

# Likud: A Balance Of Historic Ideology and Reality

Written by Aaron T. Walter

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## Likud: A Balance Of Historic Ideology and Reality

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### 1. Introduction

David Easton's systems theory based on the idea of political life as a boundary maintaining set of interactions embedded in and surrounded by other social systems that constantly influence it[1], can explain the policymaking of Israel's Likud party as both choice and as the unit level actor in Israeli politics (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 2001). The politics of Israel is a process where unity is often a catch phrase but deep ideological sentiments lie beneath the surface. Such sentiments are rooted in both secularism and religious orthodoxy. Therefore, in its decision-making (DM), issues such as settlements in the territories, peace with Arab neighbor states, and Palestinian sovereignty are influenced accordingly. Furthermore, at various times in government Likud has been guided as much by its leader, as that leader has been guided by his ideological principles, the two as mutual inclusive; whether that was Menachem Begin, Benjamin Netanyahu, or Ariel Sharon. This reality is consistent with the foreign policy analysis (FPA) subfield of DM theory. All men and the coalition they lead faced pressures either in making peace with Israel's enemies or dealing with foreign pressures, which is best described following Easton's systems theory explanation as an input-output analysis.

#### *Easton's Systems Theory*

While Easton's definitive works are still, *A Framework for Political Analysis* (1965) and *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (1965) where he defined politics as the "authoritative allocation of value" (Easton, 1) elaborating a systems approach as a means to understand how a political system works. Moreover, Easton's behavioral approach to politics, proposes that a political system could be seen as a delimited (i.e. all political systems have precise boundaries) and fluid (changing) system of steps in decision making. In brief his model postulates that changes in the social or physical environment surrounding a political system produce demands and supports for action or the status quo directed as inputs towards the political system, through political behavior. Easton further explains that these demands and supporting groups stimulate competition in a political system, leading to decisions or outputs that are directed at some feature of the surrounding social or physical environment. Moreover, after a decision or output is made (a specific policy), it interacts with its environment, if a change is produced in the environment; then outcomes occur. Finally, with new policy interacting with the environment, outcomes may generate new demands, support or opposition described as feedback.

As such, Likud's uncompromising position towards the different aspects of relations with the Palestinians is the result of the pressure Likud leaders face from within their coalition overwhelming the pressure from the United States, Palestinians and other external forces. More to the point, of all the subfields within international relations, it is the most radically integrative subfield foreign policy analysis that is able to capture the subtle difficulties and uniqueness enshrined in Israel's present coalition government. . To understand how such influence and pressure can be exerted as well as Likud's ideological background it is necessary to understand the political parties of Israel.

### 2. Decision-Making Choices: Coalitions of the small

For Israel's first thirty years of existence its political parties represented pluralistic cultural and political backgrounds. They were also shaped through the political patterns and socioeconomic structure of the State's founding fathers

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such as Levi Eshkol, David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett, and Golda Meir. Originally organizations like Histadrut and Mapai served as national institutions for a post-independent Israel as well as the foundations for political parties. The political parties within Israel influence Israeli politics and Israeli governments, due to the nature of coalition building, a necessity because political parties fail to secure the sixty-one seat parliamentary majority that is required additional support from smaller parties is necessary. Prior to 1977 the largest political party within Israel was Labor. Since then there also is a bloc of conservative parties called Likud (Union) and after 2006 a centrist and liberal party called Kadima (Forward).

Given the diverse origins of its largely immigrant population a wide range of social and political tendencies evolved with multiplicity being embedded in the pluralistic heritage of Israeli society; the result being a well-established system of multiple parties. It may be argued that on this topic of political parties an explanation is offered as to the multi-party political system within Israel. While the author of this article concedes this explanation is insufficient, in the case of Israeli political dynamics it does lend support to within the context of David Easton's systems theory. The number of parties has fluctuated as result of realignments, occasional mergers, and splits. Still, each party represented an interest and how each has lobbied for influence and extended power should be understood in Easton's systems theory analysis where politics is observed as a whole, not as a collection of different problems (Easton, 1953). As such, the major parties have their origins in the European branches of the World Zionist Organization.

There were significant political alignments in the first thirty years of Israeli politics. All were Zionist, but differed in amount of secularism and religious orthodoxy. Two of these alignments were secular but ideologically opposed; the left or socialist labor party, Mapai being the best known and predominant until its entente with Labor in 1968; and the central-rightist parties, in which Herut, *Freedom Movement*, was the dominant party eventually winning an election in 1977 (Silver, 156). It is this party that has a direct connection to the modern-day Likud.

