reluctant to strengthen their own separate identities, for which there was not always a strong historical precedent (such as in the case of Syria and Jordan), and appeared to give way to powerful pan-Arab feelings among the population. Various attempts at political union—some that were briefly implemented and some that did not pass the negotiation stage—such as between Egypt and Syria (and later, Yemen), between Jordan and Iraq, between Libya and Sudan, and between Egypt and Libya all attest to the power of pan-Arab sentiments (Sela, 1998, pp. 41–54, 69–74). Similarly, internal divisions based on religio-ethnicity were very powerful and produced political regimes in some Arab states that were based on particular communities that were able to dominate the state and use it to advance their own interests (like the Alawis in Syria and the Sunnis in Iraq).

The differences in the social structures of the various Arab states—which were the result in large part of their ethnic makeup, geopolitics, and particular histories—enhance variability in terms of the extent to which they adhered to the model of networked societies. Although all the Arab states are networked in relation to Israel and other Western states, among themselves, some are more networked than others. All Arab states possess an internal dynamic in which the state, the community (ethnically based or otherwise), and the pan-Arab or pan-Islamic movements compete.

Those Arab states that are more hierarchical (relatively speaking) have governments that are more powerful and able to assert their power to a greater extent over the society. Those Arab states that are more networked have weaker governments that sometimes prove unable to assert themselves in the face of the power of community or pan-ideological forces. In this context, we can focus on those neighboring Arab states or entities with which Israel has either signed peace agreements or is involved in negotiations: Egypt, Jordan, the Palestinians, and Syria. The extent to which they are networked has had an important effect on the nature of their relationship with Israel. Egypt, because of its unique history and the nature of its society, is relatively more hierarchical, whereas Israel's other Arab neighbors are far more networked.

### ***Egypt: State and Networks***

Unlike most Arab states in the Middle East, Egypt has existed as a state in largely the same geographical region for millennia. Egypt was blessed with a long and culturally rich history, including long periods of independent or largely independent existence, as well as a geographically compact and relatively ethnically homogeneous population. Unlike virtually all other Arab states, there does exist in ethnic, cultural, and linguistic terms something approximating an average Egyptian (van Nieuwenhuijze, 1971, p. 264). This relative ethnic homogeneity is, of course, a critical precondition to the establishment of an *etatist*-national identity because the state and nation are seen as reflecting and complementing each other.

Egypt has a long pre-Arab and pre-Islamic Pharaonic tradition, but it is also an Arab state, which means that it has also been affected by pan-Arab ideas. Politically self-conscious Egyptians were often torn between their identification with Egypt and its particularist cultural heritage and their identity as Arabs (Gershoni, 1981, p. 29). The mood of war weariness after the 1973 conflict with Israel led President Sadat to strengthen the position of the Egyptian state at the expense of pan-Arab identification (Owen, 1992, p. 92). This, in turn, strengthened the hierarchical nature of the Egyptian state.

The emphasis on Egypt as first and foremost an *Egyptian* state served to bind the society strongly to the state and its institutions, thus ensuring that links with foreign states, particularly semi-

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adversaries like Israel, will flow through the Egyptian government. As a result, the relationship with Israel is more formalized compared to that of Israel with other Arab states. Because the Egyptian state is relatively powerful vis-à-vis its society, its negotiation strategies are to some degree goal-oriented. That being said, Egypt still identifies itself as a part of the Arab world and of Arab history and culture, and thus is far more networked in nature than Israel.

### ***Jordan: Community and Networks***

Whereas Egypt represents a relatively hierarchical—in Arab terms—*etatist*-national state, Jordan is a far more networked state with a powerful communal base. Jordan lacks Egypt's advantages of having had a prolonged existence as a state, having an ethnically homogeneous population, and being geographically distinct. It was a product of the marriage of tribal Hejazi society, former nomads turned peasants who lived east of the Jordan River, and Palestinians. The original settled population of former nomads—the Transjordanians—were organized along clan and local community lines and were divided among themselves. In turn, the influx of Palestinians into the area during the early part of the century provided a rallying focus for the Transjordanian communities who viewed the Palestinians as enemies (Dann, 1989, pp. 4–8). The Hashemite leadership also saw itself as a force for Arab unification under the banner of pan-Arabism.

