Menachem Begin

The Absent Leader

By

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This book began as a doctoral dissertation entitled "Menachem Begin – A Personality Study," which I submitted to the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. In the course of my work, I was surprised to discover that the only biography of Menachem Begin written in Hebrew was Aviezer Golan and Shlomo Nakdimon's 1977 book, written at the time Begin assumed office as prime minister. In English, on the other hand, there were a number of biographies that had not been translated into Hebrew, but not one of them covered Menachem Begin’s entire life, since they were all written while he was still alive.

After completing my studies, I returned to Israel and continued working on the material. The archive of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center provided me with numerous personal interviews that had been conducted by Iris Berlatzky with people who were close to Menachem Begin at different times in his life. The State Archives added interviews, conducted by Nana Saguy, with key people who'd known Begin well. The work was submitted for the Menachem Begin Heritage Center's Research Prize, and won the award in 2004.

I am grateful to many people who helped me at various stages of the writing. First and foremost is Professor Richard Rubenstein, my doctoral adviser, who took it upon himself to be involved in and oversee the challenge of writing a biography that examines psychological aspects of the subject's personality in tandem with the central historical events of the twentieth century. Without Professor Rubenstein's deep faith in the need for and the possibility of bridging the gap between different disciplines of the social sciences and psychology, this project would never have come to fruition. I also must thank Professor Aliza Kolker, who specialized in the study of pre-War Polish Jewry, and was an especially warm and encouraging contributing adviser. She passed away while this work was still in progress. My thanks also to Professor Christopher Mitchell, the second reader, and to Professor Joe Scimmecca, the third reader, who consented to replace Aliza, and both graciously gave of their extensive knowledge of conflict resolution, political science, sociology and anthropology, also with much warmth and encouragement.
The Menachem Begin Heritage Center contributed very significantly to this work. I would first of all like to thank Iris Berlatzky of the archives for the thorough and sensitive interviews she conducted, which contributed greatly to the quality of the research, and for her plentiful assistance with every request. Thank you, too, to Rami Shtivi, whose patience, familiarity with the material and computer expertise were a real asset, and to Yossi Barnea and Dina Litvak, who also responded gladly to each request. To Bruria Romanov, the library director, who used to send me material when I was still in the United States. To Moshe Sha'al-Foxman, coordinator of academic activities, and to Herzl Makov, the Center's director general, who also spared no effort to help advance the project with the objective of turning the research study into a book that could reach a wide audience. I would also like to thank Nana Saguy from the State Archives, who supplied me with the comprehensive and professional interviews she conducted, which also made a significant contribution to the project. Anne Pace's skillful editing of the English text was especially important.

And finally, to my warm and loving family, my wife and my two daughters, Mor and Stav, and my mother and my brother, who enabled me to devote all the necessary time to this project and who encouraged me to persevere, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Ofer Grosbard
Haifa
I was born in Tel Aviv in 1954, six years after the birth of the State of Israel. My father, David Grosbard, was Tel Aviv district commander and a member of the top command of the Irgun, and from the founding of the state until his death in 1990, was active in the Herut movement. My mother, a pediatrician by profession, was the family doctor of Aliza, Menachem and their children – Benny, Hasia and Leah – from 1950-1977, when Begin was elected prime minister and the family moved to Jerusalem. Afterwards, my mother continued to care for the family's children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. In those days, we lived near the Begins' home, which was located at 1 Rosenbaum Street in Tel Aviv. Every Saturday night I used to accompany my father to Menachem's home, which was an "open house" on those evenings. The image I recall from that time is of older, stern-faced men sitting in a circle and discussing important matters, nodding their heads in mutual agreement and the Ala's voice carrying through the house. There was also much warmth beneath all the seriousness, the maturity and even the tiredness, or so it seemed to me as a child. I also remember my mother checking Menachem's blood pressure and seeing it jump to 200 because Ben-Gurion had again infuriated him, and Menachem saying, "When you examine me I feel young." And Benny, Hasia or Leah coming by our house to ask my mother for a prescription, or Ala showing up to chat a little in her raspy voice, and all with a friendliness and ease that I don't recall from other relationships.

At mealtimes, we listened to my father's stories about the underground. They contained a boldness colored by humor: how they stole weapons from the British, how they switched identities during the curfew, and similar tales that, naturally, began to repeat themselves at some point, though I never failed to get caught up in their spirit. Without a doubt, this was the spirit that Menachem Begin represented.

This sense of patriotism has been with me my whole life, and during the writing of the book, these feelings were awakened many times in a way that amounted to the closing of a circle for me. Menachem Begin's message – and I think that if he were alive, he would agree with me – is in essence an emotional message of the spirit. This is the book and this is the story that come together as one. The book, I believe, is solidly
anchored in fact, but where does the spirit come from? From whence the motivation to undertake this journey? This is what I wanted to tell the reader.
Childhood

Our story begins around 1863 in Brest, a Polish town about 150 miles east of Warsaw and then under Russian rule. It is home to about 30,000 Jews (about half the population) and the rest of the inhabitants are Poles, White Russians and Lithuanians. Ze’ev Dov Wolfowitz Begin (Menachem Begin’s father) was born about this time, the eldest of nine children. Ze'ev Dov first attended a heder (a one-room, one-teacher elementary Jewish religious school with combined grades) and later a famous yeshiva (religious studies academy) in his town. An excellent student, he did not look forward to joining his father in the timber business and instead wished to become a doctor. With this goal in mind, he studied German and prepared for the matriculation exams and, at age 17, after completing his yeshiva studies, made an attempt to escape to Berlin and enroll at a university. But it was not to be. Grandfather Begin got wind of his plans, hurried to the train station and ordered him back home. Then, in the hope of taming him, he arranged for Ze'ev Dov to marry a daughter’s friend. But that was not to work out either, and a year later the young couple, now the parents of a child, divorced. This child, a girl, would never be mentioned by Begin’s family and is only seldom mentioned in the many writings about Menachem Begin. The only information we have is that she eventually emigrated to Palestine and then to the U.S.¹

Ze’ev Dov grudgingly worked in his father’s business. His one consolation was the frequent traveling that went with the job, which gave him the chance to see new places, people and cultures, something not terribly common in those days. He was drawn to Warsaw’s cafés and bookshops and was a lover of languages who knew Hebrew, Yiddish, German, Russian and Polish. Ze’ev Dov was also a biblical scholar and an observant Jew, but not strictly Orthodox. He was able to integrate his religious
roots with the influence of the “wider world.” People said he was a driven man with a rebellious nature who spent many years on a quest for self-discovery – at a time when that was quite unusual – until, between his two marriages, he found his destiny. It was Zionism. He became an active member of the Brest community, belonged to many groups and eventually served as spokesman and later secretary of the town’s Jewish community, a position that gave him tremendous satisfaction.

