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Beliefs About Negative Intentions of the World: A Study of the Israeli Siege Mentality

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The present study introduces the concept of Siege Mentality which denotes a mental state in which group members hold a central belief that the rest of the world has negative behavioral intentions toward them. Two scales were constructed to assess the level of Siege Mentality among a group of Israeli students: The General Siege Mentality Scale (GSMS) and the Israeli Siege Mentality Scale (ISMS). A series of analyses showed that Siege Mentality is a unique construct different from paranoid tendency and ethnocentrism, and that the two scales (GSMS and ISMS) assess a similar construct. Finally, the results show that Siege Mentality is the best predicted by the hawkish orientation regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict.

We have plenty of . . . 'friends' in the world who would like to see us dead, wounded, trampled, suppressed. And then it is possible to pity the wretched Jew, to commiserate with him. (Yitzhak Shamir, Prime Minister, in *Newsweek*, January 25, 1988, p. 30)

INTRODUCTION

Anyone who attempts to comprehend the actions and reactions of the Israeli public and leaders, in the past and present, has to unveil the Israeli perception of the world. A rigorous analysis of the Israeli ethos as revealed in public polls, literature, films, holy books, school books, media commentaries, and leaders' expressions indicates that Israeli Jews believe that the world is against them (Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). In the words of Liebman (1978), "Jewish tradition finds Antisemitism to be the norm, the natural response of the non-Jew. . . . The term 'Esau hates Jacob' symbolizes the world which Jews experience. It is deeply embedded in the Jewish folk tradition" (p. 44).

We would like to suggest that the described characteristic reflects the *Siege*

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Mentality,² defined as a mental state in which members of a group hold a central belief that the rest of the world has highly negative behavioral intentions toward them (see Bar-Tal, 1986). Although individuals store the belief in their cognitive repertoire, the definition refers to a group characteristic. It describes a situation in which at least a significant and influential part of the group believes that outsiders have intentions to do wrong to or inflict harm on their group. In addition, the crucial focus of this belief is on the rest of the world or out-groups. Since most of the groups are in conflict with one or several out-groups, the emphasis of this belief is on the rest of the world. In actuality, the belief refers to all the reference out-groups with which the group desires to have positive relations or which have influence on the group's welfare. Finally, this belief is usually accompanied with additional thoughts by group members such as that they are "alone" in the world, that there is a threat to their existence, that the group must be united in the face of danger, that they cannot expect help from anyone in time of need, and that all means are justified for group defense (Bar-Tal, 1986).

These beliefs are not unique to Jews or Israeli Jews, but characterize various groups in the past and present. For example, the Albanians for years have continued to believe in a "capitalistic-revisionist blockade and encirclement" (e.g., Marmullaku, 1975; Pollo & Puto, 1981). White Afrikaners, especially of Dutch descent, perceive themselves as a group driven with its back to the wall by the hostile world (e.g., Johnson, 1977). Similar beliefs characterized the Japanese in the 1930s, following their military action in Manchuria (e.g., Crowley, 1966; Morley, 1974) and the Soviets, following the international intervention during the Russian civil war in 1918-1919 (e.g., Fischer, 1951; Kennan, 1960).

In the case of Israeli Jews (and generally of Jews), the *Siege Mentality* is a consequence of a long history of past experiences which left their mark on the Jewish psyche and imprinted the emerging Israeli ethos. From the early days of Jewish history, as the only group of people with a monotheistic religion, Jews experienced a hostile world (see Stein, 1978). Later, with the emergence of anti-Semitism, from the Roman period through the Middle Ages, the Reformation and the Industrial Revolution, until today, Jews continuously were subjects of persecutions, libels, special taxation, restrictions, forced conversions, expulsions, and pogroms (e.g., Grosser, 1983; Poliakov, 1965). The climax of anti-Semitism took place in the 20th century when a systematic genocide, "the final solution to the Jewish problem" called the Holocaust, was carried out in Europe.

