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9 The detrimental dynamics of delegitimization in  
11 intractable conflicts: The Israeli–Palestinian case

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17 Accepted 23 July 2006

19  
21 **Abstract**

23 Delegitimization of the adversary, among psychological factors, is one of the major detrimental  
25 forces to peaceful resolution of any conflict. In the present context of violence between Palestinians  
27 and Israeli Jews, it is probably the major obstacle to the realization of the readiness in both societies  
29 to make major concession in the final settlement of the conflict. First, thus, the paper discusses the  
31 nature of delegitimization and elaborates its societal functions. Then it describes the mutual  
delegitimization between the Israeli Jews and the Palestinians, focusing on the context of violent  
confrontations that broke out following failure of the Camp David summit meeting in the fall of  
2000. It presents several consequences based on survey data carried out in both Israeli Jewish and  
Palestinian societies. Finally, the paper provides few concluding comments.

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33  
35 **1. Introduction**

37 Analysis of the relations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians, in the context of the Al  
39 Aqsa Intifada indicates a sad paradox. On the one hand, in both societies there is increase  
41 tendency for far-reaching compromises in order to resolve the Palestinian–Israeli conflict  
peacefully. At the same time, the majority of people in both societies attribute extremely  
negative characteristics to the opponent and has a deep mistrust that jeopardizes possible  
negotiation and conflict solution. In addition, the majority in both societies supported

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1 violent acts against the opponent during the Intifada, and this only deepens the negative  
 2 stereotyping and the mistrust (Bar-Tal & Sharvit, in press; Kull, 2003).<sup>1</sup> In fact the  
 3 described paradox is pivotal to the understanding of the present continuation of violent  
 4 conformations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians and the stalemate of the peace  
 5 process.

6 In trying to understand the present paradoxical situation, it is necessary to look at the  
 7 dynamics of the intractable conflict in which Palestinians and Israeli Jews are locked. For a  
 8 period of about 100 years, these societies have contested each other over such goals and  
 9 interests as social identity, territory, natural resources, self-determination, statehood, holy  
 10 places, economic gains, personal and collective security, and values (Morris, 2001; Tessler,  
 11 1994). These goals with the accompanying acts of violence dictate the nature of the conflict  
 12 and the possibility of its solution. So is the *psychological repertoire*, which has evolved with  
 13 time, and plays a determinative role in the conflict dynamics. This psychological repertoire  
 14 eventually turns out to be a major obstacle to conflict resolution of the conflict and in fact  
 15 maintains it.

16 The psychological repertoire consists of such elements as collective memory about the  
 17 conflict, ethos of conflict, collective emotional orientation and social identity—all of which  
 18 evolve in the course of intractable conflict (Bar-Tal, 1998a, in press; Bar-Tal & Salomon, in  
 19 press; Oren, 2005). We propose that in this repertoire, delegitimization of the adversary,  
 20 among all the psychological elements, is one of the major detrimental forces to peaceful  
 21 resolution (Bandura, 1999; Kelman, 1973; Staub, 1999) and therefore its functioning  
 22 should be elaborated. In the present context of violence between the Palestinians and  
 23 Israeli Jews, it is probably the major obstacle that prevents the realization of the readiness  
 24 to make major concession in the final settlement of the conflict.

25 The present contribution therefore focuses on delegitimization and we will mainly  
 26 analyze it within the context of the violent confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli  
 27 Jews that broke out following failure of the Camp David summit meeting in the fall of  
 28 2000. Its consequences are grounded in the present deadlock that fuels the Israeli–Pales-  
 29 tinian conflict. Thus, first, we will present the concept of delegitimization. Then, we will  
 30 describe the nature of the mutual Palestinian–Israeli delegitimization and analyze its  
 31 implications. Finally, we will provide several concluding comments.

## 32 2. Concept of delegitimization

### 33 2.1. Definition

34 In general, delegitimization refers to stereotypes<sup>2</sup> with extremely negative connotations  
 35 (Bar-Tal, 1989, 1990, 2000) that is used to describe a specific case of group categorization.  
 36 It is based on extremely negative outgroup characterization and aimed at denying the other  
 37 group's humanity. Specifically, *delegitimization is defined as categorization of a group or*  
 38 *groups into extremely negative social categories that exclude it, or them, from the sphere of*  
 39 *human groups that act within the limits of acceptable norms and/or values, since these groups*  
 40 *are viewed as violating basic human norms or values; In this view, delegitimization is a type*  
 41 *of*

42 <sup>1</sup>See also Search for Common Ground (December 10, 2002). The potential for non-violent Intifada.  
 43 [www.sfcg.org/documents/SFCGPoll.pdf](http://www.sfcg.org/documents/SFCGPoll.pdf).

44 <sup>2</sup>Stereotypes are defined as stored beliefs about characteristics of a group of people.

1 of moral exclusion, which according to Opatow (1990) leads individuals or groups  
 2 “outside the boundary in which moral values, rules, and considerations of fairness apply.  
 3 Those who are morally excluded are perceived as non-entities, expendable, or undeserving;  
 4 consequently, harming them appears acceptable, appropriate, or just” (p. 1). This  
 5 phenomenon occurs mostly in situations of intergroup conflict and ethnocentrism (Bar-  
 6 Tal, 1990). We will focus only on the former situation.

7 Delegitimization, as an extreme case of negative stereotyping, does not appear in every  
 8 intergroup conflict. It tends to emerge especially in very violent conflicts when the  
 9 contested goals are perceived as far-reaching, unjustified, and endangering the  
 10 fundamental goals of the group. For example, it appears in intractable conflicts<sup>3</sup> (Bar-  
 11 Tal, 1998a, in press; Kriesberg, 1993, 1998). Delegitimization appears under these  
 12 conditions to fulfill various needs that we will specify below.