Upon the death of Theodore Herzl (1860-1904), the visionary of the Jewish state, Ze’ev Dov issued a call for a memorial service in opposition to the will of the town rabbis who were against Zionism. There are different versions of what happened, as to whether Ze’ev and his people broke into the synagogue to conduct the service; whether they broke into the rabbi’s house to get the keys; and whether or not he was arrested by the police.

In 1905, Ze’ev Dov and Mordechai Sheinerman (the grandfather of current Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon), both of whom were among the first Zionists in Brest, participated in a Jewish “self-defense” organization, in those days a still rare - if not unheard of – phenomenon among the Jews, to protect the community from pogromists.

At age 43, twenty five years after his first marriage, Ze'ev Dov married a 20-year-old woman named Hassia. We have less detailed information regarding Menachem Begin’s mother prior to his birth. Her name, Hassia, is Hebrew for "God's mercy." Hassia Kosovsky was described as a beautiful woman with blue-grey, or steel-colored eyes. Her parents died when she was young and she grew up in her Orthodox grandfather's home. An old-fashioned religious Jew, he did not believe that women

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1Temko, 1987, p. 23; Steinman, 1954, p. 185
needed a broad education; he felt they ought to stay home and take care of the family. Hassia met Ze’ev Dov when her family was visiting his father. It was love at first sight and they married a few weeks later. She knew only Yiddish, loved reading books, and was very keen to learn.

Ze’ev Dov and Hassia Begin’s first child was a girl, born in 1907. The father had hoped for a boy to be named for Herzl, after Theodore (Binyamin Ze’ev) Herzl. He still wanted to make the connection by calling her Herzliya but his wife was opposed. In the end they chose the name Rachel after Hassia’s mother. In 1910, they had a son which the happy father named Herzl. So the names the parents chose for their children were a mixture of traditional Jewish and Zionist names.

Their third and youngest child, Menachem, was born in Brisk (the Jewish name for Brest), on August 16, 1913. His sister, Rachel, was six years older, and his brother, Herzl, was three years older. Menachem was born on the Saturday of “Sabbath Nahamu.” In Jewish tradition, every Saturday a chapter from the Prophets is chanted after the Pentateuch reading. The chapter read on the Saturday after Menachem’s birth begins, “Nahamu, nahamu ami yomar eloheikhem” (Isaiah 40:1), “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God.” So Menachem, which derives from the same root as "nahamu," is someone who comforts, who consoles. It was also the Jewish month of Av, the time of mourning for the Temples in Jerusalem which, according to tradition, were both destroyed on the 9th of Av -- the first time by the Babylonian armies and the second time by Titus’ legions. This might shed some additional light concerning the choice of name.\(^2\)  The midwife who delivered him was Mrs. Sheinerman, Ariel Sharon’s grandmother. The godfather at the circumcision ceremony when Menachem was eight days old was the chief rabbi of Brisk. One

\(^2\)Haber, 1978, p. 14
unusual gift, supplied by the Zionist leadership, was a gigantic cake in the shape of a bouquet of flowers. Indeed, a mixture of Orthodox Judaism and nationalism was to characterize Menachem Begin throughout his life.

Early in 1915, the war was becoming an oppressive presence in Brest, which was still under Czarist rule. The family of a Russian officer lived on the floor above the Begins and the Begin children were at home when soldiers brought back his kit with the news that he had been killed. Galician refugees — most of them Jews — began to arrive in a slow but steady trickle. Ze’ev Dov used to invite the more indigent into his home twice a week for a hot meal. Although he had no love for the Russians, he shared his food with some Russian soldiers who were in bad shape because of the war. He apparently felt a kinship with suffering people. Yet his longstanding sympathy – going back to the time he tried to run away to Berlin for his medicine studies - was with the Germans. As he told his daughter, Rachel: “When the Germans arrive, you’ll see the difference!”

By that time, the Begins' home had already become a hub for the Jewish community. It attracted many visitors, including Zionists who expounded on the movement's salient issues. Friends from the chess club in which Ze'ev Dov was very active were also frequent guests. The Russian maid, Natasha, stoked the fire while the guests drank tea. When an especially honored guest arrived, the children were introduced to him.

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3Haber, 1978, p. 15
4Halperin, 1978
Young Menachem had just a couple of peaceful years in Brisk. “Before the war,” his sister Rachel recalled, “we had a wonderful life... But Menachem was born into 'Gone with the Wind!' The war tore everything apart... By the age of two... he did not have a childhood like me or my other brother.”6 One of the few things we know about Menachem's first few years is that Ze’ev Dov used to pick up his son, point at various objects and ask in Hebrew, “What's this?” Menachem heard Hebrew from his father and Yiddish from his mother. For Ze’ev Dov, Hebrew was the language of the future, the language of action, of science and art, and not just the language of the prayers, the Bible and the past.7

Ze’ev Dov, who was quite influential within the Jewish community, did not cease his public praise for the Germans and was often heard expressing his hope for a German victory. He said time and again that it would be better for the Jews if the Germans won the war. Thus it was no great surprise when he was eventually exiled by the Russians. According to one version of the story, he was fortunate to escape execution as a German spy.8 Another version is that friends from his chess club, some of them Russian officers, intervened on his behalf and saved his life.9 He stoutly refused to keep his views to himself or to kowtow as most of the Jews had been conditioned to do after so many years under a ruling power. As a result, he was forced to leave his wife and three children during wartime. Menachem was two years old when his father was sent away and did not see him for the next two years.

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6Temko, 1987, p. 19
7Gervasi, 1979, p. 83
8Haber, 1978, p. 15
9Golan, 1978, p. 14
We have no specific information about how little Menachem and the rest of the family managed without the father of the family while the cannons were roaring. All we know is that Rachel (then eight years old) wrote a letter to the local governor saying: “Please, return Father to us.” On one occasion, someone told the family that Ze’ev Dov was going to pass through town on the train. But when the family went to the station in the hope of waving to him, the train whizzed by too fast.  

Running from the advancing German army, Menachem’s mother fled eastward with her three children. She packed the children and some belongings onto a horse-drawn wagon and, together with her mother-in-law, set out for the home of a cousin in Drohiczyn. Two days later, Brest was torched by the retreating Russians forces and the Begin home was completely destroyed. Menachem was around two years old then. It was a long and arduous journey but the children apparently enjoyed it. It was Menachem's first trip anywhere.