The Hashemites continued to carry the banner of pan-Arabism even after they were relegated to ruling only Jordan. The founder and first ruler of Jordan, King Abdallah, attempted to justify his 1950 annexation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem on the grounds that it was part of a process of Arab unification. After the 1987 outbreak of the Palestinian *intifada*, Jordan decided in July 1988 to sever its links with the West Bank. However, King Hussein reaffirmed his commitment to pan-Arabism and Arab unification—thus alluding to possible grounds for a Jordanian return to the West Bank (Layne, 1994, p. 28). Although pan-Arabism played an important doctrinal role in Jordan, its use to justify the existence of the Hashemite regime reflected the fact that Jordan's society was deeply divided along communal-national lines. Egypt did not necessarily have to use pan-Arab doctrines to justify its existence as a state, whereas Jordan did. The Jordanian kingdom, insofar as it plays the role of a nation-state, is dependent

on the development of a powerful *etatist*-national identity among Jordanians. As this has not happened, the state has faced serious difficulties in attempting to penetrate society—with the exception of those inhabitants of Transjordanian and Bedouin background who prop it up and view it as legitimate. The state in Jordan is in effect a proxy of the dominant communal-national group.

The upshot of this sectorial reality is that Jordan is a weak state, and rather than the political establishment enjoying solid standing among broad sections of society, the state apparatus is controlled by particular communal elements. Jordan's society is thus a networked society in which important matters are often dealt with in communal circles rather than at the official level, and in which communal groups forge ties with governments or communities in other states. Such ties have occurred, for example, between Palestinians in Jordan and the Syrian regime during the civil war of 1970; between the Palestinians in Jordan and those on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, especially during the first Palestinian *intifada* of 1987–1993 and the current round of violence that began in September 2000; or the ties between the Hashemite ruling house and Israel. Hence, the state and society are non-hierarchical—with horizontal ties with external states and communities that are often more important than vertical ties between the society and the state.

In a highly networked state like Jordan, a balance of power among the various communal groups—or the dominance of some at the expense of others—is maintained through ongoing negotiations and application of pressure. Agreements between the various groups tend to be flexible, so as to leave them enough maneuvering room, and hence informal. Informality is also a necessity because the agreements are carried out at the social rather than state level, and because making them formal would undermine the perceived sovereignty of the state. With respect to external ties, these sectorial or communal groups typically establish links with outside social and political elements. Nowhere has this phenomenon found better expression than in the close relations between the Islamist groups in Jordan and the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, in the West Bank and Gaza. These links too tend to be informal, because the communal leaders, not being leaders of sovereign states, are not empowered to act as agents of the state or to guarantee that others outside the community will adhere to agreements that they

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have reached with third parties. As a result, trust becomes critical because the agreements are informal, deniable, and provide no long-term guarantees.

### ***The Palestinians: Networks on Top of Networks***

The relationship between Israel and the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has been based primarily on networks, because the Palestinians did not, and still do not fully have, a state that can try to penetrate society and create a hierarchical system in which external links flow through it. The statehood element of the triangle formed by the state, the national movement, and community is extremely weak and was nonexistent for most of modern Palestinian history. Hence, unlike Egypt, the society evolved independently of a state. Although communal affiliations play a role in dividing Palestinian society along regional and extended-family lines, these have not played a significant role in shaping Palestinian identity and claims to self-determination vis-à-vis Israel. Rather, during the 1950s and 1960s it was the participation of young Palestinian activists in pan-Arab movements that played a crucial role in the historical development of Palestinian identity (Mishal, 1986, chapter 1).

Palestinian national consciousness developed, in its initial stages, as part of the general national awakening among the Arabs in the early part of the 20th century. As a result of the influx of Jews into Palestine during this period, Palestinian leaders found themselves waging a struggle for Arab self-determination against Zionism. The struggle with the Jews became a major factor in the creation of a unified pan-Arab national identity among the community of Arabic speakers. With the creation of Israel and the beginning of the Palestinian diaspora in 1948, the Palestinians became caught up in the general struggle between the Arab states and Israel. Having been unable to create their own state, the Palestinians could not attempt to develop a coherent *etatist*-nationalism and a hierarchical society. Being more or less ethnically homogeneous, the Palestinians did not face the same kind of problems that Jordan faced and continues to face. Egypt had both a strong state and a homogeneous population; Jordan had a state but a severely communally divided polity; and the Palestinians had a relatively homogeneous population but no state.

Lacking a state that could penetrate and unify society and around which they could build their own separate national identity, the Palestinians adhered to the pan-Arabist vision, hoping that in so doing, they would be able to influence political developments in the inter-Arab arena. Such developments, they hoped, would encourage a strategy of all-out war against Israel that would lead to its destruction and the return of the Palestinians to their homeland. In the 1960s, Palestinian politics became a microcosm of Arab politics in general, with different Palestinian factions supported by rival interests in the Arab world such as Nasserists, Syrian Ba'athists, Iraqi Ba'athists, and, later, Islamists. The Arab states actively encouraged their own "pet" factions among the Palestinians because by 1948, and perhaps even before then, the Palestinian issue had become part and parcel of internal politics within most of the Arab states and was therefore "too important" for the Arabs "to leave in the hands of the Palestinians." The Palestinians were mainly interested in returning to their homeland and were perfectly happy to do so within the political framework of an all-Arab state (Hadi, 1997, p. 165). Indeed, because the Palestinians could not return to their homeland without massive Arab support and military intervention, they had to appeal to universalistic ideals that were larger than their own narrow nationalism (Peres, 1997, pp. 24–25). Hence, in the early stages of the Palestinian struggle, the Palestinians portrayed themselves as fighting for "Arab" rather than "Palestinian" rights.