13 The above implies that the conflict context in which delegitimization evolves is stable  
 14 and salient in its threatening and violent nature, concerns many of the society members,  
 15 and plays a central role in their lives. Moreover, the two groups engaged in conflict are  
 16 physically and socially separated, even if they live in the same geographical area, as do  
 17 Jews and Palestinians in the Middle East. There is usually little social contact between  
 18 members of the two groups. Most of the information they receive about each other is  
 19 dominated by conflict-related themes that present the malevolent acts of the other side. In  
 20 such a context, the persistent use of delegitimization is not surprising.

21

## 22 2.2. Types of delegitimization

23 It was suggested that dehumanization, out-casting, negative trait characterization,  
 24 political labeling, and group comparison are among the most commonly used contents in  
 25 delegitimization (Bar-Tal, 1989). *Dehumanization* involves categorizing a group as non-  
 26 human. This can be done either by using subhuman epithets such as uncivilized savages,  
 27 primitives, animals, or by using superhuman categories with negative connotations such as  
 28 demons, monsters, and devils. *Trait characterization* consists of attributing traits that are  
 29 considered extremely negative and unacceptable in a given society. Traits such as  
 30 *aggressors*, *idiots*, or *parasites* exemplify this type of delegitimization. *Out-casting* consists  
 31 of categorizing the adversary into groups that are considered as violators of pivotal social  
 32 norms. Out-casts include such categories as murderers, thieves, psychopaths, terrorists, or  
 33 maniacs. The society usually excludes these violators from its system and often even places  
 34 them in total institutions. Use of *political labels* involves categorization into political  
 35 groups which are absolutely rejected by the values of the delegitimizing group, for  
 36 example, Nazis, fascists, communists, Zionists, colonialists, or imperialists. These labels  
 37 are culturally bound and their use depends on society’s cultural ideology. Finally,  
 38 delegitimization by *group comparison* occurs when the delegitized group is labeled by a  
 39 name of a group that traditionally serves as an example of negativity in the delegitimizing  
 40 group. Uses of such categories as “Vandals” or “Huns” are examples of this type of  
 41 delegitimization. Each society has, in its cultural repertoire, representations of groups or  
 42 societies that serve as symbols of malice, evil, brutality, or wickedness.

43  
 44  
 45 <sup>3</sup>Intractable conflicts, in which the parties involved greatly invest material and nonmaterial resources, are  
 46 characterized as being total, protracted, violent, central, and perceived as being unsolvable and of zero sum  
 47 nature.

1 In severe conflicts, the label *enemy*, together with the above categories of delegitimiza-  
 2 tion, is also used which has a very negative meaning and implications (e.g., Frank, 1967;  
 3 Holt & Silverstein, 1989; Kaplowitz, 1990; Moses, 1990; Rieber, 1991) and therefore in the  
 4 present analysis it will be seen as having similar functions, implications, and consequences  
 5 as delegitimizing labels. Social categorization as an “enemy” defines the other group as a  
 6 severe threat; implies a confrontational and hostile attitude toward the other group  
 7 (Kelman, 1997; Silverstein & Flamenbaum, 1989), and attribution of very negative  
 8 characteristics (Szalay & Mir-Djalali, 1991). Keen (1986), who examined how the enemy is  
 9 portrayed in posters, leaflets, caricatures, comics, photographs, drawings, paintings, and  
 10 illustrations appearing in books from different countries, suggested that the prototype has  
 11 the following features: the enemy is a stranger; a faceless, barbarous, greedy, criminal,  
 12 sadistic, and immoral aggressor. The enemy is often presented in depersonalized abstract  
 13 terms as a torturer, rapist, desecrator, beast, reptile, insect, germ, death, or devil. All these  
 14 characteristics imply an intention of delegitimization.

### 15 2.3. Functions

16  
 17 Delegitimization fulfills several important functions on the individual and group levels.  
 18 First, like other stereotypes, delegitimizing categories provide information and explan-  
 19 ations about the social world (Stangor & Schaller, 1996; Tajfel, 1981; Yzerbyt, Rocher, &  
 20 Schadron, 1997). In the context of conflict, delegitimizing stereotypes explain the nature of  
 21 the conflict: Specifically, why it erupted, why it continues, and why it is violent. Since  
 22 societies involved in intractable conflicts view their own goals as justified and perceive  
 23 themselves in a positive light, they attribute all responsibility for the outbreak and  
 24 continuation of the conflict to the characteristics and nature of the opponent: the enemy.  
 25 The situation of violent conflict is extremely threatening and accompanied by stress,  
 26 vulnerability, uncertainty, and fear (Bar-Tal, in press; Lieberman, 1964). As such, it raises  
 27 a need for structure, allowing quick explanation, understanding, and prediction  
 28 (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996). Delegitimizing labels fulfill these needs. A black and white  
 29 approach, without gray shades, enables a fast, parsimonious, unequivocal, and simple  
 30 grasp of the situation. It provides absolute clarity as to which rival group is to be blamed  
 31 for the conflict and violence.

32 Second, in their epistemic function, delegitimizing labels, as well as the label “enemy”,  
 33 also serve to justify the violence and destruction inflicted on the adversary by the  
 34 delegitimizing group (Tajfel, 1981). They provide justification for individuals and for the  
 35 social system as a whole to intentionally harm the rival, and for continuing to  
 36 institutionalize aggression towards the enemy (Jackman, 2001; Jost & Banaji, 1994). This  
 37 is an important function that resolves feelings of dissonance, guilt, and shame that may  
 38 appear, because normally human beings do not willingly harm other human beings. The  
 39 sanctity of life is perhaps the most respected value in modern societies. Killing or even  
 40 hurting other human beings is considered the most serious violation of the moral code  
 41 (Donagan, 1979; Kleinig, 1991). Delegitimization, the denial of the adversary’s humanity  
 42 and attribution of threatening characteristics, allows such violence. (Bandura, 1999;  
 43 Kelman, 1973; Staub, 1989).