When the Germans arrived in Warsaw, where Ze’ev Dov was, and the roads were reopened, he decided to try and make contact with the Drohiczyn cousin. There were rumors that the Russians had killed the local population, so he did not have great hopes of finding anyone. He ran into Rachel by coincidence at a local dairy where he'd gone to inquire about where the Begin family lived. Upon seeing her father, Rachel threw herself into his arms. But then it seems that the father left again.

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10Haber, 1978, p. 15
11Greenfield, 1977, p. 15
12Haber, 1978, p.16
13Haber, 1978, p. 16
Meanwhile, Menachem’s grandfather left the rubble of Brest in the small boat he
used to haul timber down the River Bug, and sailed downstream as far as Kobrin.
There, in the thick forest by the riverbank, the two armies were facing each other. The
old man held up a white flag and decided that he would side with whoever got to him
first, which turned out to be the Germans. He offered them something to eat and they
showed him a small house by the dam that had belonged to the dam-keeper who'd fled
the approaching armies.

The front seemed to follow the Begin family and kept coming closer to Drohiczyn.
Russian peasants had been expelled from the farms so they could not work for the
Germans or supply them with food, and Cossacks were torching the fields. One day
a Cossack cavalryman approached the Drohiczyn cousin's house and asked, “Who
lives here, Zhidy or Russians?” (Zhidy was a Russian pejorative term for Jews). There
was a brief moment of silence. From the window, all the children could see was the
horse's legs. “Russians,” answered the cousin, in a local peasant accent. The Cossack
left and Rachel recalled feeling that their lives had been spared by sheer luck. The
next day a large force of Cossacks came, driving people out of their homes and setting
fire to everything. Rachel remembered the weeping of the expelled peasants and two
and a half year-old Menachem later remembered how a Cossack poured oil on the
house and set it alight. Though it was a wet and cold night they had no choice but to
sleep outdoors.

In one of his memoirs, Menachem recounted the escape from Drohiczyn. He
described how his mother shielded him with her body under a wagon while German

14 Silver, 1984, p. 4

15 Temko, 1987, p. 20
shells directed at the Russians were exploding all around. Menachem felt that “she was ready to sacrifice herself for us.”

One can understand the feelings of Hassia, an orphan herself who lost both her parents at a young age and then had to protect her three children all on her own for four years (1915-1919) during wartime. We can easily imagine that her own personal experiences gave her insight into little Menachem’s non-verbal fears. When Menachem later spoke about his mother as a saint with enormous tact who understood him without words, it becomes clear. “It was thanks to Mother,” said Rachel, “that we managed to survive the war. She was a romantic type, but at the same time very strong, a very strong character.”

The next morning, the Germans appeared and distributed cookies. They did not threaten them with death if they did not turn over their money, as the Cossacks had done. Many years later, Menachem’s sister Rachel candidly confessed that because of this memory, it was difficult for her to hate Germans as Jews were apparently supposed to (in light of the Holocaust).

The Begins left Drohiczyn and moved westward to settle in the grandfather’s house in the forest by the river, near Kobrin. In one version, Ze’ev Dov showed them the house. It was a long, arduous journey, but as when the family fled Brest earlier, we hear that Menachem enjoyed it.

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16 Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 15
17 Silver, 1984, p. 5
18 Halperin, 1978; Silver, 1984, pp. 5, 9
19 Haber, 1978, p. 17
They lived in the forest for a year, 20 people in a two-room house. They gathered wheat from the field, winnowed, milled flour, baked bread and had enough to eat. The children, including Menachem, enjoyed exploring the nearby woods. They ran barefoot, picked mushrooms and adopted a lonely raven they named Hans. War still raged nearby. Russian soldiers hid in the forest and German soldiers tried to ferret them out, but for Menachem and his friends, as he remembered it, it was a marvelous time.

Then Ze'ev Dov returned and decided the children had to live in a town to learn reading and writing. So they moved into Kobrin, even though he didn't have a job there. All five of them lived in one room and they were often hungry. Rachel went to school and Herzl to heder. According to one version of events, Ze'ev Dov threw himself back into Zionist activity. Other accounts say that he first stayed with the family for a while.

Rachel related that Menachem was Hassia's favorite child, and in the absence of his father was probably even closer to his mother. What did it mean for Menachem, at three and four years old, to be abruptly separated from an exclusive relationship with his mother after his father's return, and to change from playful freedom to identification with his father’s intellectual goals? No doubt the sudden change was difficult for the entire family but, as before, we hear no complaints. Their move to

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20Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, pp. 11, 15
21Temko, 1987, p. 20
22Silver, 1984, p. 5
23Haber, 1978, p. 17
24Silver, 1984, p. 5
25Temko, 1987, pp. 20, 21
Kobrin gives us an idea of the family's willingness to sacrifice such basic material comforts as food(!) for the sake of intellectual achievements.

“There was a cake shop near our place there,” recalled Menachem’s sister. “We could not afford it. We did not even dare look at it. One day, the son of the woman who rented us the room bought himself a cake. Menachem came up to him and said: ‘Please, can I just sniff it?’ Mrs. Begin overheard her son, and, for the first time since the start of the war, she cried.”

Hassia really felt for her son.

Ze’ev Dov left the family again in 1918 to go to Brest. “He was bored in Kobrin,” Rachel reported. He visited them on weekends. After the Brest-Litovsk agreement of March, 1918, the Russians left the war and the Germans agreed to rebuild Brest. The city lay in ruins, and was in no condition for the family to return to. Ze’ev Dov managed to obtain permission from the Germans to repair the synagogue, as well as permission for the construction of a hospital. Because of his knowledge of German, he was able to earn some money by writing petitions for people to the German authorities. He also arranged a census of the Jewish community and rebuilt the Jewish community archive. Because of his volunteer status, many documents of the time bear his signature without mentioning his role. He rebuilt many Jewish houses but – characteristic of him - not the Begin home.

In 1919, Ze’ev Dov called his family back to Brisk. “I was five years old,” Menachem later recalled, “and I vividly remember the way back. We traveled day and night, hundreds of kilometers. My mother showed unimaginable bravery. She did not

\[\text{Footnotes:}\]

26ibid, p. 20

27ibid, p. 20

28Temko, 1987, p. 20

show any sign of fear from the many soldiers that were around on the roads. We arrived home with our little bit of baggage.\textsuperscript{30}

Then the Germans departed and the Poles returned -- only to be ousted again in 1920 by the Soviet army. However, by the end of 1921, Brest was again in Polish hands and was to remain so until 1939, when it was occupied by Hitler.\textsuperscript{31}

Lacking the money and status of before, readjusting to Brest was not easy. Ze'ev Dov did not have time for Menachem or the rest of the family.\textsuperscript{32} Rachel, now twelve, Herzl, nine, and six-year-old Menachem all returned to school, but now to study in Polish. Rachel recalled that all the children craved their father's affection, but he was a stern, puritan man who kept a distance between himself and the others. Thus, though they were deeply attached to each other, there were few physical signs of affection, such as hugging.

