

Outline

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Netanyahu on Oslo

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Netanyahu's rule 1996-99 and the current political upheaval

Sandy Berkovski

Department of Philosophy
Bilkent University

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Introduction

- ▶ The idea of this talk: To examine analytically my personal experiences.
- ▶ The practical issue: Netanyahu's policies in 1996-99 remain relevant in the current political situation.
- ▶ The theoretical issue: How to exploit political consensus.
- ▶ Evidence will be gathered from Israeli politics. If time permits, parallels will be drawn with the recent developments in British politics.

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The general context of 1996

- ▶ Rabin's murder.
- ▶ Troubles of the Oslo process (suicide bombings).
- ▶ Daily personal attacks against Netanyahu in the media.

Main elements of Netanyahu's campaign:

- ▶ Criticism of the Oslo agreements.
- ▶ Free-market reforms.
- ▶ Alliance with Russian-speaking political forces.

Netanyahu converted his political views into a consensus, but not his economical views.

Main novelties of the Oslo approach

- ▶ **Not** the idea of peace talks with the Palestinians.
- ▶ **Not** the suggestion of establishing an Arab state in the Occupied territories.
- ▶ Rather: negotiations with the PLO, arming of the PLO and Fatah activists, and the transfer of the Occupied territories to their control.
- ▶ Also, the abandonment of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace deal on multiple tracks.

The Oslo approach slowly turned into a consensus.

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*We are inheriting a bad agreement which has created a bad set of facts on the ground. But for all of our opposition to the agreement as such, **we cannot ignore those facts which it has created.** The Oslo agreements were bad and were particularly remiss in regard to Israel's security. But by not ignoring disadvantageous facts, we can act to limit the damage already wrought. (April 1996)*

- ▶ Acceptance of the negotiations with the PLO and the transfer of territory to them.
- ▶ Reciprocity: 'If they give, they will get; if they don't give, they won't get.'
- ▶ Democracy: Political reforms in Arab states.

Abandoning Oslo by consensus

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The following argument has turned into a consensus:

1. Unless the conditions of reciprocity and democracy are fulfilled, there is no peace partner.
2. If there is no peace partner, there is no peace process.
3. But there is no reciprocity and democracy (at least with regard to the Palestinian Authority).
4. Therefore, there is no peace process.

This contradicts the Labour policy. According to Rabin–Peres, there is always a peace partner.

A new consensus is built atop the old one.

Kadima's strategy

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Claim

Sharon's Kadima party builds its 'programme' on endorsing two crucial elements of Israeli consensus:

- ▶ Transfer of Occupied territories to the PA.
- ▶ Unilateral withdrawals.

Both of these elements are stated in vague, very general terms—out of fear of violating the consensus.

Kadima is not a party which promotes its own agenda: it clings to power by combining the agendas of the previous governments.

The fight for consensus: the British case

- ▶ Key issues: public spending, privatisation.
- ▶ Thatcher's Conservative government turned low public spending and trimmed public sector into a consensus.
- ▶ That was achieved with a huge cost to its own popularity.
- ▶ Blair's New Labour upheld those policies—with no cost to itself.
- ▶ The New Labour strategy lay in softening the conservative rhetoric.
- ▶ Repeated attempts of the Conservative Party to force a new agenda failed (three elections lost with a huge margin).

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The New Conservatives?

- ▶ The new leader: David Cameron.
- ▶ No coherent ideology.
- ▶ The general impression of being fresh and youthful.
- ▶ Either softening or disregarding the traditional Conservative agenda: Europe, illegal immigration, low taxes, education, health service.
- ▶ Thus attempting to join the debate on Blair's terms.
- ▶ In short: a replica of Tony Blair.

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Conclusion: How to exploit consensus

- ▶ The party *A* establishes a consensus over a (vital) issue *Z whilst alienating a large part of the electorate.*
- ▶ The party *B* adopts the consensus views on *Z whilst retaining its traditional base and not attempting to establish a novel consensus over some other major issue.*
- ▶ The party *B* wins big time.
- ▶ The agendas of *A* and *B* become indistinguishable.
- ▶ The rivalry between *A* and *B* becomes a beauty contest.

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