

PROSPECT THEORY AND THE FAILURE TO SELL THE OSLO ACCORDS

by Landon E. Hancock and Joshua N. Weiss

We examine how supporters and opponents of the 1993 Oslo Accords attempted to persuade their constituents to either support or oppose the agreement. It is our argument that a “sales” message that is based on tenets of prospect theory—framing the preferred choice as less risky than the alternative—will garner more initial support for an agreement and, more importantly, will insulate a peace process to some extent from failures in implementation. For this paper, we ask a series of three questions designed to determine how leaders from both sides frame the peace agreement reached, how they describe the implementation of that agreement and its costs and benefits. Our analysis used 170 documents detailing statements by political party leaders and spokespeople, finding that supporters attempted to frame the agreement largely in aspirational terms toward a better future but failed to frame the agreement as a better alternative to continued or renewed conflict.

INTRODUCTION

When the first Oslo Accords were signed on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993, many Israelis and Palestinians and much of the international community believed that they would see the end of the conflict and that the Accords might lead to peace throughout the Middle East. However, just over seven years later the second intifada (also known as the al-Aqsa Intifada) would begin, plunging the region back into violence and dashing hopes for peace. Many questions have been asked about the failure of the Oslo process, including questions about the structure of the agreement, failures of implementation, and the role of spoiler violence. All of these questions have provided grist for scholars and policy makers to study the failure of the Oslo process and to point to what each sees as the reason why the conflict continues.

However, one arena that has not been fully plumbed is the role that public support or opposition may have had on the longevity of the process and its ability to withstand the vicissitudes associated with its implementation.

The framing or “selling” of a peace agreement by elites who have taken the plunge into peacemaking is an important dynamic that has garnered little attention in peacemaking literatures. Instead, examinations of the role of framing have tended to focus on either the impact of framing on individual elites or the impact of framing by the media.¹

The goal of this research is to replicate an earlier study that showed how prospect theory helped to explain the impact of elite framing on public perceptions of Northern Ireland’s Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Our main argument stems from extending prospect theory beyond its traditional analysis of elites taking in frames and making choices to elites creating reference points to frame decision choices for larger groups. Our prior article showed that the Good Friday Agreement was largely framed by its elite proponents as far superior to the alternative of renewed conflict. This framing of the Agreement, as better than the alternative of the status quo or more violence,² insulated it to some degree from its failure to meet many expectations in terms of vaunted peace dividends and, most importantly, from rising opposition because of the extended time required to fully implement its terms.³

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The problem we investigate here is whether and how leaders attempt to strike the balance between the need to aggressively sell a specific agreement as bringing peace and the danger that this sales pitch may bring forth hard to meet expectations. Our initial work on the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland was an examination of the roles that elite framing of the process played in sustaining that process through its rocky implementation. The problem we investigate in this article is the extent to which similar framing was used to sell the first Oslo Accords—also known as Oslo I or the Declaration of Principles—to the Israeli and Palestinian populaces and the extent to which this framing may have impacted levels of support for the process over time, especially during incidents of spoiler violence or other setbacks to the process. Our analysis concentrates on

statements by governmental and organizational actors as they attempted to persuade their constituencies that the Accords deserved either support or opposition.

OSLO: ANATOMY OF FAILURE

There are many distinctions that can be drawn between our original case of the Good Friday Agreement in Northern Ireland and this examination of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Among these are the overarching contextual differences of the conflict, the nature of the agreements themselves, the differences in negotiation process and the cultural distance between the antagonists. However, the most striking difference between the two agreements is the widespread belief that the Good Friday Agreement was a success, while the Oslo Accords—and all of the subsequent agreements made during the process—ended in failure with the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000. The key element of Oslo's failure as compared to Good Friday's success provides our rationale for replication to determine whether prospect theory can help to explain the difference between the two.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has deep roots in modern history, with incidents such as increases in Jewish emigration after 1882, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and, most notably, the creation of Israel following the Second World War. During Israel's war for independence—known as *Al Nakba*, or the disaster by Palestinians—between 700,000 and 800,000 Palestinians left or were driven from their homes.⁴ Palestinian resistance groups founded the PLO in 1964 to coordinate their activities. In 1969, the leader of *Al Fatah*—Yasser Arafat—gained control over the PLO and engaged in a guerrilla campaign, often using terrorist tactics in an attempt to bring attention to the plight of the Palestinians and to damage Israel.

The Oslo Accords were the fruit of secret, backchannel negotiations that took place between Israeli and Palestinian interlocutors beginning in December 1992 and culminating in the September 13, 1993 signing ceremonies on the White House lawn. The 1993 accords themselves were just the first of a series of agreements designed to address a host of increasingly complex issues in an incremental fashion.⁵ The 1993 Declaration of Principles was followed in 1995 by the *Taba* or *Oslo II* agreement, the 1998 *Wye River Memorandum* and the 1999 *Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum*. The final meeting of the

Oslo peace process was the failed Camp David Summit held in July 2000.