Rachel also recalled how one day Menachem walked by himself through the town to look for the kindergarten. “He walked in and stood in the hallway until someone asked what he was doing. ‘I am the son of Mr. Begin,’ he replied. ‘And I want to enter kindergarten.’”\textsuperscript{33}

In his father's absence, Menachem had to be Menachem and his father at the same time, something not uncommon for children in such circumstances. He identified with the importance of his studies as his father had guided him. Rachel mentioned how he used to present himself using the name of his father from whom he derived his power.

\textsuperscript{30}Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 16
\textsuperscript{31}Temko, 1989, p. 20
\textsuperscript{32}ibid, p. 22
\textsuperscript{33}Temko, 1987, p. 22
Throughout those hard years, including the time when they were refugees, Ze’ev Dov continued to be a very active Zionist. In Kobrin he organized a Lag b’Omer celebration (a festival commemorating the 70 CE Jewish revolt against the Romans in Palestine). As mentioned, he repaired the synagogue in Brest, collected money for a Jewish hospital and dealt with many other communal activities. Eventually, he was offered the position of secretary of the Jewish community, something right up his alley, and he used the platform to preach Zionism.34

Hassia did not have a higher education, but very much wanted it for her children. An expression of her aspirations for them – says Menachem - was her not wanting them to help with the household tasks although she was a sick woman, preferring that they study.35 She was an avid reader, especially of novels, and had a dramatic talent which she utilized in reading to her children. She also put on skits telling of ancient Jewish suffering and heroism for her children and their friends. She had a pleasant voice, and sang opera arias to her family.36 Rachel says:

Mommy, first of all, was beautiful. My mother had unimaginable eyes. They were with all the depth, with all the Jewish sadness, Jewish warmth. She was clever but a simple woman who knew only Yiddish and to write an address in the English language.37

Menachem studied in the Tachkemoni elementary school of the Mizrahi religious Zionist movement. His father chose this school rather than the secular Jewish Tarbut school. At home, the Begins kept Jewish tradition, but the national Jewish holidays were celebrated more fervently. Ze’ev Dov liked Lag Ba’omer in particular, and used

34 Temko, 1987, p. 23
35 Dolev, 1977
37 Halperin, 1978
the occasion to organize trips to the forest and make heroic speeches about the Jews' temerity in rebelling against the powerful Romans.\textsuperscript{38}

On Friday nights, the children accompanied their father to the synagogue. Later, after the festive Sabbath meal when the candles still burned and gave light, the family read (they had neither electricity nor water supply to their houses at this time and the roads were not paved, either). Herzl read Mapu, the first modern Hebrew novelist, or studied Talmud (Jewish traditional law and philosophy) and Menachem read the Legends of the House of David (again, a combination of Zionism and religious Judaism). At home they observed some of the commandments in a kind of balance between modernity and Jewish religious tradition. Ze’ev Dov did not attend synagogue every day, and recited only some of the prayers. Ze’ev Dov's beard was trimmed, contrary to strict orthodox practice, and on the Yom Kippur fast he told his children to brush their teeth without swallowing the water. Strict observance called for no brushing at all. Many years later, when Rachel was supposed to sign some forms at Warsaw University on a Saturday, contrary to the religious law that permits the violation of the Sabbath only when necessary to save a life, her father was flexible enough to find a justification to allow her to do so. “Knowledge is like a matter of life and death” he argued. “So sign.”\textsuperscript{39}

Chess was also a passion of Ze’ev Dov's, and he spent many an hour bent over the chessboard at a local club. He had an ornate board at home and it was considered a privilege for the children to polish it. From age seven, Menachem sought his father's

\textsuperscript{38}Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 27

\textsuperscript{39}Silver, 1984, p. 2
close company by trying to excel at chess.\textsuperscript{40} “I played a lot. My father taught me how to play, and he was my first partner.”\textsuperscript{41}

Rachel recalled that Ze’ev Dov referred to himself as a "proud Jew" — an identity assumed later in life and passed on to those around him with the zeal of a religious convert, and also that Menachem became his disciple.\textsuperscript{42} This was also because Herzl preferred mathematics, while she was a girl and not a boy.\textsuperscript{43} As often happens, the father's aspirations for his children, expressed in the names chosen by Ze'ev Dov (Herzl — a Zionist name; Menachem — a traditional name) were confounded. Herzl separated from a dominant father and delved into other goals (such as mathematics) while the youngest, Menachem, strongly identified with his father.

We have some anecdotes from different sources (Menachem, Rachel and others) about Ze’ev Dove's well-known behavior in Brest after the war. He used to light candles on Friday evening and send his children to make sure the light could be seen from far away — a way of provocatively emphasizing his Judaism.\textsuperscript{44} One time, he saved 17 Jewish members of the communist party whom the Poles had pegged as pro-Russian by disguising them as yeshiva students and helping them run away. Many years later, when Brest communists saw him approaching on the Sabbath, they extinguished their cigarettes as a sign of respect.\textsuperscript{45}

Loyalty to his Jewish brethren,

\textsuperscript{40}Haber, 1978, p. 22

\textsuperscript{41} Temko, 1987, p. 22

\textsuperscript{42} Temko, 1987, pp. 22, 23

\textsuperscript{43} ibid. p. 24

\textsuperscript{44} Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 27

\textsuperscript{45} Silver, 1984, p. 6
even if they did not share the same political views, characterized Ze’ev Dov throughout his life.

Anoted, the Bolsheviks arrived in 1920. Shortly thereafter, in 1921, the Poles returned, but two salient memories from the short Bolshevik period stayed with Menachem throughout his life.

The first memory concerns Russians soldiers knocking on their door to ask for bread — to ask, Menachem emphasizes, not demand. He remembered them with their rumpled uniforms and bare feet, but their faces were not sad, showing that their high motivation was intact. In the evening, they sang the songs of their revolution and after a few drinks the singing grew louder and louder. Menachem was deeply impressed by how the poorly-equipped Russians overwhelmed the far-better supplied Germans. A few years later, while still in elementary school, Menachem was asked to write a composition about what he would like to be when he grew up: a lawyer, he wrote, in order to defend poor and deprived people.

His second memory concerns a Jewish woman, the commissar of a unit billeted in their home. She aroused revulsion with her stern expression and masculine behavior and her bragging that she could shoot a person without so much as batting an eyelash.