Having no state or formal political institutions, and being divided among themselves by the ideological currents gripping the Arab world, Palestinian society emerged as a networked society par excellence. Palestinians lacked any kind of hierarchical or networked state, instead being divided among other states, none of which (with the partial exception of Jordan) attempted to assimilate them into their societies.

The Arab-Israeli war of 1967 hastened the decline of the pan-Arab vision, with the result that by the 1970s, most Arab states began emphasizing their own *etatist*-national identities at the expense of pan-Arabist doctrine. Egypt dramatically defected from the common Arab attitude and position toward Israel by signing a separate peace treaty with it in 1979. The Palestinians too began to increasingly emphasize their own particularistic national identity at this time, and this was given a great boost by



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the *intifada* that began 8 years later. By that time, the Palestinians were emphasizing their “rights” to form an independent state and minimizing the ideological distinctions between them. Even the ostensibly Islamist movements such as Hamas were emphasizing Palestinian statehood as an ultimate political goal, rather than the inclusion of Palestine in some broader all-Islamic state (Mishal & Sela, 2000, chapter 2). Hence, Palestinian politics had come full circle.

Nonetheless, because the Palestinians continued to lack a state, they were unable to build centralized institutions and a hierarchical political order. The decentralized nature of Palestinian society has become all the more evident in the wake of the 1993 Oslo Accords, even though the Palestinians had been given an opportunity to begin constructing a hierarchical state to penetrate and centralize Palestinian society via the Palestinian Authority (PA). They have in fact made the PA into a reflection of their society—an amalgamation of decentralized and perpetually quarreling factions.

The 1993 Declaration of Principles (the first in the series of agreements that came to be known as the Oslo Accords) signed between Israel and the PLO was followed by the establishment of the PA in May 1994. Despite the creation of a quasi-official Palestinian government, the pattern of relations between Israel and the Palestinians did not change significantly. The existence of a PA that supposedly represents all of the Palestinians inside and outside the PLO notwithstanding, relations between Israel and the PLO (especially Fatah) dominated the scene prior to the collapse of the negotiating process in September 2000. Yasser Arafat’s hesitancy to transfer real authority from Fatah to the organs of the PA thus suggests that his relations with Israel will be, from his point of view, based on process-oriented negotiating strategies of informal agreements relying largely on trust.

The outbreak of what the Palestinians refer to as the “Al-Aqsa *intifada*” in September 2000 has deepened the networked nature of the PA. On the one hand, Israeli efforts to prevent terrorist attacks have led to a military siege around (and sometimes within) PA territories, and this has inhibited the PA’s ability to maintain control over parts of its territory. On the other hand, maintaining and even deepening the diffuse and networked nature of the PA has served Arafat’s interests, making it possible for him to

claim that he does not exercise total control over the Palestinian population and thus cannot be blamed for acts of terrorism carried out by extremist elements. Israel has faced critical challenges in trying to cope with the threat posed to it by terrorist elements operating from PA territory. Because Israeli military pressure on the PA alone has not proved effective, Israel has adopted a networked multilevel strategy dealing with the threat from the PA. This strategy involves state-to-state activities (such as bombing governmental and security facilities) as well as military operations against terrorist groups and individuals. In a typical networked-style reality, Israel has been fighting the PA while at the same time holding military coordination talks with its security officials. Israel's prime minister can conduct a quasi-war against the PA, while at the same time Israel's foreign minister can meet with Arafat and his immediate subordinates. As formal and contractual settlement between the two sides does not seem to be attainable at this stage, this networked mode of behavior can probably be expected to continue for the foreseeable future.

### ***Syria: Supra-State Ideology and Networks***

Syria, like Jordan, is a state ruled by a minority ethnic group that lacks a powerful historical tradition of independent state existence. Consequently, the Syrian state is identified—in the eyes of the Sunni majority—primarily with the Alawi minority regime. Minority groups in Syria—such as Alawis and Druze—have a long history of semi-independent communal existence that served to strengthen communal bonds at the expense of broader forms of identification (Maoz, 1986, pp. 10–11). Unlike Egypt and like Jordan, Syria had not existed as a distinct territorial unit, so there was a lack of territorial unity that could have served as a factor that might have drawn disparate elements of the population together. As with Jordan, Syria's borders were drawn by a colonial power and—from the point of view of the local population—were thus arbitrary to a significant degree. However, unlike Jordan, Syria's existence in the wake of decolonization was not based exclusively on the power of the minority regime governing it, but also on the power and attraction of pan-Arab political doctrine. Pan-Arabism, particularly under the Ba'ath party (which came to power in 1963), served as a *raison d'être* for the existence of Syria. Under the Ba'ath, Syria became a state with a strong pan-Arab orientation that, for reasons of momentary geopolitical expediency, was limited to