FRAMING AND DECISIONS

As with our first paper, this analysis rests upon the theoretical premises of prospect theory as first promulgated by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky.⁶ Unlike works by scholars such as William Gamson, Gadi Wolfsfeld or others, our analysis of framing will not focus on the use of media by political parties, instead focusing solely on framing within prospect theory.⁷ The original conception of prospect theory focused on the link between the framing of choices and the subsequent decisions taken. Tversky and Kahneman found that when the preferred choice was framed as a possible gain, most respondents chose the alternative to avoid the risks associated with that gain. Conversely, when the preferred choice was framed as an alternative to a certain loss, then most respondents were willing to take the risk of losing more rather than almost certainly losing less.⁸ This preponderance of risk aversion or risk seeking behavior is labeled the 'certainty effect.' In addition, when faced with gains, they found "that people overweight outcomes that are considered certain, relative to outcomes which are merely probable."⁹ When faced with losses, however, the certainty effect translates into risk seeking in the sense that respondents overwhelmingly chose to risk possibly losing more rather than certainly losing less.¹⁰

Jack Levy gives an overview of prospect theory which emphasizes that people tend to evaluate gains and losses with regard to a reference point rather than to overall costs or benefits.¹¹ This means that the promotion of a particular reference point can help to shape relative policy preferences or other choices.¹² Given that the reference point serves as an external process, the conventional notion of framing has been conceptualized as an internal process whereby individuals receive information leading to their selection or choice. The frame is the manner in which the information entering the cognitive and emotional structures of an individual emphasizes one element over another in an attempt to create a reference point. Kahneman and Tversky's original conception of a *decision frame* referred to an internal conception of "acts, outcomes, and contingencies associated with a particular choice."¹³ Boettcher conceptualized framing as having three elements:

actor perception of alternatives, their outcomes and the probabilities associated with each outcome.¹⁴

A key element of prospect theory for our analysis is its proposition that individuals tend to weigh potential gains and losses with regard to a reference point rather than as an overall proposition. This means that the selection or promotion of a reference point becomes important and that it does not necessarily need to be represented by the status quo.¹⁵ We use the setting of reference points as the external element of prospect theory's framing process, normally seen as an exclusively internal process. In doing so, we are extending prospect theory from typical examinations of the impact of framing on elite decision-makers and extending it to show its impact on larger populations.

METHODS

As with our initial study, our focus is on elites as framing agents for the general populace. We identify the reference points created by supporting and opposing elites and the extent to which the frames created by these elites were successful in generating support for or opposition to the Oslo Accords. This replication study provides both a rich analysis of the framing process and strengthens our argument that elites who follow the tenets of prospect theory by framing an agreement as better than the alternative can have an impact on the longevity, and thus the success or failure, of a given peace process.

Our data consists largely of public statements made by elite government, party or movement officials and their spokespeople during a six-month period bracketing the signing of the Oslo Accords on September 13, 1993, with a few statements from earlier in the year. Statements were taken mainly from English language news reports of print sources and transcripts from selected broadcast sources. The 170 documents were managed by electronic coding supplemented by hand coding where necessary.

As a starting point for our analysis, we used a series of questions designed to uncover the major thematic frames that were used to describe the Oslo Accords. Our guiding questions were:

1. How do leaders and their respective parties describe the agreement reached? (An End Point, a Beginning Point, An Interim Point)

2. How do leaders and their respective parties describe the implementation of the agreement reached? (Easy, difficult, impossible)
3. How do leaders and their parties describe the perceived benefits and costs of the agreement reached (i.e., the selling of the agreement)?

Implicit in these questions are notions of how leaders and parties attempt to manage the expectations of their constituents. Within each of these questions, we examined statements regarding expectations for the future, including such things as peace dividends, existential and material benefits, as well as the description of future relations among the parties and with other societies.

The data were analyzed and inductively coded to larger themes based on our guiding questions. Question-driven codes were then thematically matched to patterns derived from prospect theory's certainty effect to determine the extent to which the themes expressed by elites and their spokespeople corresponded to setting the reference point toward the preferred choice as an alternative to a loss to make it more attractive.

Data were divided between the authors for initial coding, with supplementary cross-coding and verification undertaken by both. Coding discrepancies were handled through consensus discussion to establish meaning within the relevant cultural context and the degree to which individual passages corresponded to a reference point, indicating that the preferred choice was framed as the alternative to a greater loss.

ANALYSIS

The secret talks that produced the Oslo Accords were important in the sense that they were one of a relatively few processes that started as an unofficial, Track II effort, gradually eclipsing the official talks in Madrid. The Clinton Administration agreed to hold the signing ceremony on the White House lawn to show support as an outside guarantor to give the agreement the best possible chance at success. While the agreement was not submitted to popular referenda by either the Israelis or the Palestinians, supporters and opponents on both sides of the agreement made their cases to their respective publics in an attempt to whip up support or opposition. Our analysis follows the three questions described above.

How Is The Agreement Described?

This section is primarily geared toward the overall description of the Accords by its supporters and opponents. Further analysis of whether it was described as a starting, middle, or endpoint for peace shows the extent to which proponents and opponents attempted to raise, manage, or dash expectations that the Accords would lead to a peaceful resolution of the conflict. In this segment, we would also expect to find some delineation between the choice of supporting and opposing the agreement, with that delineation either following the recommendations of prospect theory or not.

Both Yasser Arafat, the Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel, began by couching the agreement and the Oslo Process itself as a “peace of the brave,” borrowing a phrase from Mahatma Gandhi. Immediately they sought to transform the perception of peace from something perceived as weak to something strong and worth fighting for. In the Middle East, unless you are willing to fight for something you are often considered to be weak.

Pro-Agreement Forces: The Israeli Government

Rabin and his government were anything but passive when it came to selling the agreement to Israelis across the political spectrum. Their theme was one of bravery and commitment. They flaunted a conviction that this was the historic moment in time to transform the Israeli-Palestinian relationship and that they were the ones to carry this difficult process forth. They initially coupled this conviction with tempered enthusiasm—by highlighting that the process was step-by-step in nature. In other words, while they were strong in their belief that this was the right thing to do, it was to be done slowly and in a very calculated manner that sought to “trust but verify”. As Rabin told the Israeli Parliament (the Knesset) on August 30, 1993, “[t]he signing of such an accord between the Palestinian delegation and us in Washington will turn into a significant fact: It will make possible the establishment of the interim arrangement.”¹⁶

In that same speech to the Knesset, Rabin chose a strategy contrary to what Tversky and Kahneman’s prospect theory would recommend. He focused on the risks involved, but not in a doom and gloom manner. Rather he did this to introduce the “peace of the

brave” theme into the minds of the Israelis. In his words, “I believe that the road is correct. I believe that the move is correct. It is not easy. Any change, any solution, also involves risk, but the time has come to take risks for the sake of peace, of a solution.”