### 2.1 Likud

Understanding the relationship between Easton's theory and Likud is to follow the tenant of Easton's postulation of an organic view of politics. In support of this too is Robert Jervis observation of leaders toward egocentric perception (Jervis, 1976). Therefore, the conservative coalition that broke the liberal and secular coalition monopoly on political power not only evolved to the point of maturity that made them 'electable' but also had a leader very much influenced by perception.

Until 1977, parties on the left, the most influential of these being the Labor Party, controlled key cabinet positions in all coalition governments, and dominated the political scene of Israel. In the ninth Knesset election in May 1977, the center-right alliance known as Likud won for the first time in history of Israel. The backbone of the alliance was the Herut party with centrist-orientated parties: the Liberal Party, the State List, and a faction of the Land of Israel Movement. The Democratic Movement for Change joined the Likud-led coalition in late 1977.

As a center-right party, Herut was the direct ideological descendant of the Revisionist Movement, a party founded in 1925 by a Russian Jewish Zionist intellectual, Vladimir Jabotinsky who favored obtainment to the ancient border of the Land of Israel. With the creation of the State of Israel, members of Irgun (followers of Jabotinsky) and the Stern Gang were not considered in the official history for the new State of Israel even though interestingly many members took up positions within the Israeli military and intelligence services. The reason for this was mainly they were seen as irritants by Israeli political founders such David Ben-Gurion and did not fit nicely into the labels that other nation building parties such as Mapai and later, Labour wore. It was only after 1977 that this wrong interpretation of history could be rectified, Jabotinsky's dream to be fulfilled and more importantly, Menachem Begin, the politician as a myth could be created, "[Begin] was the man who drove the British out of the land" (Silver, 84). Before the 1977 election however, Herut's leader, Menachem Begin lived in the political wilderness until the late sixties when Begin, broadened his political base in 1965 by forming a new political bloc (Gahal) with the Liberal Party and by agreeing to join a government of national unity on the eve of the six-day war gained respectability (Silver, 128). The idea of respectability helped Herut as a party, but it also proved most beneficial to its leader. As one scholar noted, "Gahal's participation in the National Unity Government under Prime Minister Eshkol until his death of a heart attack in

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February 1969, and under Golda Meir until August 1970, completed Begin's transition to presentable even important politician" (Silver, 134). Fastidious in this attendance at Knesset and Cabinet meetings Begin was also cordial and businesslike with colleagues who were former foes. Still, Begin the personality loomed larger than the party.

Despite its growth by 1973 in party membership and public opinion, Herut was not elected due to uncertainty about Begin personally, and the untried center-right parties. The situation was different by 1977, due in no small part by Ariel Sharon's entering into politics. General Ariel Sharon retired from the military when his ambitions had been reached and launched into Israeli politics with the same determination, brashness, and audacity that had made him a star in the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). In July 1973 Sharon joined the Liberal Party, part of the Gahal alliance with Herut. Sharon then went about transforming Gahal into a party of government, broadening its base so that it was a plausible alternative to Labour. Sharon's lasting success for Begin and Herut was creating a new bloc of the Israeli democratic Right. A bloc that encompassed the two Gahal partners plus Shmuel Tamir's Free Centre and the State List, furthermore the main parties originally within Likud after the Knesset election that year, were the National Religious Party, Agudat Israel, the Poalei Agudat Israel, and the small Slomzion party combined with the religious bloc and Herut.

As a party, Herut, was far right. In the center-right coalition, it was pro-west, antisocialist, anti-labor, favoring a hard-line policy toward the Arab states and retention of much of the territories taken in the six-day war, a shift from that of the Israel Labor Party's positive neutralist. Begin defined Likud's three main targets: As a voice for the incontestable right of the Jewish people to Eretz Israel (Land of Israel), abolishing poverty, and to be the viable counterweight to that of the Labor Party.

As a viable force in Israeli politics the Likud achieved this goal in 1977. Likud, which in Hebrew means unity, was able to sustain popular support from its coalition partners. It also held social and cultural position that nationality as much as religiosity are mutually-reinforcing and inseparable components of what defines being Jewish, which was a view held by many Jews regardless of political and social backgrounds. Therefore, arguably Likud after its parliamentary victory came to represent a modern, post-Ashkenazic dominance within Israel affirming Easton's systems theory where the social system is constantly influenced.