44 Third, delegitimizing stereotypes and the “enemy” labeling, have the function of  
 45 reflecting a shared reality for group members (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). They  
 46 express the nature of the conflict relations between rival groups and indicate that it is a

1 violent and severe conflict. In essence, according to Oakes et al. (1994), expressing them is a  
 2 political act of the group revealing the norms and values to which group members are  
 3 expected to subscribe. This may be viewed as the expressive function of attitudes and  
 4 opinions suggested by Katz (1960). In this case, the aim is to express the common  
 5 perception of reality in the context of the violent conflict. Holding shared views about the  
 6 rival group reflects a common fate, provides important content for the societal repertoire,  
 7 and reaffirms identification with the group.

8 Fourth, delegitimizing labels create a sense of differentiation and superiority (Tajfel,  
 9 1978, 1981) to the extent of totally excluding the delegitimized group from the community  
 10 of groups considered as acting within an acceptable range of norms and values. Since the  
 11 rival group is delegitimized, the boundaries between the groups are not penetrable. In the  
 12 situation of a severe conflict, when both sides engage in violence, and often perform  
 13 immoral acts, feelings of being different (i.e., more moral and humane) are of special  
 14 importance. In this way, delegitimization provides the contrast which feeds the  
 15 construction of positive social identity (Bar-On, 1999).

16 Fifth, delegitimizing labels motivate for action. On the one hand, they indicate to group  
 17 members that the delegitimizing group should take revenge for the violent acts performed  
 18 against them and, on the other hand, they imply a need to initiate violent acts to prevent  
 19 the perceived potential danger and threat. Vengeance is a norm in many societies and may  
 20 even be considered a moral requirement (Turney-High, 1949). That is, in some societies,  
 21 members think that in retribution for suffered violence, they have an obligation to  
 22 physically harm members of the rival group. The delegitimizing labels constantly remind  
 23 group members of the violence against them and indicate that it may recur. Thus, by  
 24 implication, their own violent acts may prevent possible harm by the enemy.

25 Finally, as a sixth function, delegitimizing stereotypes and the label “enemy”, serve as  
 26 motivator for mobilization. They supply information that implies threat and danger to the  
 27 group. Therefore, group members are required to take all necessary steps in order to cope  
 28 successfully with the other group. Withstanding the enemy and averting the danger of  
 29 delegitimized groups such as “murderers”, “Nazis”, “terrorists” or “psychopaths”,  
 30 requires full mobilization. In severe and violent conflicts, delegitimizing labels serve as cues  
 31 to remind the ingroup of the threats and of the mobilizing steps that have therefore to be  
 32 taken to counter the threatening outgroup.

33 In sum, delegitimizing labels fulfill essential functions in group coping with the stressful  
 34 and demanding situation of prolong conflict. Yet, as we will see later, it also may  
 35 contribute to the conflict continuity and prevent peaceful resolution of it. After presenting  
 36 the conceptual framework, a short description of the mutual delegitimization between  
 37 Israeli Jews and Palestinians will be described as example to the complicity and dynamic  
 38 nature of this phenomenon.

39

### 40 3. Mutual delegitimization between Israeli Jews and Palestinians

41

42 The mutual delegitimization between Israeli Jews and Palestinians did not begin  
 43 recently. It began with shared individual representation, became part of the private and  
 44 public discourse, and penetrated into cultural and educational products. Mutual  
 45 delegitimization has been normative practice in both societies (Bar-On, 2000; Bar-Tal,  
 46 1988; Kelman, 1999). It appeared in leaders’ speeches, media news and analyses, literary  
 47 books, theatrical plays, films, and even in school textbooks (see in Bar-Tal & Teichman,



1 2005, the analysis of the Israeli Jewish society). The general processes of dissemination and  
 2 transmission of delegitimizing labels have been similar in both societies, but the contents of  
 3 delegitimization have been somewhat different. Delegitimization became institutionalized  
 4 as it was widely shared by both population and extensively used by Palestinians and Israeli  
 5 Jews alike. This extensive institutionalized mutual delegitimization continued until 1993  
 6 and even beyond, when important segments in both societies tried to advance the peace  
 7 process. Even then, strong opposition groups on both sides tried to delegitimize the peace  
 8 process and the leaders who pursued it, and to actively stop it. Palestinian opposition  
 9 groups carried out deadly terror attacks on Jewish Israeli civilians without major efforts by  
 10 the Palestinian Authority to stop them, whereas the Israeli government continued the  
 11 Jewish settlement of Palestinian land and carried out policies severely restricting the daily  
 12 life of the Palestinians. Eventually the peace process collapsed, the Al Aqsa Intifada began  
 13 and the mutual (institutionalized) delegitimization reappeared with a vengeance in the  
 14 public discourse of both the Palestinians and the Israeli Jews.