At that same August 30 Knesset session, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres took a slightly different theme—highlighting the common humanity of the peoples involved:

This is a genuine proposal. We did not try to deceive either the Jews or the Palestinians. We want to live with them in peace. They are human beings just like us. We do not want to rule over them, scorn them or humiliate them. They are not four-legged creatures. They are not demons or animals. They are human beings just like us—Israel’s faith is based upon such precepts—and we will live with them in peace.¹⁷

Shortly thereafter, at the signing on the White House lawn, Rabin picked up on this theme, “Let me say to you, the Palestinians: We are destined to live together on the same soil, in the same land.”¹⁸ The dramatic nature of his comments was partly for the international audience but was also designed to begin preparing Israelis for the inevitable two-state land for peace solution that underpinned the entire process. Rabin and Peres, from very early on in the process, started preparing Israel for the difficult sacrifices it would have to make. This was crucial for the Israelis because they were going to be giving up a significant amount in tangible concessions, while Arafat and the PLO had more intangible issues to fulfill such as recognizing the existence of the State of Israel.

As with any peace process, it is not enough to just discuss the parameters of the agreement. The role of the leaders is to provide a vision for their people of what things will look like at the end of the road and to find a common bond that ties former enemies together.¹⁹ As Peres explained from an Israeli perspective:

Ladies and gentlemen: Two parallel tragedies have unfolded. Let us become a civic community. Let us bid once and for all farewell to wars, to threats, to human misery. Let us bid farewell to enmity and may there be no more victims on either side. Let us build a Middle East of hope, where today’s food is produced and tomorrow’s prosperity is guaranteed—a region with a common

market, a Near East with a long-range agenda. We owe it to our fallen soldiers, to the memories of the victims of the Holocaust. Our hearts today grieve for the lost life of young and innocent people yesterday in our own country. Let their memory be our foundation. We are establishing today a memory of peace on fresh and old pomp. Suffering is, first of all, human. We also feel for the innocent loss of Palestinian life. We begin a new day...I thank all of you, ladies and gentlemen, and let's pray together. Let's add hope to determination as all of us since Abraham believes in freedom, in peace, in the blessing of our great land and great spirit.²⁰

The vision is clear in Peres' statement, as is the evocation of the common bond of the patriarch of both groups' religions. The vision also includes two other elements, a stronger evocation of rising expectations and a weaker acknowledgement that the road ahead will be hard; that the peace agreement is a starting, not an ending, point.

Eight days after the signing of the accord, in a September 21 statement before the Knesset, Rabin again evoked a powerful symbol of religious sacrifice—that of Yom Kippur—to exhibit how sacrifice for peace is necessary:

The Israeli Government today believes that with the beginning of the New Year, a gate has opened—a gate of peace, a gate of blessing. As the prayer goes: Bestow peace, good, blessings, life, favor and grace, charity and mercy upon us and all the people of Israel. On the eve of Yom Kippur 5754, the Israeli Government presents the Israeli people with a chance for peace and, perhaps, for an end to the wars, violence and terror. In the high holidays prayers we also say: who will live and who will die, who will perish and who will not, who will die by water, fire or sword.²¹

In short, the description is one not simply of pain, but of pain with a purpose. Again, the agreement is described as a beginning point to another long struggle rather than as an endpoint for the conflict. Additionally, neither Rabin nor Peres focused on the alternative to supporting the agreement, namely continued conflict with the Palestinians. In this sense, both Rabin and Peres set the reference point on the risks of the agreement rather than on the risks of the alternative of no agree-

ment. This aspirational focus of the reference point may have been more in keeping with the local culture of the “peace of the brave” frame, but it does contradict the findings of prospect theory.

Pro-Agreement Forces: The Palestinian Liberation Organization

The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) for its part chose to use the theme of religion, with the path to salvation, freedom, and statehood lying at the end of the Oslo Process. The PLO’s approach more generally reflected the vast power asymmetry between itself and the Israelis. Moreover, to sell the agreement’s legitimacy to its populace, the PLO did two things—showed how the core of the conflict was to be addressed as the process unfolded (in other words downplayed the interim nature of the process) and used external justifications, such as UN resolutions 242 and 338—which called for a withdrawal from the occupied territories and a negotiated settlement—to strengthen their case. As the PLO statement of September 12 read:

The PLO has arrived at the first agreement in our contemporary history with Israel...[which] stipulates the realization of a comprehensive solution on the bases of the implementation of the United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 [(1967)] and 338 [(1973)] and the withdrawal of the Israeli forces within a number of months from parts of our occupied homeland in the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area... The Palestinian security forces, which will be formed from elements at home and abroad, will take over responsibilities for internal security in the entire Palestinian territory. The agreement will guarantee the control of our people over all its capabilities, affairs, and the return of those who have left since 1967, during the interim stage....

[T]he PLO considers that the Palestinian-Israeli agreement on the Declaration of Principles constitutes an important step toward the solution of the conflict, the PLO proceeds in this stance on the basis of acceptance of the challenge of peace and of giving a chance to the achievement of the just solution with all its aspects and dimensions, as contained in [the United Nations Security Council] resolutions 242 [(1967)] and 338 [(1973)], and the principle of returning all the occupied territories for peace and guaranteeing security for all.²²

Interestingly, at the signing of the accord at the White House the next day, it appeared that the PLO was trying to temper what was possible with the accord, while still emphasizing that this path was one that would resolve those issues most dear to the Palestinians. As Mamoud Abbas stated at the White House:

[I]t is important to me to affirm that we are looking forward with a great deal of hope and optimism to a date that is two years from today when negotiations over the final status of our country are set to begin. We will then settle the remaining fundamental issues, especially those of Jerusalem, the refugees and the settlements. At that time, we will be laying the last brick in the edifice of peace whose foundation has been established today.²³

Finally, Arafat also used the peace of the brave theme and he would continue to repeat that message, not only so his own people would see the courage and dignity in what he was doing, but also so that Israelis would see they had a genuine partner for peace that could control more extreme elements of Palestinian society.