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specific narrow borders. Both the powerful communal affiliation of key ethnic groups in the country as well as the anti-Syrian state undercurrents of the pan-Arab ideology served to ensure that the Syrian state would be unable to penetrate Syrian society to the extent that the Egyptian state—even at the height of Nasserist pan-Arabism—was able to penetrate its society.

The pan-Arab doctrine of the Ba'ath further served to weaken the Syrian state vis-à-vis the society. By adopting a political ideology that, in effect, considered the independent existence of Arab states as an aberration of colonialism and sought to replace these independent states with a single Arab supra-state, the Alawis were ensuring that the bulk of Syrians would identify themselves with either communal affiliations or the pan-Arab doctrine. In either case, this left little room for ensuring ultimate public identification with Syria as a state and ensured that Syria would remain a networked society.

### ***Israel: The Hierarchical State***

Israel, relative to the Arab world, possesses a fundamentally different type of social and state structure that is closer to that of European states than of Middle Eastern ones. The founders of Israel came from an eastern and central European ethos with very strong socialist conceptions of state control and central planning. Consequently, they created a powerful state to which most of the society felt a strong allegiance and deferred with respect to important social questions. Much of Israel's early history involved state-initiated social engineering—whether in the ultimately failed attempt to disperse the population to peripheral areas or in the military's role in wide-scale socialization. As the Israeli population was mainly made up of Jewish immigrants from Europe, the Middle East, and other parts of the world—many of whom came from different cultural backgrounds—the state also had to intervene in order to create a common sense of identity (Ackerman, 1997, p. 18). At least since the beginning of the 1980s, Israel became increasingly linked to the networked global economy, and its internal society became increasingly networked with the rise of ethnic politics, religious-secular divisions, and the like (Shafir & Peled, 1998). Nonetheless, the central role of the military and security apparatus, and the ethos of the military in Israeli society, continues to ensure that the Israeli political elite will continue to be exposed to hierarchical political values and

binary images of state and society (Roberts, 1990, chapter 10). Hence, we can expect Israel to continue to apply hierarchical modes of thinking to critical issues, particularly with respect to issues of war and peace.

Israel was created as a hierarchical state in which the state was able to significantly penetrate society. Because legal conventions were more powerful than informal agreements between various elements of society, it is not surprising that Israelis' expectations of relations with their Arab neighbors were based on the achievement of contractual relationships. Indeed, since the Oslo agreement between Israel and the PLO, a sizable majority of the Israeli public had viewed the achievement of a contractual peace as the be-all-end-all of the peace process and expected it to bring about a termination of the Arab-Israeli conflict (Arian, 2000, p. 15). The Israeli public today, after nearly 2 years of conflict with the Palestinians, appears to be resigned to the fact that relations with the Palestinians, for the foreseeable future, will be based on networked relationships in which conflict and cooperation (if any) exist concurrently at different levels.

### **Rethinking Arab-Israeli Negotiations: Coexistence in the Shadow of Multicultural Perceptions**

The Arab-Israeli peace process has, thus far, produced a number of agreements and is also characterized by ongoing negotiations. Israel's existing relationships with Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinians have been characterized by disappointment for both sides, as the expectations that each side had of the nature of the peace between them have not been realized, particularly since the outbreak of the current round of Israeli-Palestinian violence. The Arab states, as networked states, viewed peace (or peace negotiations) with Israel as one component in a constellation of political considerations. In networked states, political actors are constantly competing against one another and the balance of power among them is fluid. Under such conditions, agreements between various social factions can be expected to be informal and based on trust. Although contractual peace agreements may be binding on individual states, these states were a reflection of one of a number of political actors. Other sociopolitical actors might agitate against peace with Israel as a way of increasing their internal standing while the official governments sign agreements with it.

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Because Arab political elites that operate in networked environments rely on process-oriented approaches that deal with particular problems, the overall purpose of the peace process was not likely to result in a contractual peace that requires the adherence of broad circles of Arab society to the new relationship with Israel agreed to by their governments. Such a development was, in effect, unlikely to be achieved by networked states that were held together by informal, trust-based social agreements and in which the state suffered from a legitimacy problem that affected its negotiating status and ability to carry through with its commitments. Achieving the kind of peace that Israel desired would require the Arab ruling elites to subdue other powerful social players—something that they seem incapable of doing. Consequently, the Arab ruling classes are likely to view the Israeli demand for total adherence to contracts, and for the reining in of various social forces opposed to peace with Israel, with incomprehension.