15 In describing the delegitimization of each side, first it will be described on the general  
 16 level, showing the continuity and width of the used delegitimization through the long  
 17 period of the conflict. Then it will be shown how it was expressed in school textbooks  
 18 through many years. This part exemplifies the institutionalization of the delegitimization  
 19 and the way of its dissemination to new generations. This element of institutionalization is  
 20 of special importance, because the beliefs presented in the school textbooks reach the  
 21 whole younger generation of a society. Moreover, because of the perceived epistemic  
 22 authority of school textbooks, they are often considered to express truth and facts. During  
 23 an intractable conflict, children, adolescents and young adults learn a particular  
 24 delegitimizing view of the opponent that shapes their beliefs, attitudes and the  
 25 accompanying emotions. Finally, the description will shift to the present, focusing on  
 26 the delegitimization that characterizes current Jewish–Palestinian relations and showing  
 27 changes that occurred since the eruption of the latest violent confrontation, relying on  
 28 survey polls taken during this period.

### 29 3.1. Israeli delegitimization

#### 31 3.1.1. General description

32 Jews arriving to Palestine from the early 20th century in waves of Zionist immigrations,  
 33 initially viewed Arabs residing in the region ethnocentrically being primitive, dirty, stupid,  
 34 easily agitated, and aggressive. As the conflict evolved and became violent, Arabs were  
 35 perceived as killers, a blood-thirsty mob, rioters, treacherous, untrustworthy, cowards,  
 36 cruel, and wicked. Of special interest is the label of “Arabs”, which did not differentiate  
 37 the population of Palestine from that of other Arab countries. In fact, through decades the  
 38 great majority of the Jews did not recognize the Palestinian entity as a nation. During the  
 39 pre-state period, Arab residents of Palestine opposing Jewish immigration and settlement,  
 40 were viewed as being violent and intransigent by refusing to accept any compromises and  
 41 being easily agitated by the extremist leaders (see Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Gorny, 1987;  
 42 Shapira, 1992; Tessler, 1994).

43 The delegitimization of the Palestinians continued after the establishment of the state of  
 44 Israel. They continued to be perceived as primitive and violent and their national identity  
 45 was denied, as well as their right to self-determination. A special effort was made over the  
 46 decades to delegitimize the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), established in 1964,

1 which eventually came to express the aspiration of the great majority of the Palestinians.  
 Thus, delegitimization of the PLO was in effect delegitimization of the Palestinians. In the  
 3 first 10 years of the PLO's existence, literally almost all the Israeli Jews negated the  
 existence of this organization (Tessler, 1994). In 1977, the Israeli Knesset adopted a  
 5 resolution by a vote of 92–4 stating that “The organization called the PLO aspires, as  
 stated in its covenant, to destroy and exterminate the State of Israel. The murder of women  
 7 and children, and terrorism, are part of this organization's ideology, which it is  
 implementing in practice”.

9 After 1974, when the PLO opened a small window for possible conflict resolution,  
 individual Israeli Jews opened a dialogue with PLO representatives. These contacts slowly  
 11 increased and therefore in 1986 the Knesset decided to prohibit meetings with PLO  
 representatives by legislating the law of “Order for the Prevention of Terror”. The law was  
 13 changed on January 1993, thus making the Oslo talks and mutual recognition between  
 Israel and the PLO legal.

15

### 3.1.2. Use of school textbooks

17 Delegitimization of Arabs can be found already in early Hebrew school textbooks of  
 history and geography. Firer (1985) found that from 1930, as the violent conflict escalated,  
 19 history school textbooks referred to the Arabs as “robbers, vandals, primitives, and easily  
 agitated” (Firer, 1985, p. 128). Also, the books portrayed Arabs as being ungrateful to the  
 21 Jews who had come to contribute to the development of the country, while the Arab  
 leaders incited the Arab people against the Jewish settlement. With regard to the Arab  
 23 population, the books focused on *fellahin* (Arab peasants), who were generally presented  
 as primitive and backward (see also Podeh, 2002). After the establishment of the state of  
 25 Israel until the early 1970s, the school textbooks continued to present Arabs negatively.  
 Bar-Gal's (1993, 1994) summarized his analysis of Arabs' representations in Israeli  
 27 geography books by pointing out that throughout many decades they were represented in  
 terms of the following characteristics: “*unenlightened, inferior, fatalistic, unproductive,*  
 29 *apathetic, with a need for strong paternalism. ... They are divided, tribal, exotic, people of the*  
*backward East, poor, sick, dirty, noisy, colored. Arabs are not progressive; they multiply fast,*  
 31 *they are ungrateful, not part of us, non-Jews. They commit arson and murder, they destroy,*  
*are easily inflamed, and vengeful” (Bar-Gal, 1993, p. 189).*

33 Delegitimization of Arabs was also common in the Hebrew readers used in elementary  
 schools. Zohar (1972), analyzing widely used school readers published in the 1950s and  
 35 1960s, found that Arab society was represented as primitive, backward and passive. The  
 most frequent representation of Arabs was as the enemy, but neither their national  
 37 aspirations nor the context of the conflict between two national movements were ever  
 mentioned. The books used the label “enemy” in a depersonalized and undifferentiated  
 39 way. In general, the textbooks tended to describe the acts of Arabs as hostile, deviant,  
 cruel, immoral and unfair, with the intention to hurt Jews and to annihilate the state of  
 41 Israel. Within this frame of reference, Arabs were delegitimized by the use of such labels as  
 “robbers”, “wicked ones”, “blood-thirsty mob”, “killers”, “gangs”, or “rioters”.

43 By late 1970s, these delegitimizing descriptions had almost disappeared from the  
 textbooks, but the negative stereotyping remained (e.g., Bar-Tal & Zoltak, 1989; Firer,  
 45 1985). Podeh (2002) pointed out that from the late 1970s, the history textbooks began to  
 acknowledge the existence of Palestinian nationalism, and used less pejorative terminology  
 47 in their description of the Arabs' violent resistance to Jewish immigration and settlement.