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46 Steinman, 1954, p. 251; Haber, 1978, p. 18

47 Greenfield, 1977, p. 16

48 Hirschler, 1979, p. 20; Gervasi, 1979, p. 87

49 Haber, 1978, p. 18; Hirschler, 1979, p. 18
Another significant early childhood memory of Menachem's was of Polish soldiers flogging a Jew in the park. Menachem admitted that the memory of his first years, also including elementary school, is uncertain. He also acknowledged that he was relating what his sister had told him because she remembered much more about his life at that age.\textsuperscript{50} But in other places, as in The Revolt\textsuperscript{51} — his memoir of the underground period — he relates the incident as a clear traumatic memory.

The other Jews were herded into the central park of the city and compelled to witness the spectacle... I was seven years old at the time, but the horror of that degrading scene has never faded from my mind.

Rachel remembered that two Jews were flogged and that Menachem was not there, but heard about it later. One of the Jews died and Rachel said that she knew his daughter. The doctor who tried to save him was their downstairs neighbor who died of a heart attack only a few days later with Menachem’s father at his side.\textsuperscript{52} The beating stemmed from an accusation that the Jews favored the Russians.\textsuperscript{53}

These divergent versions of the incident remind us that the child does not actually have to be present in order to experience the trauma. He might just identify with his family and the Jewish fate.

Many years later Menachem still carried the trauma within him and in the Brest commemoration book, he wrote the following about his fight against the British who also flogged his underground fighters on occasion:

\textsuperscript{50} Temko, 1987, p. 313; Hirschler, 1979, p. 18

\textsuperscript{51} 1977, p. 232

\textsuperscript{52} Temko, 1987, p. 21

\textsuperscript{53} Hirschler, 1979, p. 18
Twenty five years later when the fighter Jewish youths came out to break the whip of another hated general I still remembered the public whipping of Jews in the garden in downtown Brisk.54

Menachem was described by classmates as a small and frail child who craved affection.55 This is also the impression one gets from his childhood pictures.56 He was shy and had speech difficulties. He often confused the Hebrew letters “gimel” and “kaf”, i.e., a hard "g" and a "k". At a birthday party for his sister when she was in her 70s, he thanked her for helping him overcome his speech problems.57 But the school secretary in the Tachkemoni elementary school nevertheless remembered Menachem standing on a chair and holding forth to his classmates.58 When Begin became prime minister, Eva Pitlik, a kindergarten teacher, reminisced about five-year-old Menachem and how he was an especially clever and active child who was eager to learn.59

It is easy to imagine young Menachem finding the words recited by Jews at the Passover seder (when Jewish families gather to celebrate the story of the Exodus through text and song) very relevant: “Not only in one alone, but in every generation, there are those who rise against us to destroy us, and the Holy Blessed One rescues us from their hands.” Menachem’s sister, Rachel, tells how their father used to recite

54 Steinman, 1954, p. 251
55 Temko, 1987, p. 21
56 Aizakson, 2003, p. 30-31
57 Seidman & Schreiber, 1990, p. 28
58 Sofer, 1988, p. 6
59 Begin Center Archive

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these words "with two hard tears coming out of his eyes." For Menachem, this was not some abstract generalization as it was for many Jews, but something that touched him in a very personal and intimate way.

Around the time of the Brisk flogging when Menachem was seven years old, the Poles shot three dozen Jews in Pinsk before Passover. Polish Jews were shocked. A Yiddish paper published a protest poem which Hassia taught Menachem who, with his photographic memory, learned it immediately. Subsequently, he would stand on top of the table and recite it to the family and visitors. Another version says that the father gave a speech and Menachem, standing on a chair, recited the poem which opened with the words: “Do not bother coming, Elijah the Prophet, this year we have no Passover eve ceremony (Seder), but bitter green food instead of wine…” (a reference to the folk belief that Elijah visits each Jewish home on Passover eve).

Begin’s mother is described from an outsider’s point of view as a woman who spoke little and did not complain, letting her husband set the tone. But as often happens, each child in the same family has a "different" mother and Menachem and Rachel experienced her in a quite different ways.

Rachel recalled that “she controlled the house firmly, ordering what should and should not be done and the children were quite obedient. We had the kind of magical feeling that if we disobey her something bad will happen to us”.

Menachem jumped to his mother's defense, saying that his mother was not a controlling person. She did not intervene and did not ask embarrassing questions. She was a woman with rare tact. We used to come home whenever

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60 Halperin, 1978
61 Temko, 1987, p. 24
62 Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 27
63 Temko, 1987, p. 19

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we wanted and she waited for us with a warm meal, good word and cup of tea. She took care of us in totally a positive way. We lived under her protected love but it was not a confining love. On the contrary, we felt a lot of freedom at home. Mother was always happy for the noise we and our friends made. She used to treat our friends nicely and offer them good things to eat. Mother was supportive not controlling, consoling not teasing. She had tremendous tact. She always suffered without any complaint and in this respect she was a model for us.\(^{64}\)

In many families, we might find different views of a parent by the children and here, too, we get the impression that Menachem and Rachel had quite different relationships with their mother. Rachel's feeling that Menachem was the preferred child gets additional validation in the type of attachment we observe. Time and again, Menachem described his mother as a saint.\(^{65}\)

Menachem wrote about another childhood memory:

The shadow of the pogrom, its length is like that of the Jewish people's two thousands years exile from their homeland, it has not skipped our home. It brought with it the fear that causes the adults to visibly become old and also causes the souls of the children to age invisibly.\(^{66}\)

Menachem is telling us that he aged beyond his chronological years, not just in terms of intellectual precociousness necessarily, but also in terms of sadness, compared to the rest of his age group. From a very young age, Menachem literally felt a physical connection to the fate of the Jews. He cannot play or waste time rebelling against his parents; he has to be more mature than his age — But we must remember

\(^{64}\)Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 26-7

\(^{65}\)Brackett, 2003, p. 20; Perlmutter, 1987, p. 36

\(^{66}\)Steinman, 1954, p. 251
that there was a choice here, even if unconscious, for not every Jew who was there chose to give up his personal life and identify so strongly with the fate of the Jewish people. Again, we also get the impression that even his childhood memories are not personal, but collective, and we search for Menachem, the child, last seen at about the age of three or four playing with his friends in the forest while his father is absent.