## *2.2 Systems Theory Affirmed: Transformation of Israeli society*

If "political values are a product of a historically inherited social reality as much as they are a product of a given political elite, often both" (Evens-Smith, 140) then from the mid-1960s to Herut's victory in 1977 saw a growing questionability within Israel. These questions came from Sephardic Jews (post-1948 immigrants) and even the younger generation of both Ashkenazic (original Jews who lived in Palestine) and Sepharic origin. In sum, generations of Israeli reared in the themes of sovereign Jewish territoriality, egalitarianism, and distribution of puritan ethics that taken together in sociopolitical action was essentially socialist-Zionist, openly questioned the relevance of the old values to changing realities creating a constant variable in the construction of a group dynamic within Israeli politics and culture. Therefore, with a coalition of center-right parties in government, Israel had undergone a sociopolitical transformation. A transformation within Israel's national security and foreign affairs soon occurred too.

## **3. National Security: Unit-Level Choice**

Herut as the largest party within the Likud alliance had originally been seen as the war party. In time the image was softened, embracing both nationality and religiosity as mutually reinforcing and inseparable parts of Judaism. As the government, the issue of national security not only included security against hostile state neighbors, such as Jordan and Egypt, but security issues including the occupied territories taken in the 1967 war, and those Arabs living within the territories, now Israel, viewed suspiciously by some Jews for potential Arab hostility against Israel. To help explain the policies and understand the motivations behind the Likud government, Easton's theory may be applied since changes or inputs in the social or physical environment of a political system may produce certain demands and offer support for action or the status quo directed as from said inputs towards the political system. With this theoretical explanation, the change within Israeli politics to a right-wing coalition government as well as the ideologically uncompromising prime minister was profound.

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Menachem Begin saw the Arabs living in Palestine as citizens of other Arab nation-states either Egyptian or Jordanian. With the creation of the state of Israel there developed the ideological belief in a greater land of Israel. Such a belief had existed prior to 1948, as part of the Zionist movement of Theodore Herzl and the founder of Herut Russian Jewish Zionist intellectual, Vladimir Jabotinsky who specifically favored obtainment to the ancient border of the Land of Israel, but such ideology was confined to a dream until after Israel's creation in 1948 and then Israeli victory in 1967 Six Day War and seizure of Gaza and the West Bank that held historic and biblical cities to the Jews. Land taken in war was viewed, as legal and territorial claims by those Arabs living on the land were considered irrelevant. From the Dead Sea to Jordan this historic right of Jews to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank is an area known for its biblical names Judea and Samaria (*Israeli Studies*, 2005). The point may be oversimplified, but for Begin the idea of peace with Palestinians when he was Prime Minister was not considered mainly because the Palestinians, as a distinct national group, did not exist in Herut ideology and Likud party statements.

This fact can be seen in Likud's assertion that Arabs living in Israel belonged to Jordan and in terms of peace with an Arab neighbor; Israel under the leadership of Begin only did this with Egypt. It was only after the creation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) that consideration was made to specific "national" demands. However, throughout the interim years, from the 1967 six-day war to the Likud government (1977-1984) Israeli governmental policy had been to create an infrastructure within the territories and even support limited autonomy of those Arabs living there within the construct of municipal government. Despite these efforts, Begin as prime minister was faced with an increasingly angry Arab population that throughout the late nineteen eighties until 1993 fought an uprising against the Israeli military and government, popularly known as the Intifada. Arab's ideological claims to all land within Israel and the latter's position on national security, in large part due to decade long suicide bombings from the PLO and Hamas and rocket attacks from PLO and later Hezbollah, have entrenched within the Likud party uncompromising opposition to any return of land in the territories to the Palestinians.[2]