Even in present times, Israeli Jews' perceptions and interpretations of events provide support for the *Siege Mentality* (Bar-Tal, 1990a). The attempts of all the Arab states to annihilate the state of Israel during the first 30 years of its exist-

²Bar-Tal (1986) presented this concept as the Masada Syndrome, but the present term better corresponds with the defined meaning.

tence, the embargo imposed on Israeli trade by Arab countries, the terrorist attacks on Israeli Jews and Jews in general by Palestinian organizations, the isolation of Israel by the Asian, African, and Eastern European countries, votes against Israel in various international organizations including the U.N., the criticism of Israel by the foreign public, media, and leaders, and the Palestinian pressure, including the present uprising, are all perceived by many Israeli Jews as evidence for their belief that the rest of the world is against them (see Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992 for an extensive analysis). For example, in a survey of the national sample, performed in January 1988, 50% of the respondents believed that "The whole world is against us" and 63% believed that "Israel is and will continue to be 'a people dwelling alone'" (Arian, 1989).

The assumption which underlies the importance of the proposed conception is that the *Siege Mentality* is one of the leading bases underlying Israeli behavior. This assumption is based on a social psychological premise indicating that individuals and groups behave in ways which are consistent with their beliefs. As Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey (1962) noted: "Man acts upon his ideas. His irrational acts no less than his rational acts are guided by what he thinks, what he believes, what he anticipates. However bizarre the behavior of men, tribes or nation may appear to an outsider, to the men, to the tribes, to the nation, their behavior makes sense in terms of their own world view" (p. 17). Thus, in our case, Israeli behaviors toward its neighbors and reactions to the world can be understood, at least partially, in the framework of beliefs held about the world, and specifically *Siege Mentality* beliefs. (For details, see Bar-Tal 1991; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992).

Although, as suggested, the *Siege Mentality* characterizes Israeli Jews in general, two items should be noted. First, the beliefs do not necessarily have to be constantly accessible in the individuals' repertoire. Rather, they come and go, riding the crests of associations incessantly flowing through the individual's mind, especially primed by contextual objects and events (cf. Higgins & Stangor, 1988). Thus, for example, just before the Six Day War in 1967, or when Zionism was condemned as racism in the U.N. in 1975, or during the Lebanese war, or at present, as world public opinion criticizes Israel's handling of the Palestinian uprising, the *Siege Mentality* beliefs become especially accessible (Bar-Tal, 1986). Second, Israeli Jews differ with regard to their confidence in these beliefs. While some Israeli Jews are very confident and hold them as verities, other are less certain of their validity.

In view of the above conception, it is important to develop a scale which will assess the *Siege Mentality* among group members. Such a scale can be used in various groups to measure individual and subgroup differences. The study performed was aimed at examining the *Siege Mentality* among the population of Israeli university students. Specifically, it intended to develop two scales: (1) The general *Siege Mentality* Scale (GSMS) to assess the *Siege Mentality* in any

group, and (2) a specific scale for measuring these beliefs among Israeli Jews, the Israeli Siege Mentality Scale (ISMS). In addition, the study investigated relationships between these scales and variables such as ethnocentrism, paranoia, religiosity, dovish-hawkish orientation, as well as several demographic variables.

Ethnocentrism is the most similar societal concept comprised by Siege Mentality. As originally presented by Sumner (1906), ethnocentrism denotes a tendency to accept the ingroup and reject the outgroups. Specifically, ethnocentric group members perceive their own group as virtuous and superior and the out-groups as contemptible and inferior (Brewer & Campbell, 1976; Levine & Campbell, 1972). Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, & Sanford (1950) studied the ethnocentric tendency as part of the authoritarian personality. Ethnocentrism thus reflects an attitudinal dimension of out-group rejection and ingroup acceptance, whereas the Siege Mentality focuses on the negative intentions attributed to outgroups.