During the course of the 1993 negotiations at Oslo, the Palestinian leadership attempted to make it clear to the Israeli side that, because of the networked nature of their society, they could not negotiate clear-cut agreements and be expected to uphold them. As Yasser Arafat noted to Israeli negotiator Uri Savir (1998):

You must understand me, I want to move forward but I need my people's trust. You have an elected government, a parliament and clear laws. Trust is not the basis for the bond between Israelis and their leaders, but this is all I have between me and my people. (p. 152)

Similarly, Palestinian negotiator Abed Al-Razek Yehiya explained to his Israeli interlocutors at Oslo that

you [Israelis] want to force upon us your security doctrine due to your narrow view of the true meaning of security. However, you must understand that [the achieving of security] is based on a fundamental change in the psychological atmosphere. If you force us to take certain steps, we will be unable to do so. If you appoint yourselves judges of what is right and wrong, you will destroy the goodwill that exists between us [the Palestinian leadership] and our people. The only way to bring about

a radical change in the atmosphere, which will ultimately serve both our interests, is to create a security partnership. (Savir, 1998, pp. 193–195)

In other words, the Palestinians were suggesting that the Israeli security community create a partnership with the Palestinian security community that would provide an additional level in the relationship between the two sides. To the Palestinians, in keeping with their networked viewpoint, security was a relative concept based more on the balancing of different forces than on absolutes such as the total eradication of terrorism. At another point in the negotiations, Arafat suggested that extreme right-wing forces in Israel had allied themselves with Israeli settlers and certain Israeli Army officers and were acting to try to prevent the realization of security cooperation between the Army General Staff and Palestinian security forces (Savir, 1998, p. 151). In light of the networked perceptions of the Palestinians illustrated by Arafat's views, Israeli negotiator Uri Savir responded with incredulity, as befitting a hierarchical approach, and assured Arafat that the Israel Defense Forces receives its orders from the government and that individual officers are expected to obey orders and are not free to act on their own. The Oslo agreements were thus designed, through their opaque approach and "constructive ambiguity," to encapsulate the networked approach of the Palestinians (Morag, 2000).

The Syrian approach to negotiating with Israel also reflected the networked nature of their society, in contrast to the hierarchical-based Israeli approach. Israel viewed the signing of a peace agreement between the two sovereign states as representing not only a renunciation of armed conflict between the two states, but also the establishment of a total peace and normalization. The Syrian perspective viewed an agreement with Israel as a commitment on the part of the Syrian state to end the state of war with Israel. However, the establishment of a total peace would be dependent on Israel achieving settlements with all its neighbors and the realization of "Palestinian rights" (Rabinovich, 1998, p. 103). In other words, Syria's networked nature, and the importance of pan-Arab conceptions and forces within Syria, made it impossible for Syria to act as a unified state that could offer Israel not only an end to armed conflict but also normalization and a total peace.

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A further indication of the networked nature of the Syrian state is illustrated by the importance that the late Syrian leader Hafez al-Assad put in personal relationships and commitments to fulfill Assad's directives to the letter, rather than formal titles of various Syrian officials. Assad would only allow those whom he trusted completely to fulfill his every requirement to negotiate matters of substance. The head of the Israeli negotiating team in the Washington talks, Israeli ambassador Itamar Rabinovich (1998, pp. 67, 70), related how his attitude toward the various personalities on the Syrian side, and their scope to negotiate, was based on their relationship with Assad. Hence, those who were not part of the Syrian president's inner circle, such as Muwaffaq Allaf, the Syrian delegation head, were at the talks in order to promote their country's point of view but not to negotiate on matters of substance, irrespective of their formal titles. This was not the case on the hierarchical Israeli side, where the head of the delegation was, as Rabinovich wrote, in charge of the negotiations and given substantial flexibility within the parameters set down by Prime Minister Rabin. Syrian hesitancy to maintain the same pace of talks as the administration of George H. W. Bush came to an end also reflected Assad's belief in dialogues with individuals, in this case President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker, rather than with titles. As President Clinton and Secretary of State Warren Christopher were unknowns to Assad, he decided to slow the pace of negotiations until he could size up the personalities of those individuals who would head them.

Rabinovich (1998, p. 221) made an interesting comment on the different approaches that Egypt had taken in its negotiations with Israel, as opposed to that taken by Syria with respect to security arrangements with Israel. The Egyptians (as a relatively more hierarchical state) had agreed to maintaining the Sinai as a largely demilitarized buffer zone between Israel and the core regions of the Egyptian state, whereas Syrian negotiators heatedly refused to discuss the possibility that they might redeploy their forces from the vicinity of Damascus farther inland. The very thought that the regime might thin out the forces deployed in the capital was unthinkable to the Syrians. This was not only because those forces were needed to protect the capital in the event of an Israeli attack, but *primarily* because those forces were required to protect the regime from internal challenges, as befitting a networked society in which internal balances of power must be maintained.