Jimmy Carter stated in his book, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights Into The Middle East*, that "[Yitzhak Shamir] considers the Jews the natural majority rulers of western Palestine (Israel, West Bank, and Gaza) with a right and obligation to populate the area further..." (Carter, 53). This position did not change throughout the eighties and formed the basis of opposition to Labor's peace treaty with the Palestinians in 1993. Moreover, when Likud returned to government in 1996, its new prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, approved the opening of the tunnel in Jerusalem's western wall, close to the Muslim al-Aqsa Mosque.[3] Netanyahu did hand over the city of Hebron to the Palestinian authorities, but also allowed new settlement construction in the territories. As such Har Homa (Jabal Abu Ghneim) was begun in East Jerusalem and there was no agreement to further West Bank withdrawal. More important however was Netanyahu's refusal to grant the Palestinian local government control of 30 percent of the West Bank as expected from the wording of previous agreements, specifically the Oslo Accords and agreed by both sides; instead Netanyahu ceded only 9 percent instead (Bickerton & Klausner, 2007). While this may be accepted as a breach of promise or even a unethical behavior, but it may be understood more in context when perceived that on the issue of center-right Likud opposition to a declared Palestinian state occurred in proportion to the development of the Palestinians, first as a liberation group, then later as a distinct Arab-Palestinian population within the borders of Israel

It should be noted that during Likud's first time in government (1977-1984) compromise and peace were not with those Arabs living within the borders of Israel proper, but rather with a neighbor, Egypt. The Camp David Accords only increased pressure by the Palestinian Liberation Organization that lead to decades-long internal conflict of both a physical and psychological nature. For the latter, the issue is the territories introduced in the above paragraphs. Moreover, a political policy position started by Likud, continued by opposition governments to the point of 'entrenchment' is consistent with Easton's systems theory where politics is in constant flux and the rejection of the idea of equilibrium that is prevalent in other political theories.[4] Michael Brecher insists that "the operational environment affects the result or outcomes of decisions themselves, only as it is filtered through the images of decision-makers"(1972, 4). The territories define Likud.

## 3. 1 Territories

The case for settlement growth in the historic lands of Judea and Samaria originally held biblical arguments as well as practical considerations due to the location of Israeli population centers, potential security threats and a belief

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prevalent among the majority of Israelis that any territorial concessions in these areas would increase Israel's vulnerability to attack. Joseph Frankel's support of DM theory taking the objective environment into account would support the case.

After the six-day war in 1967 Israel maintained a military presence in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) also known as the occupied territories. The deliberate establishment of Jewish settlements soon followed. Originally they were military settlements but later civilian settlements were established. In fact, new settlements had increased so that by 1977 approximately eighty-five had been set up in the occupied territories, commonly referred to as Gaza and the West Bank (Carter, 1982). Although originally the settlement policy was established by a Labor-led government, the policy's chief supporters had been Labor's coalition partners and religious parties like the National Religious party and The Bloc of the Faithful. When Likud assumed power in 1977 its policy became retaining the territories and opposing trading land for peace, with the Party's pledge "Western Eretz Yisreal will never be divided again," (Carter, 54) giving a new ideological impetus to the settlement movement. Likud leader and Prime Minister, Menachen Begin's opposition to withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza on the basis of land gained through war affirmed this.

The Likud government approved twenty-one more settlements between 1980 and 1981 meaning that Israel controlled more than one-third of the land, 90 percent of the water in the region, and at that time, a total of 110,000 Jewish settlers (Evans-Smith, 1979). Likewise, the building of the concrete and barbed wire security fence in 2004 embraced Jewish settlements in the West Bank. The continued building of settlements as a specific policy offers support to Easton's behavioral approach, as this issue has defined the boundary of the Israeli political system since the 1980s.. Furthermore, viewed from behavioral theory, it may be argued that this issue created fluidity within the system by helping Ariel Sharon produce the political earthquake he intended by leaving Likud and forming Kadima in 2006. Setting this point aside for the moment, it should be noted however that over the four decades since Likud first adopted its ideological opposition to withdrawing from the territories two significant events occurred that make a compelling case against continued settlement growth.

## **4. Foreign Policy Making and Domestic politics**

The first significance to a possible reversal of policy regarding the territories was the Israeli government policy proposals towards the territories itself. Beginning in the late 1980s the uprising of Palestinians, popularly known as the Intifada, allowed Israeli governments, one of which was Likud, to look for ways to limit settlement growth as well as partially withdrawal from them within the context of security, an issue revisited in the first decade of the twenty-first century by Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon. Retired Israeli military commanders had supported this view, most notable Yehoshafat Harkabi, who spoke directly to the urgent issue of negotiated peace with the Arab Palestinians under the leadership of Yasser Arafat. It was this issue of territories that a monumental event occurred in the history of Israel and the Middle East.