Smootha (1987) investigated ethnocentrism among Jews in Israel. He differentiated between reactive ethnocentrism, which arises in certain situations, and genuine ethnocentrism, which is rooted in a group's culture and tradition. According to him, Jewish ethnocentrism has both bases. On the one hand, the Israeli-Arab conflict has caused a mistrust and degradation of the Arabs; on the other hand, Jewish religion and Zionism have propagated the idea of Jewish superiority and uniqueness in comparison to other groups (the goyim). Measuring Israeli Jews' ethnocentric beliefs vis-à-vis an Arab minority, Smootha found ethnocentric excesses among Jews, which were especially salient among hawkish Jewish leaders (one of the subpopulations studied).

The purpose of measuring paranoia is to see whether this tendency differs from the Siege Mentality. Paranoia is diagnosed as a pervasive and unwarranted suspiciousness and a mistrust within a context of interpersonal relations (Millon, 1984). Paranoia is a personality tendency based on an individual's development and personal history, whereas the Siege Mentality reflects a person's set of beliefs which characterize a group, beliefs acquired from societal sources through the socialization process. When Siege Mentality beliefs characterize a society, they are part of the national ethos and therefore are expressed through educational, cultural and political channels. Individuals acquire them in schools, from parents, through literature and media. Subsequently, these beliefs become part of their cognitive repertoire.

In the study of the Israeli Siege Mentality, two dimensional characteristics, which differentiate Israeli Jews, are of special importance: dovish-hawkish orientation and level of religiosity. The first dimension differentiates Israeli Jews on the basis of their readiness to compromise with regard to the Israeli-Arab conflict resolution. The other dimension differentiates them on the basis of their adherence to the Jewish religion.

Two principal hypotheses are offered with regard to Siege Mentality differences: (1) religious students will express more Siege Mentality than secular students; and (2) hawkish students will express more Siege Mentality than dovish students. These hypotheses are proposed because although the Siege Mentality characterizes Israeli society at large, it is especially related to Jewish religion and to hawkish political opinions (Arian, 1989).

The Bible and other holy books contain a deeply rooted belief in other nations' hatred of Israel and their negative intentions to hurt it (see Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992). Thus, it can be assumed that especially religious individuals absorb such a belief in the course of their socialization process. Indeed, in a recent national poll (June 1989), 58.4% of the respondents among very religious Israeli Jews agreed with the item "The whole world is against us," while only 34.3% of the secular Jews agreed with it. Also, the belief that the world hates Jews is embedded in hawkish ideology. In fact, Siege Mentality beliefs have become central tenets which serve as characteristics of hawkish groups (see Antebi, 1989).

METHOD

Subjects

Three hundred and seventy six students (ages 19-36; mean 27; 126 males, 211 females and 39 did not indicate their gender)³ were recruited from Tel-Aviv University (a secular institution) and Bar-Ilan University (a religious institution).

Instruments

Four instruments were constructed for the study: The General Siege Mentality Scale (GSMS), the Israeli Siege Mentality Scale (ISMS), the Ethnocentrism Scale, and the Paranoia Scale. (The responses to the items of these scales ranged from 1 "absolutely disagree" to 5 "absolutely agree.")

GSMS

The GSMS consists of the following 12 items:

1. There is no place for internal criticism in times of danger.
2. Anyone who opposes the majority opinion weakens the strength of the nation.

³Since not all the subjects answered all the questions, some information is missing and the n's vary in the analyses.

3. In order to continue to exist we have to act according to the rule "if anyone comes to kill you, kill him first."
4. We can't rely on advice from other nations, because they do not necessarily have our welfare at heart.
5. There have always been countries which looked for closeness and friendship with us.
6. Because of the persistent danger to our existence, we must end internal disagreements.
7. Our existence is the end which justifies the means.
8. The whole world is against us.
9. Only demonstration of force will deter our enemies from attacking us.
10. Only unity will save us from external enemies.
11. When neighboring countries get into conflicts, we will often be blamed for it.
12. Most nations will conspire against us, if only they have the possibility to do so.