Jordan, too, developed a relationship with Israel that reflected its networked nature. For years, Israel and Jordan maintained secret relations that, in effect, represented relations between Israel and the Jordanian ruling house. King Hussein had to walk a fine line between his aspiration for cordial relations with Israel and the pan-Arab and Palestinian pressures (outside and inside his kingdom) that Jordan take a hard line toward Israel. Since the 1960s, Hussein had avoided signing formal agreements with Israel, preferring informal “understandings.” Even during early 1994, only months before the signing of a formal peace treaty between Israel and Jordan, Hussein maintained two avenues of negotiation: formal negotiations with Israel under the auspices of the Americans, and secret negotiations directly with the Israelis (Zak, 1994, p. 296). Such behavior would appear to be typical of networked states, according to our analysis of their modes of operation.

Because Jordanian officials tend to view their relationship with Israel in process-oriented terms of ties based on trust between the Hashemite and Israeli elites, they see no contradiction in having close and informal relations between these two elites while at the same time allowing a boycott of ties between Jordanian trade unions and professional associations and their Israeli counterparts. Even with respect to such boycotts, however, this has not prevented Jordanian entrepreneurs from carrying out secret, unofficial ties with their Israeli counterparts, focusing on trade and joint ventures (Mishal, Kuperman, & Boas, 2001). Similarly, close ties between Israel and the Hashemite monarchy have not prevented Jordan from hosting—as was done until recently—a large number of leaders from Hamas’ political wing. Even though Hamas represents a hostile force that has the potential to mobilize the Palestinian public in Jordan against the pro-Western regime, Jordan’s traditional strategy has been a policy of cooperation and co-optation with its enemies in order to tame them (Mishal & Sela, 2000). Thus, the release of Hamas’ spiritual leader, Sheikh Ahmad Yassin, from an Israeli prison was secured by King Hussein as part of a deal with Israel after Israel’s failed attempt to assassinate Hamas’ political bureau head, Khaled Mashal, in 1998. Despite all this, during the peace negotiations and during the course of dialogue between the two countries on various political, economic, and security issues, Israel expected Jordan to act as a hierarchical state and to deal with Israel as a single entity on the basis of goal-oriented negotiating strategies.



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Syrian professor Sadik Al-Azm (2000) gave expression to the Syrian networked perceptions of interstate relations in the Middle East by noting that Israel must

overcome its fixation on Sadat and leave behind its unrealistic attachment to the “charismatic” mode of the Egyptian visit to Jerusalem, and return soberly to “normal” politics among states. I have no doubt that “Syria’s collective psyche” is, for its part, incapable of producing “charismatic” and paradigm-shifting gestures in the Sadat mode. (p. 65)

In other words, Al-Azm suggested that Syria, much more so than Egypt, is highly networked and thus cannot act in a hierarchical mode that would enable it to carry out dramatic shifts in policy toward Israel. Syrian conceptions of “normal” relations in the area are thus conditioned by their networked approach and are characterized, as Al-Azm suggested with respect to the Syrian-Turkish relationship, by a view that it is “normal for Syrian-Turkish relations to swing violently and unpredictably between cold-blooded ostracism and outright threats of war (as in Turkey’s threats concerning the Kurdish PKK’s alleged relations with Syria) and highfalutin expressions of warm friendship, cooperation, and exchanges of state visitors at high levels” (p. 66).

In contradistinction, Israel’s political expectations and cultural perceptions are conditioned by its hierarchical nature. Large circles within its political elite view the solution to fundamental issues in contractual, formalized terms, with the expectation that its Arab interlocutors will act as representatives of hierarchical states. Consequently, in the Israeli understanding of things, agreements signed with Arab governments should lead to a resolution of the conflict between them and Israel and to the building of new relationships of peaceful coexistence.

Taking into consideration the differences in the parties’ expectations and cultural perceptions, Israelis and Arabs may be able to understand the needs and attitudes of the other in conceptual terms. However, they will presumably have serious difficulties in transforming the basis of their respective societies in order to put themselves on the same psychocultural “wavelength.” This does not suggest that one should look at peace negotiations

between Israel and its Arab neighbors in terms of what Walton and McKersie (1965, pp. 4–5) called “distributive bargaining”—that is, a negotiation in which “each party tries to win for itself the largest possible share of whatever value is being divided” (Hopmann, 1995, p. 27). It does, however, mean that in order to move from a bargaining approach to joint activities aimed at “enlarg[ing] the benefits available to the parties and the amount of value to be shared by them” (Hopmann, 1995), both sides must modify their expectations and redefine their perceptions, taking into consideration the social environment, structural conditions, and political nature of the other.