The second significant event was the signing in September 1993, of the Israeli-PLO Accord. In the Accord, both the State of Israel and Yasser Arafat, the leader of the PLO, recognized each other's existence. From the point of foreign policy analysis, this event is best explained by Robert Putnam's (1988) portrayal of political leaders' choices as being tailored to what both domestic audiences and external parties' will accept. In Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's personal view the territories had long ago become a 'burden' to Israel. The Accord was in keeping with United Nations Resolution 242 and allowed Arafat to cast himself as the old warrior achieving peace for his own people. The Accord worked to the political benefit of both men in theory, but not in practice.

Following the historic peace accord that called for PLO self-government were the Gaza-Jericho Agreement and Oslo II or Taba Accords that collectively established three areas in the West Bank to deal specifically with the issue of settlements. Between 1994 and 1995 provisions of Oslo II set up the step-by-step transfer of land and power. This had a long-term effect on the direction of intra-Palestinian politics, first by creating Hamas and later Hamas' parliamentary win in 2007 causing various Israeli governments to have specific plans to deal either by negotiation intent or non-recognition.[5] But more important within the context of Israel than the two events described above was the psychological viewpoint of settlements by then Israeli Prime Minister Rabin.

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As prime minister, Rabin denounced his own citizens who as settlers were in the territories. Calling them a burden on the army as it combated radical Palestinians he went further by saying, "settlements add nothing, absolutely nothing to Israeli's security...they are a liability rather than an asset" (Bickerton & Klausner, 277). It was not surprising with such a viewpoint that nervous settlers protested against the peace process initiated in 1993 and opposition to the government by Likud and other right-wing parties stepped up their rhetoric. The rhetoric and settler rage reached its peak during the second intifada of 2002 when a Likud-led coalition under the leadership of Ariel Sharon reoccupied the West Bank.

Prime Minister Sharon resisted Likud ideological precedence however, when he completely abandoned the idea and policy of Greater Israel in 2005. Within the understanding of personality-driven politics, this was a bold move by Sharon. Only a politician of his reputation and stated opposition to territory withdrawal could have begun a plan of that nature and be successful. This was in direct conflict with Likud's settlement policy in the West Bank and Gaza. Alexander George (1980) postulates that foreign-policy analysis is more of an actor specific theory than actor-general theory. In brief, George drew links on the impact of cognitive beliefs on an individual's political behavior and on the role of stress in decision-making. Sharon's actions would support this view. Sharon's decision to moderate position towards Palestinians and subsequent decision to form a new party showed that in this case intra-Likud pressures were outweighed by the strength of Sharon's personality and established reputation combined with the external pressures to compromise produced by the second Intifada and possibly other external forces. Sharon's break with Likud has had many consequences in recent years, but none were more important than the impact it had on Israel's political landscape.

His unilateral disengagement plan, begun after winning reelection on a platform that promised no unilateral withdrawals, saw increased opposition within his own party, but opposition to the peace process also saw the increase of participation by religious and nationalist parties. In effect, through the decision to abandon Likud's ideological link to Greater Israel, Ariel Sharon gave rise to the ultra-Right parties in Israeli politics.

### *4.2 The influence of the Israeli ultra-right*

Ultra-orthodox and ultra-nationalist influence within Israeli politics did not occur suddenly. The participation of religious parties within Israeli politics occurred since the founding of the state with the moderate National Religious Party being best known and created specifically to influence legislation based on the Hebrew scriptures in addition to promoting immigration, settlement, religious education and labor activity in a religious context. Prior to the post-Oslo Peace Accords of the 1990s, the main ultra-orthodox party was Agudat Israel (Association of Israel), which opposed secularism in all its manifestations. And the Poalei Agudat Israel (Workers of the Association of Israel) is a religious-political labor movement that advocates establishment of agricultural settlements.

Moreover, since 1948 religious parties have influenced Israeli politics and governments, namely due to the nature of coalition building, a necessity within Israeli politics for the dominant political party. The largest political party within Israel traditionally was Labor prior to 1977. Since then there was a conservative bloc of called Likud and after 2006 a third party bloc called Kadima. Because political parties traditionally fail to secure the sixty-one seat parliamentary majority that is required, additional support from other parties is necessary. The most numerous additional parties are nationalist and religious. Therefore, much of the extra seats come from the religious bloc. As such, the National Religious Party, but in particular the Orthodox Jews are able to trade their support for concessions on matters of religious importance. This is vital to the understanding of the interaction between the party-politics and the decision making of Israel's government based upon "level of stress" currently Prime Minister Netanyahu's difficult balance between concessions to coalition partners and those of international partners, most notably the United States (Maoz, 1990). More to the point, of all the subfields within international relations, it is the most radically integrative subfield foreign policy analysis that is able to capture the subtle difficulties and uniqueness enshrined in Israel's present coalition government.