Menachem wrote:

In one of those fearful days my father was called to the neighboring street because some Polish soldiers had perpetrated a celebrated pogrom for the glory of the renascent Poland. My father had gone, and immediately the rumor broke into the anxious house that he would not return because he was shot dead. It is true that one of the soldiers who had taken part in the pogrom had targeted my father with his rifle, also pressed the trigger and also fired but missed his target. The rumor that froze our blood reached us before my father returned. From that time I remember my father protecting his brothers, the sons of his people, from any aggression, large scale pogroms or hanging.\(^\text{67}\)

We do not hear a word of anger from a child of about seven over the possibility of losing his father. We only hear about his fear of losing his father and then see an instant identification with the father’s role as the savior of the Jews. Many children in similar circumstances would probably feel that they would like to be more important to the parent than a neighbor or a political goal. They might also be angry, not immediately perhaps, but later on, about a father who had almost deserted them forever. The only feeling toward his father that remained in Menachem’s consciousness was admiration.\(^\text{68}\)

But his sister Rachel said about this childhood memory that this was Menachem’s invention; that it was implausible that “a Polish guard could fire on the captive Begin

\(^{67}\) Steinman, 1954, p. 251

\(^{68}\) Dolev, 1977
and miss.” As we know, when it comes to childhood memories, the precise facts are less important than the emotions involved. The way this event was etched in the mind of the child Menachem will shape his perception of the world for years to come.

Arbitrary imprisonment of Jews was an everyday occurrence. One day, when Menachem was around seven, soldiers came to the house to arrest Ze’ev Dov, then secretary of the Jewish community. Menachem was sleeping while the older children, Rachel and Herzl, wept and blocked the door in an attempt to keep the soldiers out. But Ze’ev Dov stood up to them and asked if they had an arrest warrant, whereupon the confused soldiers left. People spoke about Ze’ev Dov's presence of mind and bravery and how it had saved him.

This is the only instance where I found any overt emotional reaction by the children, such as crying, to the traumas they endured. It seems that to be a child at such a time, especially with such a father who exposes the family to such events, required the development of an impermeable defensive shield. The children took part in the desperate fight in order to block the soldiers and to defend the family.

In still another childhood memory, Menachem told how his father had tried to prevent Polish soldiers from cutting off the rabbi's beard (something they used to do). The Jews involved were taken to the military camp and cruelly beaten. Nevertheless, Ze'ev Dov returned home wounded but happy. “He said he had defended the honor of the Jewish people and the honor of the rabbi. So, I remember

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69 Temko, 1987, p. 29
70 Golan & Nakdimon, p. 25; Hischler, 1979, p. 19
71 Dolev, 1977
those two things from my childhood: Jews being persecuted and the courage of the Jews.”

On still another occasion, Pilsudski, the Polish president, in his meeting with the Jewish community, insisted that they apprehend Jewish speculators who were cornering the market. Ze’ev Dov, according to Menachem’s childhood memory, answered him proudly that the Jews were not a group of spies and unlike the Polish government did not have a secret police whose business it was to apprehend criminals. Pilsudski, Menachem said, was livid, but later showed “respect” for this “honest and proud Jew.” Menachem also used to say that he never met anyone as brave as his father, but we know that some of the Jews were afraid that a pogrom might break out because of what they considered Ze’ev Dov’s arrogant attitude.

Here, too, Rachel believed that Pilsudski’s apologetic “respect” for Ze’ev Dov after their confrontation was Menachem’s invention. These are not the only examples of possible dramatic and heroic exaggerations on Menachem's part. Children naturally tend to create such “lies” at a time of stress, such as Menachem's situation, when he feared he might lose his father, in order to overcome their anxiety. In later years they tend to repeat these stories without any change.

Menachem made his first speech when he was ten years old. As noted above, Ze’ev Dov used to organize the Lag Ba’omer festivities which included speeches, songs, marches and refreshments. This time, he offered Menachem the podium to deliver a

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72 Silver, 1984, p. 4

73 Dolev, 1977

74 ibid

75 Temko, 1987, p. 29

28
speech the boy had written in Hebrew. About 5,000 Jews listened to Menachem speak about the heroism of Bar Kochba, the leader of the Jewish revolt against Rome. Rachel said it was a success.  

Later in life, he would comment on the ability to uplift people with a speech:

…the art of speech cannot be acquired by learning… It is a fact that all the schools of rhetoric, from the dawn of history until this very day, have not produced a single orator worthy of the name. And the few whose names are graven in the annals of mankind taught themselves the art of speech.

And who is an orator?...

An orator is he who knows how to combine logic and sentiments, heart and intelligence. It is the speaker from whose heart and brain is spun a thread reaching to the hearts and brains of his audience. And at certain moments, his listeners become one entity, and that orator becomes a part of it. …all of a sudden [the audience…] feels carried aloft, elevated toward another world…

Although Begin originally wrote this piece for his teacher, Jabotinsky (1880-1940), who was famous as an outstanding orator, it tells us something very important about the kind of relationship he had with his father, which had developed into the same kind of relationship with his teacher. Menachem describes how a skilled orator and his audience meld together as one, in kind of an elated mutual identification. This is how he perceived and experienced the essence of his father's message and their relationship. Only then, Menachem was the audience and his father was the orator.

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76 Temko, 1987, p. 25

77 Translation Hurwitz, 1994, p. 44; the Irgun newspaper, Herut, July, 13, 1950
Although the speech made Menachem a celebrity and he was invited to speak elsewhere, he remained a loner who spent most of his time studying. He was very shy and preferred indoor activity. At age 12, he still looked like a little kid of six or seven. “His eyes stared from behind thick round glasses. He read constantly and his strongest subject combined the magic of words with the rigors of memory: Latin.”

Menachem delved into his studies and also excelled in Hebrew. At this point in his life, he wanted to be a lawyer in order to help the poor and deprived and had not yet thought much about Palestine.

According to some, his childhood shyness stayed with him in later years. Fifty-five years later, when Menachem had grandchildren, his favorite was the youngest: "So bright! So bright but physically so frail!" he would say.

In 1925, the Jewish youth movement Hashomer Hatzair ("The Young Guard"); HaShomer was a self-appointed group of pioneers who stood on guard in far-off Palestine against Arab attacks. They used to ride horses and wear the traditional Arab headdress to guard against the desert sun and trained themselves to wield the sword and the plowshare with equal skill. To some Jews, they were legendary heroes) was established. In the early years it was a general Zionist youth movement (rather than leftist, as it was to become) and Ze’ev Dov was head of its patrons' committee. All three of his children attended its meetings. Rachel, then eighteen years old, had a
leadership role. Menachem, who was then twelve, sought her proximity, which aroused some mockery from their peers.\textsuperscript{82}

The townsfolk said that Menachem was like his father. They looked alike, sharing physical similarities such as a prominent nose and otherwise delicate features. (Aizakson's book contains pictures from Menachem’s childhood; it is amazing to see the soft, feminine cast of his facial features).\textsuperscript{83} Menachem and his father also shared a defiant brand of Zionism and “the shield of bluster that often grows from shyness.”\textsuperscript{4}

The final glue was Menachem’s admiration for his father and the absence over the years of any hint of disagreement. Menachem, everyone agrees, did not rebel against his parents or undergo the typical period of self-searching in which many western adolescents seek to consolidate their own, discrete identity.\textsuperscript{84} In fact, the separation process from both parents was incomplete in the sense that Menachem could not express a large range of feelings, especially less favorable ones, toward his parents. In western societies, this separation process is often considered crucial for growth and good mental health. In collective cultures and within different religious groups, we often find the opposite, with the separation process between children and parents being the exception.\textsuperscript{85} In such societies, children are more apt to follow their parents’ guidance in many respects and to develop more of a group identity rather than independent individuality.