We will need more courage and determination to continue the course of building coexistence and peace between us. This is possible. And it will happen with mutual determination and with the effort that will be made with all parties on all the tracks to establish the foundations of a just and comprehensive peace. Our people do not consider that exercising the right to self-determination could violate the rights of their neighbors or infringe on their security. Rather, putting an end to their feelings of being wronged and of having suffered an historic injustice is the strongest guarantee of achieving coexistence and openness between our two peoples and future generations.²⁴

Here, the leaders of the PLO concentrate almost solely on the difficulties facing the parties as they implement the agreement, with some acknowledgement that “justice” in the form of the right of return and the division of Jerusalem would still need to be dealt with before the final and comprehensive settlement. Unlike Israeli leaders, PLO leaders addressed their remarks to international as well as domestic constituents. Domestically their focus had been on the alignment of the agreement with UN resolutions 242 and 338; internationally, the call was

for assistance by the US and other members for the international community in the implementation of the Accords, ostensibly charging all parties with responsibility for the agreement's success or failure.²⁵ Again the PLO framing mirrors the Israeli framing in the sense that the reference point was focused on the risks of the agreement alongside the aspirations of the Palestinian people for peace.

As we can see from these statements, the Israeli government's emphasis is on the courageous, yet controlled, nature of the peace process, while the PLO's emphasis is on the courage required to embark on a path that would also eventually include a clear final settlement of all the core issues in the conflict. Neither party framed the accords as the only workable alternative to continued war and violence—or even the rise of extremist elements—instead framing the Oslo Accords as a risky first step to eventual peace.

Anti-Agreement Forces

Anti-agreement forces in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were in a strong position vis-à-vis the supporters of the agreement. Israel's Labor party faced strong opposition from Likud as well as internal dissension while the PLO suffered a loss of credibility in the occupied territories following its expulsion from Lebanon in 1982 and the subsequent rise of the Islamic Resistance Movement known as Hamas. Additionally, unlike peace processes in places like Northern Ireland, Zimbabwe/Rhodesia and Sri Lanka, there was no significant outside force that could set the terms of debate or credibly guarantee that all sides would abide by the agreement. Finally, the gradual nature of the Oslo Accords made them more vulnerable to failures of implementation. What this meant was that the extent to which internal opponents could possibly derail the Accords was greater than in the case of Northern Ireland and that, consequently, it was much harder to completely sideline those internal opposition forces.

This was particularly true in the case of the PLO, who, in addition to a lack of local resources, had come under increasing pressure by the success of Hamas in “winning hearts and minds” through its extensive social programs. Hamas' rejection of any accord with Israel, like the Likud's insistence that any agreement with the PLO was “treating with terrorists,” left the Oslo Accords with opponents who were adamantly against the agreement and had more room to maneuver in opposing it.

On the Israeli side, Binyamin Netanyahu was a strong voice of opposition to the agreement. In a telephone interview with Israeli Defense Force's radio on August 29, 1993, Netanyahu described the upcoming agreement in no uncertain terms, "We are not speaking here of an alternative between this situation and a war. The situation itself constitutes a preparation for war. There is no relation between this situation and peace."²⁶ Former Prime Minister Yitzak Shamir concurred with this characterization two days later in a September 23 speech to the Knesset. He remarked that:

Judaea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip will be transferred in rapid stages to Arafat and his henchmen—first by crawling toward autonomy and then finally in the permanent solution. This is how vital and dear pieces of land, our motherland, are being wrenched from our bodies.²⁷

Overall, Israeli opponents of the agreement argued that it would not bring peace and would only play into the hands of PLO "terrorists" bent on destroying the Jewish state. In doing so, they attempted to create a reference point framing the agreement as being a riskier alternative to their preferred choice of "staying the course." This framing, in line with prospect theory, failed to convince members of the Knesset to vote against ratifying the agreement, but may have, in the long term, undermined public support.

On the Palestinian side, the most steadfast opponent of the peace agreement was Hamas. Throughout the negotiating period as well as following the signing and ratification of the accords, Hamas remained opposed to the agreement and described it as a sellout of the Palestinian people. In an interview with Tehran's *Jomhuri-ye Islami* broadcast on December 4, 1993, Musa Abu-Mazuq, head of Hamas' political bureau argued that:

The accord does not solve any of the existing problems, such as the problem of the refugees, deportees, Jerusalem, the settlers, domestic security, roads, borders, the economy or water. All these problems remain unsolved. The accord postpones all the problems until conditions are ripe. We believe that this accord will not last. Time will prove this.²⁸

Both main opponents to the agreement emphasized the risks involved in terms of supporting that agreement. Netanyahu, Shamir, and the Likud party emphasized that they believed the agreement's giving of land and control to the "terrorist" PLO and Yasser Arafat would result in increased acts of terrorism and would endanger the Israeli state.²⁹ Hamas emphasized its belief that the agreement was a sell-out and would solidify Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, dashing their vision of a unified Palestinian state and the destruction of Israel. In both of these cases, we can see that the opponents of the agreement attempted to create a reference point to frame the agreement as embodying more risk than no agreement at all. In a sense, this conforms to Kahneman and Tversky's dictum of making the preferred choice seem like less risk than the certain loss posed by the other choice.