1 Bar-Tal (1998b), who analyzed the contents of all school textbooks used in all school  
 2 grades (1–12) for History, Geography, Civic Studies, and Hebrew (readers), which were  
 3 approved by the Ministry of Education for use in 1994–1995, found sporadic  
 4 delegitimization of Arabs. Their negative stereotyping was prevalent and positive  
 5 stereotypes were rare.

6 The most recent analysis by Podeh (2002) indicates that a major and significant change  
 7 took place at the end of the 1990s, during the peace negotiations between Israel and the  
 8 Palestinians. Some of the published books shed a more balanced light on the Arab–Jewish  
 9 conflict and were influenced by the new zeitgeist, which allowed more openness, pluralism,  
 10 and self-criticism (see also Furer & Adwan, 2004). In these books, Arabs were presented  
 11 “not only as mere spectators or as aggressors but also as victims of the conflict” (Podeh,  
 12 2002, pp. 149–150). Many of these books shed a new perspective on the Arab–Jewish  
 13 conflict and presented the Arabs, in general, and the Palestinians, in particular, in more a  
 14 complex, multidimensional, and differentiated way. However, the publication of the new  
 15 books evoked heated debates in Israeli society, including in Israeli parliament, the *Knesset*.  
 16 In November 2000, the Education Committee of the Knesset decided to delay the use of  
 17 one of the history text books—indicating that part of society and its representatives have  
 18 difficulty accepting changes in school textbooks that question the delegitimization of the  
 19 Palestinians. It is possible that this decision reflected a trend of reversal in Israeli society  
 20 that began with the outbreak of violence in the fall of 2000 (Sharvit & Bar-Tal, in press).

### 21 3.2. *Palestinian delegitimization*

#### 22 3.2.1. *General description*

23 In many aspects, the Palestinian delegitimization of Jews is a mirror image in terms of its  
 24 content to the Israeli delegitimization of Palestinians (see Bar-Tal, 1988); In general, Jews  
 25 were viewed almost from the start of Zionist immigration as colonialists who came to settle  
 26 Palestinian land and expel the Palestinian population. They were stereotyped as strangers,  
 27 crusaders, unwanted, and enemies. Also, Jews were attributed with labels such as deceitful,  
 28 treacherous, thieves, and disloyal and were seen as aggressors and robbers. In addition,  
 29 they were perceived as colonialists, racists, fascists, and imperialists and they were even  
 30 compared to the Nazis. The term Zionism itself became a delegitimizing label as it was  
 31 considered a colonialist ideology. The war of 1948 was viewed as a Naqba (disaster) caused  
 32 by Jewish aggression and expansionism (Hadawi, 1968; Khalidi, 1997; Said, 1979; Sayigh,  
 33 1997).

34 This line of delegitimization continued through decades. The national Covenant of the  
 35 PLO, approved in 1964, stated in its article 19: “Zionism is a colonialist movement in its  
 36 inception, aggressive and expansionist in its goals, racist and segregationist in its  
 37 configuration and fascist in its means and aims”.

38 Since almost all the Jews in Israel viewed themselves as Zionists, the delegitimizing label  
 39 was applied to the Jewish entity as a whole. However, after 1974 some change began to  
 40 take place in the PLO’s policy toward Israel. In the 12th meeting of the Palestinian  
 41 National Council (PNC) in 1974 a “ten-point” program was draft, calling for the  
 42 establishment of the ‘people’s national independent and fighting authority on every part of  
 43 liberated Palestinian land”. Muslish (1997) and Hassassian (1997) identify this program as  
 44 a vague acceptance of the two-state solution to the conflict, and hence a first step toward  
 45 full recognition of Israel. Yet, Muslish (1997) pointed out that the main reason for the



1 ambiguity of the plan can be found in “the fact that the Palestinians were not yet ready to  
 2 accept the existence of Israel” (p. 40). Only in November 1988, the PNC meeting in  
 3 Algiers, adopted two documents—the Political Program and Declaration of Independence—which officially accepted the 1947 UN partition plan, thus recognizing the two-  
 4 state solution of the conflict. Finally in September 1993, Yasir Arafat, Head of the PLO,  
 5 and Yitzhak Rabin, the Prime Minister of Israel, signed an accord granting mutual  
 6 recognition between the two parties.

### 9 3.2.2. Use of school textbooks

11 Many delegitimizing beliefs concerning Jews appeared in Jordanian and Egyptian  
 12 textbooks that have been used by Palestinian schools in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for  
 13 decades since 1948, including the period of Israeli occupation from 1967 onward. They  
 14 were also distributed by the Palestinian National Authority after its establishment until  
 15 late 1990s. The books included descriptions of the Jews as disloyal and treacherous, as in  
 16 the following quote: “Treachery and disloyalty are character traits of the Jews and  
 17 therefore one should beware of them”.<sup>4</sup> The Jews in these books were described as enemies  
 18 and aggressors, whose aim is to destroy and conquer Palestine. For example, a history  
 19 book for 10th grade describes Zionism as “a political, aggressive, and colonialist  
 20 movement, which calls for the Judaisation of Palestine by the expulsion of its Arab  
 21 inhabitants”.<sup>5</sup>

22 As can be seen from the last citation, the Zionists were characterized as colonialists and  
 23 even worse than regular western imperialists. According to History book for 12th grade,  
 24 Zionism differs from imperialism because the former “Believes in the elimination of the  
 25 original inhabitants” while the latter “has not gone as far as the elimination of original  
 26 inhabitants”. Also, Zionism is “based on the foundation of false religious and historical  
 27 rights” while imperialism is “based on foundations of economic interests”.<sup>6</sup> Zionism was  
 28 also compared to the Nazi movement; a 12th grade history book, for example, declares  
 29 that: “The clearest examples of racist belief and racial discrimination in the world are  
 30 Nazism and Zionism”.<sup>7</sup>

31 However, from 1994, after the signing of the Oslo accord, the newly created Palestinian  
 32 Ministry of Education began to introduce a new curriculum. In 1994 it composed a set of  
 33 textbooks for the first six grades as a supplement to the Jordanian and Egyptian books. In  
 34 2000, new textbooks for the elementary schools were written by the Palestinian Ministry of  
 35 Education. As Brown (2003) and Nordbruch (2002) point out, although these books  
 36 discuss current problems of the Palestinians and talk about occupation and colonialism,  
 37 calls for Israel’s destruction were no longer present, nor were references to the Jews and  
 38 Israelis as an “evil enemy” (see also Firer & Adwan, 2004).