\textsuperscript{4} Temko, 1987, p. 28
\textsuperscript{83} Aizakson, 2003, p. 21
\textsuperscript{5} ibid
\textsuperscript{84} also: Perlmutter, 1987, p. 37; Brackett, 2003, p. 20
\textsuperscript{85} Triandis, 1995; Volkan, 1980; Slote, 1992
Menachem became very active in the ideological debates in Hashomer Hatzair. But just a year later, Ze’ev Dov decided that the children should leave Hashomer Hatzair. The reason? The movement had started taking a strong turn to the Left as its leaders sought to adopt the communist ideology. Ze’ev Dov felt that first it was necessary to see to the liberation of their own people and only afterwards to think about the liberation of the whole world.  

In his way, Ze’ev Dov was like a father to the entire town. He preached Zionism to Menachem and to others in the same manner, creating a similar type of relationship with Menachem’s peer group. He quizzed them on the Bible, then winked and suggested that even the school principal didn't know the answers, and he played chess with them as he did with Menachem. He used to sit in the park with his chess board humming to himself while inviting youngsters to try to beat him in chess. Many of the people who grew up with Menachem don’t remember much about him, but they remember his father very well. It is quite clear that it was difficult for the father to create an emotional bond with his children and he substituted intellectual discourse and political goals instead.  

But how was the relationship between Ze’ev Dov and Hassia? We lack detailed information about it but one rare example is described by a friend of Menachem. Hassia, the friend said, talked little, perhaps because the rest of the family talked so much. Menachem, according to the friend, saw how she tried to feed the family with Ze’ev Dov’s Zionism and said he learned his patience from her (perhaps a rare hint of criticism of his father).

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86 Temko, 1987, p. 27; Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 28
87 Temko, 1987, p. 29
88 Temko, 1987, p. 31
Menachem told the story of how one Monday she took Ze’ev Dov aside and told him they did not have enough money for the next Sabbath dinner. Ze’ev Dov's response was: “What's the worry?” The same scene was repeated on each of the next few days. On Thursday, Ze’ev Dov said he was sure he would get some money that evening. “Tonight there is a drawing of the lottery!” Hassia asked if he had bought a ticket. Her husband chuckled: “Hah! Is it anything to win a lottery when you buy a ticket? I believe I will win without buying a ticket!”

Begin later spoke of his family's continuous poverty and, in one of his memoirs, also talked about “learning while hungry.” The children participated in the efforts to raise the family income by giving private lessons. But Ze’ev Dov strutted about town like an aristocrat. He had false teeth in need of repair, but no money to fix them. He dressed fancily, but had holes in his suit, at the elbows and elsewhere. He had a silver-tipped cane and Rachel said he was a great dandy even in times of great difficulty.

Ze’ev Dov invited ridicule not only because of his appearance. He loved public speaking, but his perpetually hoarse voice made it difficult to understand him. Be that as it may, his oratorical fervor was so great that at some point in his speech he would put his hands on his chest in a show of exhaustion and sigh in Yiddish: “Ohhh! my heart!” Actually, he had no heart trouble, but the episodes were very dramatic.

89Steinman, 1954, p. 251
91Dolev, 1977
92Temko, 1987, p. 30
93ibid
94ibid
On the one hand, the townsfolk respected Ze’ev Dov for his courage and honesty, and for his work in promoting Zionism and as secretary of the Jewish Community, but they also made fun of him and called him meshugener (a Yiddish term for "crazy" that expresses a tinge of pity as well). They said that he put on airs.  

At age 14, Menachem attended a Polish gymnasium (Traugutt) from which he graduated with honors. He was accepted to the school with a few other Jews because of his high grades, and probably also because of his father's connections. He did not go to a Jewish school, probably because of the expense.  

An additional reason for sending his children to the Polish high school was Ze’ev’s desire for his children to receive the more general education he had so craved in his adolescent years and which his father had vetoed. He also knew that his children's chances of being accepted at university would be greater if they graduated from a Polish, rather than a Jewish, high school. His three children did indeed attend Warsaw University. Herzl studied mathematics and Rachel studied history there and later became a teacher (rather rare then for a town girl).  

Ze’ev also wanted his wife to expand her basic education. According to Rachel, he discussed it with her, but the war, poverty and having three children prevented him from fulfilling this promise.  

Nationalist sentiments were strong in Poland, and Menachem, at the Polish high school, was influenced by this spirit. The students learned how Poland had suffered  

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95 Dolev, 1977; Temko, 1987, p. 30  

96 Sofer, 1988, p. 6  

97 Halperin, 1978  

98 Temko, 1987, p. 22
from foreign invasions and occupations and how the Poles had bravely fought for their independence. Feelings of nationalism, love of homeland, pride of belonging and faith in the nation's eternal survival were then in the air. It went well with what Menachem had learned from his father about the aspiration to build a Jewish state in Palestine.  

Menachem was skinny, had a chronic sniffle and coughed so persistently that some people thought he had tuberculosis. He did not excel in sports. He excelled in humanities and preferred books. Years later he could recite by heart from the Knesset podium verses of Adam Mickiewicz, Poland’s national poet, whose nationalistic sentiments had captured his imagination. He could also recite from Shakespeare, Abraham Lincoln, Latin texts and the Bible.