## **5. The "Ultras": Interest Groups & the Territories**

Since, 2009 ultra-orthodox and ultra-nationalist influence within Israeli politics has grown. More political parties that

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ideologically fit into such definition exist and in the government paralysis of 2008 that saw Kadima search for viable coalition partners the parties of the far-right held consider weight. As such, though Kadima was unable to form a government and Likud was returned to power, the fact that far-right parties make up the current government indicate the outcomes for future centre-right coalition governments. Such governments will exist with the support and consent of religious and national parties and throughout the past decade the issue of the territories capsulated this view supporting David Easton's interest group theory as subsumed in his political systems analysis (Easton, 1965). Nowhere within Israeli politics is this more apparent than in the current struggle between religious and national groups against government plans to withdraw from the territories, and their insistence on instead expanding settlement growth.

As Daniel Drezner (2010) has argued "the rapidly growing ultra-Orthodox and those Israeli nationalists who believe in Greater Israel.... are the people driving the Israeli government to expand settlement construction in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem" (*Foreign Policy*, 2010) instead of the Negev or Galilee. While other possibilities exist, a two-state solution is the best of available options for Israel. Therefore, while following a tactic begun by Begin as prime minister, the short-term political logic is appeasement of coalition partners, but in the long term this strategy may prove counterproductive, as most of the territory will have to ultimately be ceded for a Palestinian state. The result of such a tactic was clearly demonstrated in the early part of the 2000s under the leadership of Ariel Sharon when he became Likud leader and prime minister in 2001.

Originally known for his hard-line opinions on security and relations with the Palestinians, Ariel Sharon softened his approach as prime minister. Giving his support to a US roadmap for peace that called upon a creation of a Palestinian state, Sharon offered, as a concession, the Gaza Strip. Originally following Likud ideology that refused any concessions on the territories Sharon seemed to follow precedence, especially after the attacks in Netanya and Tel Aviv in 2001. But after 2003 Sharon himself took upon the idea of a peace settlement whose idea of an imposed settlement called for Israel to retain settlements in certain areas in particular the West Bank, but to leave Gaza. This left 8,500 Israeli settlers in 21 fortified settlements in the Gaza Strip, some of which Sharon had helped establish, to leave or be forcibly evicted by the Israeli army. The plan was opposed by the Israeli far right but backed by two-thirds of the population overall (Bickerton & Klausner, year 239). The Sharon plan also consolidated existing Israeli settlements on the West Bank and expanding into the land between them. This proposal actually would mean more Israelis entering the territories a total of 14,000 (Bickerton & Klausner, 377). This idea had support from Israeli citizens as well as becoming official policy towards the territories of the new political party that Sharon founded, Kadima. So, while campaign slogans and coalition support was based upon retaining the territories and even expanding settlements, Sharon moved away from this position after being safely returned to power. Later when the moment was most opportune he split with Likud and formed a new political party; the instinct of timing, ideological flexibility, and practical considerations on the part of Ariel Sharon point again to Alexander George's actor specific theory.

This new policy towards the Palestinians and possible peace with them was not sudden. For Sharon it was a gradual realization. However, once Sharon undertook the policy of disengagement the opposition within Likud was fierce and it led to much speculation within Israeli politics and in the Israeli media throughout 2005-2006. Acting as a unit actor, Sharon helped shape the future of Israeli politics that has affected the decision making of Likud.

The rationale for the split from the Likud party and centre-right had much to do with Sharon leaving Likud, which he had helped form over continued disagreements regarding his unilateral disengagement plan. The plan that Sharon endorsed saw the withdrawal of Israeli troops as well as settlers from Gaza. Though popular amongst the majority of Israelis, Sharon saw his popularity decline within Likud and a rival, Binyamin Netanyahu, his finance minister, gain advantage amongst the party's rejectionist faction by resigning from the government and pointing to the Gaza disengagement plan as jeopardizing the safety of Israeli citizens.