39 In sum, we showed the lines of delegitimization that evolved through the years of conflict  
 40 between the Palestinians and Jews. This delegitimization was institutionalized, as the  
 41 analysis of the schoolbooks shows, and dominated the psychological repertoire of the  
 42 members of both societies. Generations of Israeli Jews and Palestinians were reared up on  
 43 its basis and it deeply penetrated the culture of both nations. During the 1990s, as the

44 <sup>4</sup>Islamic Education for 9th grade, p. 87 quoted in CMIP, 2001.

45 <sup>5</sup>Modern Arab History and Contemporary Problems, Part Two, for 10th grade, p. 49 quoted in CMIP, 2001.

46 <sup>6</sup>Modern Arab History for 12th grade, Part I, p. 123 quoted in CMIP, 2001.

47 <sup>7</sup>Modern Arab History for 12th grade, Part I, p. 123 quoted in CMIP, 2001.

1 peace process continued, delegitimization was greatly reduced, among various segments of  
 2 the Palestinian and Israeli societies. It reappeared easily with the eruption of intense  
 3 violence in the fall of 2000, which involved many society members on both sides (see the  
 analysis of this context in Bar-Tal & Sharvit, in press).

5 Indeed, there is evidence that at the end of 2000, with the eruption of violence between  
 the two sides, mutual delegitimization increased as more individuals in both sides hold  
 7 negative image of the opponent. In 1997, only 39% of Israeli Jewish respondents described  
 the Palestinians as violent, 42% regarded Palestinians as dishonest. Nevertheless, by the  
 9 end of 2000, 68% of Israeli Jewish respondents perceived Palestinians as violent and 51%  
 as dishonest.<sup>8</sup> The delegitimization of the Palestinians by Israelis focused on the label  
 11 “terrorist” which is a type of outcasting. Already in October 2000, 71% of Israeli Jews  
 thought that Arafat, the father figure of the Palestinian national movement, behaved like a  
 13 terrorist, in comparison to 2 years earlier when only 41% thought so<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, the  
 Palestinian Authority was presented by the Israeli government as a “terrorist entity”,  
 15 which initiates and supports terror attacks<sup>10</sup> and 67% of Israeli Jews supported this  
 view<sup>11</sup>. The negative view of the Palestinians increased even more after the elections in  
 17 2006 in which Hamas won and formed the government.

Finding from Palestinian public polls indicate similar pattern. As for negative  
 19 stereotypes, polls conducted by Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (JMCC)  
 indicates that a large majority of Palestinians in 1997 perceived Israelis as violent (77%)  
 21 and unfair (62%), but intelligent (71%). At the end of 2000, 94% of the Palestinians  
 perceived the Israelis as violent and 81% as dishonest.<sup>12</sup> Also the sweeping majority  
 23 (90–98%) perceived Israeli army activities as terror, while only a small minority (13–16%)  
 view own acts of violence as terror.<sup>13</sup> The ascendance to power of Hamas institutionalized  
 25 the delegitimization of the Jews because this organization does recognize the state of Israel.

In trying to understand the present psychological deadlock, we turn now to the  
 27 discussion of the consequences of the return to mutual delegitimization that characterizes  
 the Israeli–Palestinian relationship after fall 2000.

29

#### 31 4. Consequences of delegitimization

31

The return to mutual delegitimization had a number of implications: cognitive,  
 33 emotional, and behavioral. The main emotional consequents were increase of fear and  
 mistrust in both sides. Delegitimizing characteristics not only imply intentions of behavior,  
 35 but also characterize already performed behaviors. That is, use of labels such as murderers,  
 terrorists, colonialists, or fascists, indicates that the delegitimized group, which is in  
 37 conflict with the delegitimizing group, has the capacity to harm the opponent. The uses of  
 delegitimizing labels strengthen already aroused threat and fear. Already at the beginning  
 39 of the violence, in a poll carried in November 2000 by Tami Steinmetz Center, 59% of the  
 Israeli Jews reported feelings of personal threat and 62% felt that Israel’s national security

41

<sup>8</sup>*Peace Index*: The Peace Index project is conducted by The Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research at Tel-  
 43 Aviv University. The data appears in The Tami Steinmetz Center’s web site at [www.tau.ac.il/peace](http://www.tau.ac.il/peace).

<sup>9</sup>Peace Index, October 2000.

<sup>10</sup>Herald Tribune, March 1, 2001.

<sup>11</sup>*Maariv*, December 7, 2001.

<sup>12</sup>See <http://www.jmcc.org/publicpoll/results.html>.

<sup>13</sup>Israeli Palestinian joint public opinion poll, December 2001. <http://Truman.huji.ac.il/poll-dec-1-2001.htm>.

47

1 was threatened.<sup>14</sup> In June 2001, 67% of Israeli Jews reported being anxious about the  
 future of Israel and 63% reported higher anxiety than in the past regarding their personal  
 3 security and that of their family.<sup>15</sup> In addition, in 2002 almost all Israeli Jews (92%)  
 reported fear that they or a member of their family might fall victim to a terrorist attack,  
 5 while in February 2000, this percentage was 79% and in 1999 only 58% (Arian, 2002).