How is Implementation Described?

This section focuses more on how the level of perceived difficulty in implementing the Oslo Accords was described, more explicitly focusing on how supporting elites attempted to generate support for the Accords and manage expectations to avoid a loss of support that might come if the agreement failed to deliver all that had been promised.

The crux of the Israeli government's approach was the incremental nature of the process, with consistent talk of interim agreements. This made progress seem very plausible without appearing to be giving away too much at any one time. The Israelis sold the implementation as plausible from hurdle to hurdle, provided the Palestinians did everything they were required to do under the Accords. Israeli leaders were also quite careful to point out the interdependence between the parties and the fact that their collective security was tied to each other. They counterposed the plausible interim perspective with another perspective, which was that reaching the end goal of the process was going to be very difficult. As Rabin enunciated in a speech to the Knesset on September 21, 1993:

The agreement on the interim period in Gaza and Jericho will be implemented before the establishment of the elected Palestinian Council, which will direct the affairs of the Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. The Council will be established only

after we agree with the Palestinians about its structure, composition and functions. The target date for elections is nine months after the Declaration of Principles goes into effect. Israel will regard the Gaza-Jericho first stage as a sort of test of the Palestinians' ability to implement the agreement on the Declaration of Principles.³⁰

Shimon Peres, who focused very specifically on the two groups' interdependence and security, added in an October 11 Knesset speech:

The implementation of our agreement with the PLO, as approved by the Knesset, will decrease the friction between us and them and will burden the Palestinians with the responsibility of preserving law and order. It will increase our common interest in preserving peace and overcoming terrorism.³¹

The emphasis of Israeli leaders here rests mainly on the control that they perceived they would have over the process. On the one hand, the implementation of the agreement would increase the interdependence of the two groups—and would be difficult—but on the other, because the Israelis would, in effect, test Palestinian compliance at each stage, they would be able to control the process to “turn off the tap” if the PLO (or Palestinian Authority[PA]) proved unable or unwilling to live up to its end of the bargain.

The PLO used a somewhat different tactic than the Israelis. Arafat saw it in his interest to sell the agreement in a final status capacity. As such, he really only had one choice in terms of peddling the nature of the implementation process—that it would be difficult. His reality was that he did not really control the process given his weaker party status, and so by emphasizing the difficulties in making peace—particularly on the final status issues—he tried to paint himself as someone who could only win in the process. If the process went wrong, he could blame the more powerful Israelis, and if the process succeeded, he could take credit.

In his statement at the White House signing ceremony, Arafat and the PLO not only did what was mentioned above but also added another layer of complexity by proclaiming the international community was another player that would be faulted should the process fail. As the statement read:

Enforcing the agreement and moving toward the final settlement, after two years, to implement all aspects of United Nations [Security Council] resolutions 242 [(1967)] and 338 [(1973)], in all of their aspects and resolve all the issues of Jerusalem, the settlement, the refugees and the boundaries will be a Palestinian and an Israeli responsibility. It is also the responsibility of the international community, in its entirety, to help the parties overcome the tremendous difficulties which are still standing in the way of reaching a final and comprehensive settlement.³²

Finally, Arafat in this same September 13 speech crystallized not only how difficult it would be to achieve a lasting peace, but also that justice demanded such a solution. Anything short of such a peace would not be acceptable. "Ladies and gentlemen, the battle for peace is the most difficult battle of our lives. It deserves our utmost efforts because the land of peace—the land of peace yearns for a just and comprehensive peace."

In his White House signing remarks, Mahmoud Abbas echoed the idea that implementation was going to be difficult, but not impossible, stating:

We know quite well that this is merely the beginning of a journey that is surrounded by numerous dangers and difficulties. And yet, our mutual determination to overcome everything that stands in the way of the cause of peace—our common belief that peace is the only means to security and stability, and our mutual aspiration for a secure peace characterized by cooperation—all this will enable us to overcome all obstacles with the support of the international community.³³

Once again we notice the same peace process with very different salespeople at the helm. The Israelis were pitching an interim-based progression that required the interdependent cooperation of the two sides. Conversely, the PLO was selling the road to the final status issues and the notion of justice to validate its long and arduous struggle against occupation.

Anti-Agreement Forces

Israeli opponents of the agreement also emphasized that it was a beginning point. However, opponents such as Netanhayu and Shamir

described it as the beginning of the end of the Israeli state instead of a beginning point for peace. As noted above, Netanyahu saw the handover of Gaza and Jericho as the first step toward the dissolution of Israel; to those who opposed giving the land to the Palestinians, the loss of the West Bank, or Judea and Samaria would inevitably lead to "capitulation...and retreat."³⁴ In his September 22 speech to the Knesset, Netanyahu followed up on the theme of loss, asserting that:

This agreement relinquishes the safety of the citizens of Israel and transfers the responsibility to the hands and good intentions of Yasir Arafat. But, Sir the most cynical, despicable, and even most contemptible thing this agreement does is to knowingly abandon the 130,000 inhabitants of Judaea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip, who are Israeli citizens.³⁵

For its part, Hamas and its spokespeople did not describe the agreement as either a beginning or an endpoint, but as noted above, they consistently reiterated their belief that the agreement would fail in time.

Pro-agreement elites from both camps described the Accords as a beginning step that would require hard work to bring the peace to full fruition. Given the interim nature of the first Oslo Accords, it was reasonable for both parties to attempt to manage expectations by emphasizing the difficulties inherent in its implementation. However, it is clear that pro-agreement Israeli elites did more to attempt to manage expectations than did their Palestinian counterparts. Arafat's focus on the final status encouraged people to take a long view, but this focus was premature in the sense that the promise of a better life in the future was not enough to sustain Palestinian support over the long haul. In addition, Arafat's attempt to insulate himself from the possible failure of the Accords by shifting responsibility onto the international community may have had a ring of truth to it, but likely did little to engender trust with his Israeli counterparts. In essence, the raising of expectations for the final status and peace dividends were not effectively dampened through the use of the peace of the brave frame, which focused on the risks of achieving peace rather than on the risks inherent in losing peace.³⁶

How are the Costs & Benefits Described?