When Sharon quit Likud and formed the new party that composed some Likud allies and allowed other politicians from other parties to join as well it was called the "big bang" (HaMapatz HaGadol). The affect was entirely what Sharon had hoped for, a radical realignment of Israel's politics. The new party Kadima (Forward), centrist and liberal won 29 out of 120 seats in the Knesset after the 2006 elections. Those that followed Sharon into the new party were

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moderates from Likud that had grown tired of the right-wing parties within Likud, as well as the policy of the past towards the Palestinians. This included some like-minded Labor politicians, most notably Shimon Peres. However, with Sharon's failing health and eventual incapacitation the larger question was whether Kadima could survive. In the March 2006 elections the answer was a clear yes, as Ehud Olmert became prime minister only later to resign in 2008. The resulting political situation forced early elections in February 2009 that saw Kadima win one more seat than Likud, but ultimately not form a government.

As such, Netanyahu was returned to power beholden more than ever to small rightist parties and Likud's stated policy positions. For example, the 'Peace & Security' chapter of the 1999 Likud Party platform states that it "flatly rejects the establishment of a Palestinian Arab state west of the Jordan river." This is the West Bank territory. Furthermore, the chapter states, "The Palestinians can run their lives freely in the framework of self-rule, but not as an independent and sovereign state" (Likud Platform, 1999). A decade later with Likud back in power and Benjamin Netanyahu again as Likud leader and prime minister he has neither endorsed or ruled out the idea of a Palestinian state, going so far as to outline his vision of such a state (McGregor-Wood, 2009) but must move cautiously because his religious-nationalist coalition partners are opposed to any land being given away. Such opposition must be taken seriously since the religious population constitutes approximately 30 percent of the voting population (Zarembski, 2000) and religious parties hold 28 of the 120 seats in the Knesset. This forces Netanyahu to traverse a tight-rope between his coalition partners, the ideological path of his party, and the necessities of making peace with an Arab population that is a de facto nation.

## 7. Conclusion: In Sum

In sum, as a party Likud has been guided by ideological principles and ideologically observant men that have influenced the decisions made. All leaders of Likud and the coalitions they led, acting within the perimeters of unit level actor, faced pressures from allies and enemies, as well as dealing with specific interests of coalition partners, thus linking Easton's political systems analysis with interest group theory and offering a cogent explanation as to seemingly inconsistent Likud policy regarding the Palestinians.

This fact affects Prime Minister Netanyahu's maneuverability as the leader of Likud. He is in the difficult position of supporting the nationalist and religious parties that are part of his coalition government, while being pressured by the Obama Administration to agree to peace terms with the Palestinians (not to mention Palestinians themselves). From these contradictory "inputs," the expected outputs are policies favoring the status-quo in questions towards the Palestinians.

Indeed, that is what has happened in the period from 2010-2011. Netanyahu has pursued a status-quo policy towards the peace process that was largely the result of pressures from the Likud-led coalition. These intra-coalition pressures include the opposition to a Palestinian state and disengagement from Gaza, and support for expanding Jewish settlements. The expansion of Jewish settlements is the best example of the aforementioned pressures and how more powerful domestic considerations are over allied hopes. In March 2011 when U.S. Vice-President Biden visited Israel and spoke to the issue of resuming peace talks, the next day Israel announced new settlement plans within East Jerusalem. Finally, from the standpoint of decision-making, as long as Likud's ideological principles remain uncompromising and Benjamin Netanyahu holds firm to them there is little in practice that will come of the peace process with the Palestinians despite prevailing circumstances.

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[1] Both Mark Bevir in *Political Studies* and John G. Gunnell in *Political Science: The State of the Discipline* though writing decade's apart support the claim.

[2] Yehoshafat Harkabi's *Israeli's Fateful Hour* (1988) offers a convincing argument for the Israeli Army withdrawal from the territories.

[3] The mosque is the third holiest site in Sunni Islam located along with the Dome of the Rock and the Temple Mount; the holiest site in Judaism. For a more extensive reading please see Robert Schieck in *Geographical Dimension of Islamic Jerusalem*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

[4] Institutionalism, based upon Rosenau's model where institutions and regimes act with keeping their ideational and behavioral expressions.

[5] Michael Herzog and Daniel Byman write extensively on this subject in the 2006 and 2010 issues respectively of *Foreign Affairs*.