On the Palestinian side, similar findings were observed. The percentage of respondents  
 7 that reported feeling insecurity about their lives, their children, and their property rose  
 significantly since fall 2000 from 18% in September 2000 to above 70% in 2001.<sup>16</sup> In  
 9 addition, in June 2002, a majority of respondents (87%) in a survey conducted by the  
 development studies program at Bir-Zeit University reported a feeling of worrisome.<sup>17</sup>

11 Delegitimization also arouses deep mistrust. In 2001, 79.8% of Israeli Jews reported that  
 they did not trust Palestinians, since even if they would sign a peace agreement, they would  
 13 not honor it.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in a survey of March 2001, 75% believed that “the Palestinian  
 Authority has no desire whatsoever to attain peace with Israel”.<sup>19</sup> These responses should  
 15 be compared to beliefs expressed earlier, in 1997, which showed that 53% of Israeli Jews  
 believed that the Palestinian people were truly interested in peace and 52% of the  
 17 respondents believed that the Palestinian Authority was truly interested in peace.<sup>20</sup>

As for the Palestinians, polls carried out by the PCPSR from August 1998 until  
 19 December 1999 showed that most of the respondents (63%) in August 1998 and in June  
 1999 did not trust the intentions of the Israeli people towards the peace process with the  
 21 Palestinians.<sup>21</sup> Later polls carried out by the development studies program at Bir-Zeit  
 University showed similar results: In October 2001, over 91% of the respondents felt that  
 23 the current Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, was not serious about  
 reaching an agreement to end the conflict with the Palestinians (compared with 64% in  
 25 February 2001).<sup>22</sup>

It is not surprising, then, that as violence erupted and delegitimization increased, both  
 27 sides began to express pessimism about the chances of resolving the conflict. Coordinated  
 surveys conducted during late December 2000 by the JMCC and the Tami Steinmetz  
 29 Center investigated the level of pessimism and optimism about reaching a peaceful  
 settlement of their conflict. The Palestinian public showed a sharp decrease in the degree of  
 31 optimism after the eruption of the violence—from 60% in December 1999 to 33% in  
 December 2000. At the same time, the rate of pessimism went up from 37% to 62%. The  
 33 optimism of the Israeli public has also declined, but more moderately: 54% were optimists  
 in December 1999 and 48% in December 2000. The rates of pessimism went up from 40%  
 35 to 48%.

Moreover, the increase in mutual delegitimization had significant consequences that  
 37 pertain to information processing in both sides. In situations of severe and violent conflict,  
 where delegitimizing stereotypes dislike and negative emotions are common features,  
 39

41 <sup>14</sup>Peace Index, November 2000.

<sup>15</sup>*Maariv*, June 8, 2001.

<sup>16</sup><http://micro5.mssc.huji.ac.il/~truman>.

43 <sup>17</sup>[http://home.birzeit.edu/dsp/DSPNEW/polls/opinion\\_polls.htm](http://home.birzeit.edu/dsp/DSPNEW/polls/opinion_polls.htm).

<sup>18</sup>Peace Index, May 2001.

45 <sup>19</sup>Peace Index, March 2001.

<sup>20</sup>Peace Index, March, 1997.

<sup>21</sup><http://www.pcpsr.org/survey/cprspolls/index.html>.

47 <sup>22</sup>[http://home.birzeit.edu/dsp/DSPNEW/polls/opinion\\_polls.htm](http://home.birzeit.edu/dsp/DSPNEW/polls/opinion_polls.htm).

1 information is absorbed in specific ways. Group members tend to make evaluations,  
 2 interpretations, and attributions that shed negative light on the rival group, in line with  
 3 their held view. This tendency reflects biased and distorting information processing in  
 4 which group members change and add elements to construct images that are consistent  
 5 with their delegitimizing beliefs, negative attitudes, and emotions.

Indeed, Wolfsfeld and Dajani (2003), who examined media coverage by major Israeli  
 7 and Palestinian newspapers of four violent events during the current *Intifada*<sup>23</sup> found that  
 8 each side processes information in line with their held negative view of the other, and thus  
 9 the outcome suggests a clear case of mirroring. Both, Palestinians and Israelis, focused on  
 10 the violence of the other side, demonized the opponent, viewed the own group as a victim,  
 11 and emphasized own group solidarity and unity. But, when the own side carried out the  
 12 violence, they judged it by different criteria: they justified it, adopted a military perspective  
 13 and presented it as a patriotic act of self-protection.

It is therefore not surprising that similar trends appear in public polls results about the  
 15 way the public in each side interpret the same events. A great majority of Israeli Jews  
 16 defines violent acts committed by Palestinians against Israelis as terrorism, but not vice  
 17 versa those committed by the Israeli government against Palestinians. As a mirror image, a  
 18 great majority of Palestinians define acts committed by Israelis against them as terrorism,  
 19 but not so vice versa.<sup>24</sup>

Finely, the mutual delegitimization provides the basis for expectations and has  
 21 behavioral consequences. Group members who use delegitimizing labels always expect  
 22 the rival group to have extremely negative dispositions and bad intentions, and to behave  
 23 accordingly. Such expectations may bring about the self-fulfilling prophecy phenomenon.  
 24 In expecting negative intentions and behavior, the group itself behaves towards the rival  
 25 group in a negative way instigating hostility and animosity, thus confirming the initial  
 26 expectations and creating a vicious circle (see the analysis of Hamilton, Sherman, &  
 27 Ruvolo, 1990; Jussim & Fleming, 1996).