This final section addresses the specifics of how costs and benefits for the agreement were described. In this question, the focus on the descriptions of pros and cons associated with the agreement focuses more directly on some of the benefits expected for making peace and the sacrifices people would have to make. As such, this section is where we attempt to integrate most clearly the balance between emphasizing the risks associated with the alternative to the preferred choice and the management of expectations associated with describing the costs and benefits of the agreement.

Once again, we begin the analysis with statements made prior to the signing of the Oslo Accords by the Israeli government officials. It is quite clear from their statements that they are trying to prepare their population both for the hard work ahead and for the fruits of the agreement. As Rabin stated at the Knesset on August 30, 1993:

I am telling you today that the horizons for peace are open. Progress has been made in the entire Arab arena with regard to readiness for peace. This does not mean that there are no obstacles or difficulties, but I am convinced that the horizons for peace are open.³⁷

This statement is purposefully vague and seeks to be a frame of what is possible and why. This grand vision, devoid of specifics, is a tactic both the Israelis and the PLO used frequently to encourage their people to support the process.

But Rabin did not stop there. In the same speech, he very clearly drew a link to the ultimate carrot for Israelis—a peace with their neighbors and a permanent place in the Middle East. In his words:

Hence, what was agreed on in Oslo and what will be presented and signed in Washington—I hope and believe it will be so—is a great step forward in promoting Israel towards peace with all our neighbouring countries, first and foremost with the Palestinians.³⁸

On September 21, Rabin went further, claiming that one significant benefit of the agreement was its focus on the reduction of terrorism. As he explained:

We chose to adopt another way, one which offers a chance and hope. We decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people to the negotiations in the framework of the peace talks...The PLO has undertaken to denounce and put an end to terrorism and violence in Israel, in the territories and elsewhere. I want to say here that since the agreements were signed, the PLO has not carried out even one act of terrorism. The PLO has undertaken to enforce an end to terrorism and violence by its members and to punish the violators.³⁹

As most leaders realize, focusing on a high profile tangible benefit such as the reduction of terrorism is a message people not only want to hear, but also desperately hope is possible. Rabin went on to say "Today we are looking forward to the good chances, to days without worries and nights without fears, to a developing economy and a prosperous society. If and when the long desired peace arrives, our lives will completely change. We will no longer live only by our swords."

Finally, Rabin also tried to frame the achievement of the Zionist dream of a secure state as a benefit of the process. As he expressed it:

On the eve of the New Year, after hundred years of violence and terrorism, after wars and suffering, today there is a good chance to open a new chapter in Israel's history. There is a chance for putting an end to tears. Flower buds and new horizons are opening up for the Israeli economy and society. Above all, I want to tell you that this is a victory for Zionism, which is now recognized by its most adamant and bitter enemies. There are chances for good relations with our neighbors, for an end to the bereavement which has afflicted our homes, for an end to war.⁴⁰

Similarly, the PLO used lofty visions to elicit the positives possible from the signing of the accord. In the case of the PLO, there was a focus on this accord as vindication and justice for years of struggle. As Arafat claimed in a statement issued to the *Algiers Voice of Palestine* radio program on September 22:

The establishment of a permanent, comprehensive and just peace is the fundamental goal we all endeavour to achieve. The Palestinian-Israeli agreement made recently—as our Arab brothers considered it to be a first, important step on the road to the sought-after

solution...[The agreement] is the practical beginning for the establishment of our independent Palestinian state on our national soil, which must necessarily be the firm pillar of a just and comprehensive peace in our region, and also for moving toward progress and prosperity.⁴¹

The other primary benefit PLO leaders tried to convey was the economic and social transformation of their society as a result of this agreement. This frame shifted from the general to the specific for the average Palestinian. PLO leaders realized that they had to spend time highlighting how the people on the ground would benefit from the peace dividend. As Abbas exhorted on the White House lawn:

Economic development is the principal challenge facing the Palestinian people after years of struggle during which our national infrastructure and institutions were overburdened and drained. We are looking to the world for its support and encouragement in our struggle for growth and development which begins today.⁴²

As should be evident from the statements of both groups, both sides framed the agreement through a combination of general and specific issues. For the Israelis, the general was the focus on Zionism and its fulfillment and the specific was on security and a reduction of terrorism. For the PLO, the general was on how the agreement justified their years of struggle, while the specific dealt with the economic and social benefits to Palestinian society.

Anti-Agreement Forces

Both pro-agreement parties described the costs and benefits in terms that would raise expectations rather than in terms that would emphasize the risks of no agreement. By contrast parties opposed to the agreement—Netanyahu's Likud and Hamas—tended to focus on the risks that the agreement posed rather than on any possibility that Israelis or Palestinians, respectively, would benefit from the agreement.

CONCLUSION

The “sales pitches” for the Oslo Accords did not emphasize the dangers of the alternatives, but instead the difficulties of the process

itself. For both sides, this may have been a wise attempt to lower or manage expectations for what could be achieved by the agreement. However, for the PLO, this may have been sabotaged to some extent by Arafat's emphasis on the final status negotiations and how not only would the Palestinian people have their own state in a short time, but everyday life would improve for them. In conjunction with this, Rabin and Peres' emphasis on the end of terror may have raised expectations too high given the limited ability of the Palestinian Authority to contend with and suppress violence from Hamas which remained steadfast in its opposition to the agreement and in support of violence as the only avenue to Palestinian statehood through the destruction of Israel.