ISMS

The ISMS consists of the following nine items:

1. All means are justified to secure the survival of the state of Israel.
2. Most of the countries of the world recognize the existence of Israel.
3. Throughout the world anti-Semitism exists even if it not openly expressed.
4. There is hardly any country where Jews can live without being disturbed.
5. The state of Israel has many friends among the nations of the world.
6. In times of danger, there is no place for opposing views.
7. The nations of the world honestly regret the Holocaust.
8. There will always be enemies who persecute Israel.
9. The Holocaust is not a one-time event, and it can happen again.

Ethnocentrism Scale. The Ethnocentrism Scale consists of the following eight items:

1. The level of morality of Jews is not different than any other people.
2. It is a special honor to belong to the Jewish people.
3. I would always prefer to work with people of my own religion.
4. The Jewish people is a chosen people.
5. Compared to other people Jews are smart and clever.
6. I am willing to allow a family member to intermarry.
7. The ability to survive points to a unique quality of the Jewish people.
8. I rarely remember that I am Jewish.

Paranoia Scale. The Paranoia Scale consists of 25 items and is based on the Comrey Personality Scale (Comrey, 1970) which was translated to Hebrew by Montag and Comrey (1982). It assesses the personal tendency to trust other people, to be suspicious toward them and to attribute to them negative intentions. "Most of the people try to receive more than they give," "I feel that nobody understands me," or "Most of the people would cheat if they could do so without being caught" are a few examples of the items in the scale.

In addition, students evaluated their level of religiosity on a seven-point scale where (1) represented secularism and (7) represented orthodox religiosity and level of dovishness-hawkishness on a 7-point scale where (1) represented dovish orientation and (7) represented a hawkish one. Finally, respondents indicated their voting tendency,⁴ and answered questions regarding their demographic and socioeconomic background (i.e., age, gender, father's ethnic origin-place of birth, father's educational level, and whether each of the parents went through the Holocaust).

Construction of the Scales

The General Siege Mentality Scale (GSMS) and the Israeli Siege Mentality Scale (ISMS) were constructed on the basis of the conception of Masada Syndrome presented by Bar-Tal (1986). For the GSMS 28 items and for the ISMS 19 items were formulated, which expressed the beliefs of the Siege Mentality. The items included feelings of loneliness in the world, negative attitudes toward the world, sensitivity to cues indicating negative intentions of the world, increased pressure to conformity within the in-group, and use of all means for self-defense.

The questionnaires were administered to 197 students from Bar-Ilan University and Tel-Aviv University. Their responses on the five-point scale—ranging from (5) very much agree to (1) very much disagree—were analyzed. The Cronbach alpha for the GSMS was .81 and for the ISMS was .74. On the basis of the distributions and the correlations, 16 items were omitted from the GSMS and 10 from the ISMS. Only items which differentiated among the respondents and correlated highly with the total score of the scale were retained.

The Ethnocentrism Scale was first constructed with 13 items and administered to the same group of 197 students previously described. The items reflected feelings of the in-group's superiority and negative feelings toward out-groups, closeness of the in-group, and categorization of people according to social groups and rejection of those who belong to out-groups (see Brewer & Campbell, 1976;

⁴The voting tendency was classified to three categories: leftist parties which propagate relatively dovish ideology, rightish parties which express hawkish ideology, and religious parties which express relatively hawkish ideology.

Levine & Campbell, 1972). The reliability measured by Cronbach's alpha was .82. Following the analysis, five items were omitted from the scale.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to students during class hours. It was explained to them that the study was intended to find out public beliefs about various social and political issues. The students were assured that there were no right or wrong answers to the questions and that their anonymity would be preserved.

RESULTS

First, in order to determine the internal consistency of the final versions of the four scales, a Cronbach alpha was calculated for each of them. The analyses yielded the following alpha coefficients: for the GSMS .88; for the ISMS .89; for the Ethnocentrism Scale .86; and for the Paranoia Scale .83.

Second, a correlation matrix was calculated for the four scales and the self-ratings regarding the level of religiosity and dovish-hawkish orientation. Table I indicates, as expected, that while the GSMS, ISMS, and Ethnocentrism Scale were highly correlated, the Paranoia Scale did not correlate significantly with Ethnocentrism and only slightly, but significantly, correlated with GSMS and ISMS. Level of religiosity correlated positively with GSMS, ISMS, and Ethnocentrism, but slightly negatively with the Paranoia Scale. The self-rating of political orientation (dovishness-hawkishness) correlated positively with all the scales and measures, with the exception of the Paranoia Scale.