### **Negotiation in the Shadow of Conceptual Pluralism**

One way of assuaging political tension and lowering the level of disputes and disagreements might be to narrow the perceptual gap between the parties. Along these lines, one may argue that what is needed is for all parties to adopt a problem-solving approach. The key argument of this perspective is “that the goal of negotiation is to solve the common problem that the parties face and to try to find solutions to those problems that will benefit everyone” (Hopmann, 1995, p. 30). Hence, solutions should be predicated on understanding and incorporating each other’s perspectives, facilitating opposing interests, “reciprocating concessions, avoiding commitments, [and] discovering mutually rewarding solutions to joint problems” (Druckman & Mitchell, 1995, p. 12). This would bring about a common approach by the parties and enhance patterns of cooperative relations across borders (Alger, 1977).

When relations become cooperative, disagreements are treated as a problem that must, and can, be resolved. Each side discloses its needs and attempts to give the other party the greatest possible leeway to pursue its interests. However, cooperative relations and a problem-solving negotiating approach would require the parties to reinvent themselves by erasing their ingrained fears and anxieties. And because the Israeli and Arab parties to the negotiating process are operating on the basis of different structural conditions and cultural perceptions, it is highly unlikely that parties to the negotiation will be able to overcome their mutual mistrust and suspicion.

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Still, there is another option. In a world of alternative perceptions, conflicting interests, and shifting priorities, *perceptual pluralism* may replace the ordinary problem-solving approach. Concretely, this means negotiating asymmetric arrangements rather than each side insisting on mutual accommodation.

In this respect, one may argue that because Israel as a hierarchical state is very anxious about its external security, its Arab neighbors could mitigate those fears and suspicions by providing Israel with security assurances, without imposing similar demands on Israel. At the same time, because the Arab side consists of networked states fearful of internal instability, Israel should take steps to neutralize Arab fear of Israeli economic invasion. Israel should thus accept limitations on its access to Arab markets while allowing its neighbors free access to Israeli markets.

The existence of an asymmetric security regime may entail a military cost for the Arab partners but will not place their internal stability in danger, and allowing an asymmetric economic relationship will involve an economic cost for Israel but will not put its economy in jeopardy. In the long run, such a strategy may encourage Arab states to maintain peaceful relations with Israel and perhaps allow more Israeli access to their markets; and Israel, for its part, will be in a position to reduce its military expenditure. Thus, rather than relying on a problem-solving approach, being entrenched in symmetric security and economic regimes, the political stability of the Middle East would be best served by a negotiating process that accommodates perceptual contradictions without succumbing to them.

The concept of perceptual pluralism might seem a fantastic idea. Why should someone agree to be a member of a regime that puts the others in a more advantageous position? This type of behavior is irrational if we assume that the parties that are in conflict with each other adhere to realist perspectives of world order. According to these perspectives, the status quo that emerges between actors reflects the relative strength of one in relation to the other. Stronger actors frequently enforce asymmetric arrangements in their favor, and the weaker parties accept their inferior status until the balance of power changes. This interpretation of world order is based on the assumption that all members of the international community share the same perceptions regarding the priority of

security. But what if security has a different meaning for the parties involved, or if security is not necessarily the highest priority of all parties? This is the case for Arab-Israeli relations. Each party has a different perception of the concept of security. The Israelis are mainly concerned with the external strategic aspects, whereas the Arabs are more concerned with the economic and internal political aspects. Thus, each party can satisfy its most basic needs for security precisely by adhering to its own interpretation of security.

A perceptually pluralistic settlement is possible when there are alternative interpretations of interests, such as the case described above, where security priorities are not overlapping. This, however, is not always plausible. For example, in the case of territorial disputes between the Israelis and Palestinians—and especially the future status of Jerusalem—the concept of perceptual pluralism may not be suitable. This is because overlapping (religious, spiritual, cultural) aspirations rather than alternative perceptions underlie this issue. Therefore, reaching compromise over such disputes will most likely be accompanied by all the competitive posturing typical of adversarial aspects of bargaining rather than problem-solving processes.