There is a question as to how much of an effect the framing of a peace agreement will have on popular support over time as opposed to other factors. Some of these other factors could arguably be more important, such as issues around Israeli control over the process and the degree to which the agreement was implemented with some arguing that Israeli unwillingness to relinquish control led to Palestinian dissatisfaction⁴³ and others that the focus of the PA on its own power rather than national liberation set the stage for a reemergence of tribalism and economic decline that fueled the rage underlying the al-Aqsa Intifada.⁴⁴ Additional issues around continued expansion of Israeli settlements, spoiler violence—including suicide attacks—from Hamas, Israeli reprisals and closure policies and, not least, the impact of Yitzhak Rabin's assassination by a Jewish extremist in 1995 all had an impact upon both rising dissatisfaction as well as a creeping unwillingness by all to continue to sacrifice for a peace that was not meeting anyone's expectations. While we agree that framing cannot substitute for these factors, it can help people try and make sense of the improvements, or especially the lack thereof, that do take place. Our initial analysis showed that by focusing on the argument that, as flawed as it was, the Good Friday Agreement was far superior to the alternative of descending back into violence, supporters of the agreement insulated it, to an extent, from vicissitudes of the implementation process with its many suspensions and delays. Despite the fact that much of the promised peace dividend failed to materialize, polling showed that support for the GFA remained relatively strong in both communities.⁴⁵ While the circumstances of the two conflicts differ, it is evident that both of these agreements had their successes and failures, including incidents of violence, political deadlock, and dissatisfactions among considerable portions of the populations. For

supporters and opponents of the GFA in Northern Ireland, however, the continued refrain from politicians and, increasingly, news outlets and editorials was that either one would go forward with a difficult process or one would go backwards into a spiral of violence.⁴⁶ In the Oslo process, however, there was no reference to the dangers of failure, leaving the population with the “peace of the brave” frame which only emphasized the difficulties of implementation. When the process finally ended with the start of the second intifada, it did so in part because of poor framing that did little to alleviate the failures in implementation. Rothstein indicates that neither leader “made much effort to educate their constituencies...[and] as a result, as conditions deteriorated the masses began to see the peace as increasing dangers and decreasing standards of living.”⁴⁷ Rothstein further emphasizes the importance of framing by stating that “the presentation of the peace process—the way we “frame” it—is not an exercise in public relations but is rather a major factor in determining whether it will succeed or fail.”⁴⁸

Thus, we believe that framing a peace process has an impact on the longevity and possibly the success of that process through its ability to help constituents for peace keep their eye on the long-term view of peace as preferable to the alternative. In our study of Northern Ireland, we showed that proponents of the process succeeded in persuading the populace that the alternative to the agreement continued to be more unpalatable than the difficulties and shortcomings in the agreement’s implementation. This theme was so powerful that it continued to be used by supporters of the agreement whenever it appeared that the agreement might be in any danger. From chastising unionist political opponents to dissident republican groups, the populace of Northern Ireland was continually reminded that despite the GFA’s difficulties, there was no alternative to continued implementation.⁴⁹ In contrast, proponents of the Oslo Accords did not focus on the, very real, dangers of renewed conflict in attempting to sell the agreement to their constituents, instead emphasizing the long, hard struggle that lay on the road to peace. This framing, when coupled with both sides’ failures in implementation, led to disappointment on the Israeli side and disillusionment on the Palestinians. It was this disillusionment, along with the lack of focus on the consequences of failure, which made no agreement seem more palatable and preferable to continuing a process that failed to meet either population’s expectations.

This analysis, especially when coupled with our earlier work on Northern Ireland, leads us to assert that not only should leaders pay attention to the need to frame and “sell” peace agreements to their constituents—even when popular referenda are not being held—but that they should also pay attention to the dictates of prospect theory when doing so. In other words, while it is important to be realistic about the difficulties inherent in implementing any peace agreement, it is also very much worth reminding people that even when promised “peace dividends” fail to materialize, that the major dividend of peace is just that, peace. By following the dictates of prospect theory, leaders may be able to insulate a particular agreement from the problems inherent in implementation by reminding people of the costs of conflict rather than the costs of peace and the risks of failure rather than the risks of peace.

NOTES

1. For example see Arie M. Kacowicz, “Rashomon in the Middle East: Clashing Narratives, Images, and Frames in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” in *Cooperation & Conflict* 40, No. 3 (2005); David Levin, “Framing Peace Policies: The Competition for Resonant Themes,” in *Political Communication* 22, No. 1 (2005); Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Gadi Wolfsfeld, *The News Media and Peace Processes: The Middle East and Northern Ireland* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2001); Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and the Path to Peace, Communication, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

2. This concept of alternatives in negotiation was first articulated by Mary Parker Follett and made popular by Fisher and Ury in the book *Getting to Yes* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981).

3. Landon E. Hancock, Joshua N. Weiss and Glen M. E. Duerr, “Prospect Theory and the Framing of the Good Friday Agreement,” in *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 28, No. 2 (2011): 183–203.

4. Colin Gilbert Chapman, *Whose Promised Land? The Continuing Crisis over Israel and Palestine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 31.

5. Joshua N. Weiss, “Trajectories toward Peace: Mediator Sequencing Strategies in Intractable Communal Conflicts,” in *Negotiation Journal* 19, No. 2 (2003): 109–115.

6. Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, “Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk,” in *Econometrica* 47, No. 2 (1979); Amos Tversky

and Daniel Kahneman, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice," in *Science* 311, No. 30 (January, 1981).

7. See William A. Gamson, "News as Framing," in *American Behavioral Scientist* 33 (1989); Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East*; Gadi Wolfsfeld, *The News Media and Peace Processes: The Middle East and Northern Ireland*; Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Media and the Path to Peace*.