Table I. Correlation Matrix

	GSMS	ISMS	Ethnocentrism	Paranoia	Religiosity	Dovishness-Hawkishness
GSMS	.70** (n = 376)					
ISMS		.61** (n = 376)		.21** (n = 376)	.47** (n = 366)	.50** (n = 345)
Ethnocentrism			.51** (n = 376)	.06 (n = 376)	.33** (n = 366)	.46** (n = 345)
Paranoia					.69** (n = 366)	.44** (n = 345)
Religiosity					-.18** (n = 366)	.02 (n = 345)
						.38** (n = 345)

* $p < .01$.

** $p < .001$.

Table II. Multiple Regression Analysis of General Siege Mentality as a Function of Ethnocentrism, Paranoia Religiosity, and Hawkish-Dovish Orientation (N = 336)

Variables	b	F
Constant	-.33	1.79
Ethnocentrism	.34	60.18**
Paranoia	.49	42.04**
Hawkish-dovish orientation	.12	32.54**
Religiosity	.43	4.48*

* $p < .05$.

** $p < .01$.

Of special interest is the finding showing that the correlation between GSMS and ISMS is .70. This means that both scales have a high percentage of common variance (49%), and thus they can be considered as similar constructs. This result is in contrast to lower commonality of variance between Ethnocentrism and Siege Mentality scales (37% for GSMS and 26% for ISMS), and negligible commonality of variance between Paranoia and Siege Mentality scales (4.5%).

In order to examine further the relations between Siege Mentality constructs, Paranoia, and Ethnocentrism, as well as hawkish-dovish orientation and religiosity, a multiple regression analysis was performed in which the latter four constructs were used as predicting variables. The analysis yielded a multiple correlation of $R^2 = .49$. Specifically, as Table II shows, the dominant component of the General Siege Mentality is Ethnocentrism. Paranoia and hawkish-dovish orientation also highly contribute to the explanation of the General Siege Mentality, while religiosity was found to contribute the least. This result indicates that the General Siege Mentality has additional contents beyond the ones of the four variables. It is a separate and unique construct. Similar results were accepted for the regression analysis performed on the ISMS.

Finally, to determine the relative contribution of personal (attitudinal and demographic) variables to the prediction of Siege Mentality,⁵ a stepwise regression analysis was performed. The attitudinal variables consisted of self-ratings on the hawkish-dovish dimension, level of religiosity, and voting tendency for either left, religious, or right parties. (The latter variables of voting tendency served as dummy variables.) The demographic variables included father's ethnic origin (classified either as European, American, and Israeli origin or as Asian-African origin), whether at least one of the parents was a victim of the Holocaust, (both these variables were coded as dummy variables), and father's level of

⁵A regression analysis performed on the Israeli Siege Mentality Scale yielded the same results, and therefore only one set of findings was reported.

Table III. Stepwise Regression Analysis of General Siege Mentality as a Function of Attitudinal and Demographic Variables ($N = 287$)

Variables	beta	F	R ² change	Simple r
Hawkish-dovish orientation	.31	73.43*	.20	.45
Voting tendency for the leftist parties	-.19	19.93*	.06	-.41
Gender	.09	3.30	.01	.16
Religiosity	.06	1.50	.00	.31
Asian & African origin	-.06	.55	.00	.08
Voting tendency for the religious parties	.06	.43	.00	.16
Voting tendency for the rightist parties	.06	.54	.00	.27
Holocaust experience	.05	.30	.00	-.01
European and American origin	-.05	.44	.00	-.03
Father's level of education	-.01	.06	.00	-.08

* $p < .01$.

education. Table III shows that only hawkish-dovish orientation and voting tendency for the left parties (i.e., dovish parties) achieved significance. The analysis shows that the first variable is positively related and the second variable is negatively related—that is, dovish-hawkish orientation predicts Siege Mentality. The two attitudinal variables together explained 26% of the 27% explained by all the variables together.