The tendency of Arab and Israeli negotiators to discuss security and economic issues around separate tables in different locations seems, in fact, to have impeded the ability of the discussants to reach a mutually satisfying settlement (Hirsh, 1999). Indeed, even if the negotiators were to act in a spirit of the problem-solving approach to producing symmetric security and economic agreements, both parties would be dissatisfied. The Israelis would feel that they compromised their military security, while the Arabs would feel that they compromised their economic interests and internal political stability. Therefore, it seems that what is required instead is a simultaneous negotiation, to be conducted in a cross-cutting manner, over all issues rather than a sequential addressing of each topic. If all issues are discussed concurrently around one table, as part of a larger and more comprehensive settlement, then both sides may agree on the creation of asymmetric packages as part of a final peace agreement. In this case, each party can raise demands in particular issue-areas and make concessions in others. Under these circumstances, each party would compromise on certain interests in return for advantages granted on another issue. This would allow each party to receive benefits where they really

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count. Moreover, simultaneous negotiation in a cross-cutting manner provides a way out of the inherent dilemma associated with negotiators acting in a problem-solving manner who strive for mutual accommodation: how to demonstrate flexibility by moving toward the other's positions in order to reach agreement, while at the same time standing firm "in order to avoid exploitation or to gain the largest possible share of the outcome" (Hopmann, 1995, p. 39).

Along these lines, as long as Israel and the Palestinians, or the Syrians, continue to negotiate in traditional modes of thinking in which each issue is discussed separately by teams of experts, the likelihood of reaching agreements is minimal. On the other hand, if the parties put all the issues on the table simultaneously and recognize that concessions in one area may lead to gains in others, they will have more of a tendency to reach a mutually beneficial solution. Use of the simultaneous negotiation approach increases the size of the "cake" being negotiated, and thus allows both sides to have a sense of having achieved more in the negotiations and presumably lessens the effect on the negotiations of critical cultural differences between the parties. Although neither side will view this alternative approach as ideal, an understanding of the political and structural differences between Israel and the Arab partners is critical in order to create a *modus vivendi* between them. Attempts by one side to act solely according to its perceptions and to force its own political conceptions on the other are unlikely to succeed.

### **A Future Research Agenda**

Our research has been inspired by relatively recent studies of states and societies in the Middle East. These new studies question the underlying assumption of traditional accounts of Middle Eastern politics, which depict social and political reality as classified within two mutually exclusive, diametrically opposed categories characterized by either/or relations. This new wave of research (Anderson, 1987; Barnett, 1995; Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996; Kimmerling & Migdal, 1999; Layne, 1994; Tibi, 1990) attempts to move away from viewing the political process in linear terms, emphasizing instead the formal and informal relations that cut across social categories and group boundaries. According to this non-categorical perspective, boundaries between social structures and political identities are permeable, contestable, and negotiable.

Yet this new literature does not seem to have made any meaningful impact on practitioners involved in the Arab-Israeli negotiating processes and on observers who follow political developments. State interests are still assumed to be fixed and unitary and state preferences to be distinct and static.

Further research on political negotiating strategies should take into account the intricate web of multiple identities, fluid loyalties, and interchangeable dynamics of political order, all of which characterize the social and political reality of the Middle East. Emphasis should be put on the network perspective of Middle Eastern politics as well as on aspects of the region's negotiating cultures. Future research should rely on a large body of literature, including theories of political networks and models of social structures (see, e.g., Burt, 1992; Knoke, 1990; Wellman & Berkovitz, 1988; White, 1992) as well as various approaches to political culture drawn from anthropological and social psychological perspectives (for anthropological approaches, see, e.g., Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982; Thompson, Ellis, & Wildavsky, 1990; for sociological approaches, see, e.g., Bell, 1976; Inkeles, 1983; Rudolph & Rudolph, 1967).

Network studies, especially those focusing on relational aspects of social and political systems, can provide a useful tool for examining the impact of diverse domestic and regional entities on the content, dynamics, and strategies of negotiation, in addition to that of the state. Especially in the case of the Middle East, a promising research line, from the network studies point of view, is to investigate how interactions at both the formal and informal level affect the relationship among the three interrelated entities—state, community, and pan-movement—as well as how and in what way such interactions may influence developments in the negotiating process.

The same logic can be applied to various approaches to political culture. Using such criteria as language, religion, education, ethnicity, and anthropological and sociological perspectives should help us to identify the dominant cultural orientations (i.e., goal-oriented vs. process-oriented) and group preferences that exist within each society.

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Social network analyses and political culture perspectives should assist us in mapping out the close-to-home issues and local anxieties that are particular to each of the negotiating parties. On the basis of our research, we should then be able to use such a map to help us revisit existing negotiating strategies, centering on the dominant approaches of bargaining and problem-solving. Future research should strive to bridge between these two dominant approaches in order to build a negotiating strategy capable of moving between the rigidity of positions and the need for flexibility. In a region such as the Middle East, where the conflict is prolonged and suspicion is deeply rooted, future research should neither fully reject bargaining nor totally accept problem-solving. Instead, it should strive toward a working formula of negotiation that may allow each side to reach a satisfactory agreement—one that allows both parties to claim significant gains and minimal compromise over core values or fundamental beliefs.

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