8. Tversky and Kahneman, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice," 453.

9. Kahneman and Tversky, "Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk," 265.

10. Ibid., 269; Tversky and Kahneman, "The Framing of Decisions and the Psychology of Choice" 455.

11. Jack S. Levy, "An Introduction to Prospect Theory," in *Political Psychology* 13, No. 2 (1992): 171-186.

12. Zeev Maoz, "Framing the National Interest," in *World Politics* 43, No. 1 (1990), 89.

13. William A. Boettcher III, "The Prospects for Prospect Theory: An Empirical Evaluation of International Relations Applications of Framing and Loss Aversion," in *Political Psychology* 25, No. 3 (2004): 453.

14. Ibid., 333.

15. Jack S. Levy, "Applications of Prospect Theory to Political Science," in *Synthese* 135, No. 2 (2003); Z. Maoz, "Framing the National Interest," 89.

16. *Knesset Briefed by Rabin, Peres on Accord*. Jerusalem Channel 2 Television Network in Hebrew, August 30, 1993. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) transcribed text, August 31, 1993.

17. Ibid.

18. White House, "*Ceremony for the Signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles: Transcript of Statements*," ed. Office of the Press Secretary (1993).

19. For the role of leaders in making peace see, John Darby, and Roger Mac Ginty, eds. *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence, and Peace Processes* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Janice Gross Stein, "Image, Identity and Conflict Resolution," in *Managing Global Chaos: Sources and Responses to International Conflict*, eds. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson and Pamela Aall, (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996), 93-112; Cathy Gormley-Heenan, "Abdicated and Assumed Responsibilities? The Multiple Roles of Political Leadership During the Northern Ireland Peace Process," in *Civil Wars* 7, No. 3 (2005): 195-218.

20. White House, "*Ceremony for the Signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles: Transcript of Statements.*"

21. *Rabin Addresses Knesset on Accord with PLO*, Jerusalem Qol Yisra'el radio in Hebrew, September 21, 1993. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) transcribed text, September 22, 1993.

22. Text of statement of the Executive Committee of the PLO on the Israeli-PLO Declaration of Principles, Tunis, September 12, 1993.

23. White House, "*Ceremony for the Signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles: Transcript of Statements.*"

24. Ibid.

25. "Arafat: Mideast at Strategic Crossroads," *Xinhua General News Service*, November 29, 1993.

26. *Netanyahu Rejects Deal*. Tel Aviv IDF Radio in Hebrew, August 29, 1993. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) transcribed text, August 30, 1993.

27. *Shamir Addresses Session*, Jerusalem Qol Yisra'el radio in Hebrew, September 21, 1993. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) transcribed text, September 22, 1993.

28. *Hamas Official on Visit, PLO-Israeli Accord*, Tehran Jomhuri-ye Eslami in Persian, December 4, 1993. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) transcribed text, December 14, 1993.

29. For more on Netanyahu's view of Arafat see Landon E. Hancock, and Joshua N. Weiss. "The Conflict Within: the Interpersonal Conflict between Netanyahu and Arafat," in *Online journal of peace and conflict resolution* 2, No. 2 (May 1999).

30. *Rabin Addresses Knesset on Accord with PLO*.

31. *Peres Statement Opens Knesset Winter Session*, Jerusalem Channel 2 Television Network in Hebrew, October 11, 1993. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) transcribed text, October 12, 1993.

32. White House, "*Ceremony for the Signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles: Transcript of Statements.*"

33. Ibid.

34. *Netanyahu Speaks against Accord During Knesset Debate*. Jerusalem Qol Yisra'el radio in Hebrew, September 21, 1993. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) transcribed text, September 22, 1993.

35. Ibid.

36. Several news stories following the outbreak of the Second Intifada indicate high levels of Palestinian frustration with the peace process. In particular, Camron and Gaouette's article "Peace that Left a Public Behind," in the *Christian Science Monitor*, October 3, 2000, argues that Palestinian

frustrations were focused on the peace agreement itself, its failure to lead to resolution of the final status issues of refugees, settlements and Jerusalem, and, finally, the fact that, despite promises of a peace dividend, Palestinian abilities to “earn a living wage” had declined during the 1990s, largely due to Israeli security measures.

37. *Knesset Briefed by Rabin, Peres on Accord.*

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Rabin Addresses Knesset on Accord with PLO.*

40. *Ibid.*

41. *Arafat Asks People to Support Agreement with Israel*, Algiers Voice of Palestine radio in Arabic, September 22, 1993. Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) transcribed text, September 23, 1993.

42. White House, “Ceremony for the Signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles: Transcript of Statements.”

43. See Khalil Shikaki, “Peace Now or Hamas Later,” in *Foreign Affairs* 77, No. 4 (1998): 29–43; Jerome Slater, “What Went Wrong? The Collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process,” in *Political Science Quarterly* 116, No. 2 (2001).

44. Sara Roy, “Palestinian Society and Economy: The Continued Denial of Possibility,” in *Journal of Palestine Studies* 30 #4, No. 120 (2001).

45. “Prospect Theory and the Framing of the Good Friday Agreement.”

46. *Ibid.*

47. Robert L Rothstein, “A Fragile Peace: Could A “Race to the Bottom” Have Been Avoided?” in *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process: Oslo and the Lessons of Failure: Perspectives, Predicaments and Prospects*, eds. Robert L Rothstein, Moshe Ma’oz and Khalil Shikaki (Brighton; Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), 10.

48. *Ibid.*, 8.

49. Landon E. Hancock, “There is No Alternative: Prospect Theory, the Yes Campaign and the Selling of the Good Friday Agreement,” in *Irish Political Studies* 26, No. 1 (2011): 95–116.