Indeed, delegitimization leads to the harming of the delegitized group. The harm is  
 29 often done to prevent the delegitized group from carrying out harmful acts and to  
 30 punish the delegitized group for harm already done. The Israeli Jewish public  
 31 (consistently about 70%) began to support violent acts against the Palestinians initiated  
 32 by its government after the eruption of the Intifada in fall of 2000. In March 2001, 72% of  
 33 Israeli Jews thought that more military force should be used against the Palestinians.<sup>25</sup>

Also, 58% supported a policy of increasing military pressure in order to avoid another war  
 35 and as an alternative to peace talks, while 2 years earlier only 40% supported this option  
 36 (Arian, 2002). Eighty percent supported the use of tanks and fighter planes against the  
 37 Palestinians, 73% supported use of so-called “closures” and economic sanctions, and 72%  
 38 supported military invasion of the cities under the control of the Palestinian Authority  
 39 (Arian, 2002).

The results from Palestinian public polls demonstrate similar trends of support for  
 41 violent acts against Israelis. Data from polls conducted by JMCC indicates that the

43 <sup>23</sup>The events are: the Palestinian suicide attack on Passover evening at the Park Hotel in Natanya (March 27,  
 44 2002), the Palestinian suicide attack at the Pat junction in Jerusalem (June 18, 2002), the Israeli incursion into  
 45 Jenin (April 6, 2002) and the assassination of Saleh Shehade (July 22, 2002) carried out by the Israeli army in  
 46 Gaza.

47 <sup>24</sup>Israeli Palestinian joint public opinion poll, December 2001. <http://Truman.huji.ac.il/poll-dec-1-2001.htm>.

<sup>25</sup>Peace Index, March 2001.

1 support for “military operations against Israeli targets” rose from 34% in May 1997 to  
 2 70% in June 2001. Support for suicide attacks against Israelis rose from 24% in May 1997  
 3 to 74% in April 2001. By 2002–2003, most respondents (60–72%) still supported such  
 4 attacks.<sup>26</sup>

5 Delegitimization also contributes to the continuity of the conflict because it prevents  
 6 contact. Marking a group with delegitimizing labels indicates that no contacts should be  
 7 had with this group. Moreover, delegitimization also can prevent negotiation and political  
 8 contact, since it is unthinkable to lead political negotiation with a group that is considered  
 9 delegitimized. Indeed, since the beginning of Al Aqsa Intifada both sides referred to the  
 10 other side leadership as un-legitimate and the direct Israeli Palestinian negotiation ceased.  
 11 Accordingly, the percent of Israelis who wanted to continue the peace talks with the  
 12 Palestinians dropped from 63% in 1999 to 42% in 2001 (Arian, 2002). Among the  
 13 Palestinian there has been during that time also decrease in the degree of support of the  
 14 Israeli–Palestinian negotiations from 56% who supported this process in 1999 to 46% that  
 15 supported the negotiation in December 2000.<sup>27</sup>

## 17 5. Conclusions

18 The above analysis suggests that the characteristics, implications, and consequences of  
 19 delegitimization should be seen as a syndrome that is very influential in situations of  
 20 intergroup conflict. When delegitimization becomes prevalent, it marks the whole nature of  
 21 intergroup relations. Delegitimization allows practices like discrimination, exploitation,  
 22 expulsion, mass killings, and genocide that would otherwise be unthinkable. Without the  
 23 rationalization provided by delegitimization, many people would have great difficulty to  
 24 commit such acts (see Bandura, 1999; Kelman, 1973; Staub, 1989).

25 Delegitimization operates circularly (see Bar-Tal, 1990). Focusing on severe and violent  
 26 conflicts, of the type in which Israelis and Palestinians are involved, delegitimization, on  
 27 the one hand, is a result of the particular characteristics of the intractable conflict and  
 28 especially of the rival violent behaviors. In this capacity, delegitimization provides an  
 29 efficient, simplistic, and un-ambiguous explanation of the nature of the conflict and its  
 30 threatening features. This explanation, in turn, leads to group mobilization for coping with  
 31 the threat and harming the opponent as a preventive or retributitional act. On the other  
 32 hand, however, the need to justify the violence carried out and the harm inflicted  
 33 strengthen the delegitimization.

34 We provided systematic analysis of one example: the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In the  
 35 present violent confrontation with the Palestinians, terror attacks by Palestinians against  
 36 Israeli Jews substantially increase Israeli delegitimization, fear and hatred of, as well as  
 37 their readiness to harm, the Palestinian people; in turn harsh Israeli measures increase  
 38 Palestinians’ hatred and delegitimization of Israeli Jews, as well as Palestinians’ readiness  
 39 to carry out extremely harmful acts against them. This is a vicious cycle and it is hard both  
 40 to tell where it begins and to decide where it ends. This situation continues up to the  
 41 present day as the behaviors of each side serve to validate held psychological repertoire as  
 42 well as constitute justification for harming the rival. Paradoxically, both sides are  
 43 expressing readiness for far-reaching compromises regarding the resolution of the  
 44

<sup>26</sup><http://www.jmcc.org/publicpoll/results.html>.

47 <sup>27</sup>Israeli Palestinian joint public opinion poll, December 2001. <http://Truman.huji.ac.il/poll-dec-1-2001.htm>.



1 Palestinian–Israeli conflict. We assume that change of the psychological repertoire held by  
 2 the Israeli Jews and Palestinians about each other is a necessary condition to achieve this  
 3 step toward peace (Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005). Legitimization and personalization of the  
 4 enemy are crucial processes, without which it is almost impossible to conduct a peace  
 5 process of any serious kind.

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