In order to determine whether the contribution of the attitudinal variables will be significant even after the inclusion of the demographic variables, a two-step regression analysis was performed in which demographic variables were entered first and the attitudinal variables entered in the second step. The results show that while one of the demographic variables achieved statistical significance (gender, $F = 7.35$), the same attitudinal variables, which were significant in the initial regression analysis, remained significant (hawkish-dovish orientation, $F = 25.74$; $p < .001$, and voting tendency for the left parties $F = 6.29$; $p < .02$).

DISCUSSION

The Siege Mentality conception describes an important cognitive state of a group which has an effect not only on the group's life but also on its intergroup relations. The conception suggests that members of a group who believe that other groups have negative intentions toward them may develop negative attitudes and mistrust toward the out-groups. They also may develop special sensitivity to cues indicating negative intentions emitted by the out-groups. In addition, the group members may press for cohesiveness and unity in order to withstand the possible threat from the world. Finally, they may take drastic measures, even out of the range of the accepted norms for the intergroup behavior.

iors, to prevent possible danger and avert the threat (for details, see Bar-Tal, 1986; Bar-Tal & Antebi, 1992).

Although the present study focused on the Siege Mentality of Israeli Jews, this state may characterize any other group (e.g., religious, ethnic, racial, or national group). Therefore, it was the purpose of the present study to develop a scale which can assess Siege Mentality beliefs. The developed instrument, General Siege Mentality Scale (GSMS), can be a useful tool in assessing the specific state in various groups. Although the present study also utilized a specific instrument for the Israeli Jewish population, the Israeli Siege Mentality Scale (ISMS), the results show high correlation between the two scales and a complete replication of results. Thus, the general scale fulfills the function of tapping the Siege Mentality of a specific group, and in the Israeli case there is no need for the specific scale.

The analyses show that Siege Mentality exists as a separate construct. It does not focus on feelings of superiority vis-à-vis out-groups, but mainly on feelings of mistrust and suspicion towards the rest of the world, threat of potential danger from the outgroups, and loneliness in the world, without reliance on other groups. Nevertheless, not surprisingly, Siege Mentality is related to Ethnocentrism. The belief that the world has negative intentions toward the group indicates its evil, malice, and aggressiveness. In this context, the group not only feels victimized and self-righteous, but also superior to the out-groups.

Siege Mentality was found to be different from paranoia. Paranoia as a personality tendency reflects vigilant mistrust of others in the context of interpersonal relations, together with resistance to external influences and an ever-present fear of losing the power of self-determination (Millon, 1984). In contrast, Siege Mentality, as a group characteristic, expresses beliefs regarding negative intentions of out-groups, rooted in the group ethos. However, the small positive correlations between the two constructs indicate that they both include elements of suspicion and mistrust.

As part of the validating procedures, Siege Mentality was found to differ between various groups in the Israeli society, as hypothesized. Religious Israeli Jews were found to have more Siege Mentality than seculars, and hawks were found to have more Siege Mentality than doves. These findings reflect the religious and hawkish ideologies which highly emphasize the Siege Mentality (see Antebi, 1989). In the case of religious groups, not only do their leaders continuously express the Siege Mentality beliefs, but also these beliefs can be found in the Bible and other books serving as socializing sources. In the case of hawkish groups, Siege Mentality beliefs serve as an important foundation for their uncompromising positions with regard to the resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict. In fact, the political orientation on the dovish-hawkish dimension was found to be the most powerful predictor of Siege Mentality, with hawkish political opinions being highly related to Siege Mentality beliefs.

In conclusion, the present conception indicates the importance of studying specific beliefs which may dominate a group repertoire. This line of research has revealed an underlying basis for group behaviors (see Bar-Tal, 1989). In the present case, Siege Mentality is a characteristic which facilitates an understanding of the behavior of Israeli Jews.

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