Menachem insisted on refraining from writing the Latin exam on the Jewish Sabbath. This could have been very detrimental because a failing grade could have kept him out of the university. But Menachem stuck to his guns and told the teacher that under no circumstances was he going to write an exam on Saturday. He confessed to Rachel that the fact that the other students laughed at him spurred him on because he wasn't going to give them any satisfaction. In the end the teacher capitulated and gave him

99 Haber, 1978, p. 22

100 Temko, 1987, p. 33

101 Haber, 1978, p. 22

102 Hurwitz, 1994, p. 5; Hirschler & Ackman, 1979, p. 14
his usual good grade.\textsuperscript{103} His struggle against humiliation is even more evident in the following example:

Menachem remembered how the Polish children used to beat the Jewish children on the street as an everyday habit. “We acquired knowledge at the cost of beatings. Every day had its ‘quota’ — a quota of insults and shoves and ‘sieges’. Our suffering became a significant teacher. We learnt to defend ourselves, to beat those who beat us, and to insult our insulters. Our teachers taught us but our “friends” taught us more.” Menachem was physically weak but he said that the lesson he learned was not to run away. “We returned home bleeding and beaten, but with the knowledge we had not been humiliated.”\textsuperscript{104}

Menachem’s desperate need to defend his self-respect and pride and not be humiliated must be understood. We do not often see a weaker child confronting a stronger one; such behavior somehow requires a disregard of the body for the sake of soul. The child (like anyone else in a similar situation) must overcome the fear of injury or death in order to behave in this way and most children naturally surrender to a stronger power. This is an example of how the emotional need not to be humiliated may be stronger than the physical survival instinct. Then came the reward: “We soon learnt that these bullies would behave politely enough when they received blows in return.”\textsuperscript{105} This “street psychology” accompanied Menachem throughout his life.

One girl remembered how they organized a New Year’s Eve party. They invited Herzl and after some hesitation decided not to invite Menachem because it was

\textsuperscript{103}Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 35

\textsuperscript{104}Steinman, 1954, p. 252; Dolev, 1977

\textsuperscript{105}Silver, 1984, p. 10

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doubtful he would fit in. Menachem had no close friends and did not court girls. In one of his rare intimate interviews he described how flirting worked in his day. Walking with their books tucked under their arm, the boy usually asked the girl, "Miss, what's that book you're reading?" The girl would respond and then the boy would tell her what he was reading. “With the aid of such a literary background courtships usually flourished. I think (said Menachem Begin with a sad voice, according to the interviewer) it is a lovely way of courtship that has passed from the world.” Probably Menachem had not had this experience too often, if at all, as happens to some youths. But the fact that he could describe it with a sad voice gives us the impression that he was not isolated from this experience.106

Herzl's very different personality is very clear. He was not enamored of the humanities as was Menachem, and was especially talented in mathematics. He used to dance with girls, helped his friends cheat in exams and was popular. He also had an intimacy with his father that Menachem could only dream of. Herzl actually showed his father his first love letters when he was in high school.107 Probably the fact that Herzl was different from his father and had developed his own identity made their more intimate relationship possible. As for Rachel, it is clear from her description of her father and mother and her ability also to criticize them that she had developed her separate individuality.108 Menachem, in contrast, created his entire life from family relationships and not from friends. He was an extension of his parents, part of his people, but not Menachem the individual. From the time he was exclusively with his

106 Bashan, 1977; Temko, 1987, p. 33-34

107 Temko, 1987, p. 34

108 Halperin, 1978
mother around the age of four, playing in the forest before his father's return, and up to his retirement at the age of 70 and withdrawal into depression, there was never any such thing as Menachem the individual without the Jewish people.

Menachem had outstanding oratorical skills and always attracted an audience at the Zionist meetings his father organized in the synagogue. He seemed entranced while speaking and could recite the modern Polish poet Mickiewicz's hymns in order to enhance his depictment of the struggle of the Jews. But his brother Herzl gave the impression that he pitied him and thought he was wasting his time.

Many years later, Menachem omitted his brother from some of his memories. Although Herzl was extremely talented in mathematics, Menachem said that he was merely “very capable,” which in Menachem’s dramatic lexicon is not saying much. By contrast, he described Rachel as one of the more brilliant students in town. Menachem and Herzl were never seen together outside their home and Menachem actually resented him.\textsuperscript{109} But although his sister Rachel later termed some of Menachem's significant memories dramatic childish exaggerations, she remained a benevolent mother figure for him. This is probably because of the larger age difference (six years) between them and her being a girl and less of a rival. We also know that she used to help Menachem on different occasions, especially during the hard refugee years when she took on a maternal role.\textsuperscript{110}

In \textit{White Nights} (Begin’s autobiographical book about his prison years in Russia), Menachem described what it means to be a prisoner:

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\textsuperscript{109}Temko, 1987, p. 34
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\textsuperscript{110}Silver, 1984, p. 5
\end{flushright}
He must know that a mother’s loving hand will not comfort him any more…
There is no home, no mother, no sister, no friend (1977, p. 30).

Father and brother are not mentioned. Given his life experience, it is not surprising that Menachem concentrated on the mother and sister figures in such a difficult situation. As previously noted, his frail mother, who had sadness and warmth in her eyes and who suffered silently and was ready to sacrifice herself for him, left Menachem longing for her throughout his entire life.

Yehuda Rosenman, an acquaintance of Menachem’s from high school in Brisk, described one of his visits to the Begin home. Menachem’s mother used to offer the guests sugar cookies and hot tea in the living room, which was also where Menachem and Herzl slept and thus in constant chaos. Many visitors came to the house to see Menachem’s father.

This day Menachem’s parents were out. Menachem was alone — sprawled on the couch, reading — when Rosenman arrived. Menachem ignored him. For several minutes, the visitor — who knew Menachem well, and looked up to him — waited for acknowledgement. Finally, he barked, 'Menachem! Why the hell do you ignore me and lie there even though I am sitting here?' Menachem put down his book and replied: 'I am going to tell you something you must always remember. It is terribly important for an educated man, if he wants to know things, to read a minimum of a hundred and fifty pages a day'. Menachem said he did not mean to insult the younger boy. 'But there are always people coming in here. I can’t hide myself, because we have a tiny apartment. So I just have to make time, and just lie like this and read'  

It is not surprising that when Moshe Steiner, a prominent Revisionist figure, came to Brisk in 1929 to give a speech, 16-year-old Menachem was very excited. He already knew about Jabotinsky and his view that the Jews should leave the Diaspora and build their country in Palestine, and he asked Steiner many questions. Menachem

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111 Temko 1987, P. 13
also wanted to hear more about the Revisionists’ youth wing -- Betar. Steiner explained, but it was when he recited a poem by Jabotinsky that Betar had adopted as its battle cry that Menachem was converted. The words fell on the right ears:

Even in poverty, a Jew is a prince;
Whether slave or tramp
You have been created a prince.
Crowned with the diadem of David
In light or in darkness
Remember the crown… ¹¹²

Begin recalled being “fascinated by the total Zionism of Betar… It brought together all those elements I had found in reading and listening.” And he really believed it personally.¹¹³ It is also important to consider the powerful emotional message in Jabotinsky's poem, which was set to music and appealed to so many Jews over the years. Simply put, it is a song that restores the lost pride of a humiliated people.

The name ‘Betar’ has two sources: 1. Betar was the fortress near Jerusalem where Simon Bar Kochba made his last heroic stand in the Jewish revolt against Roman rule in Palestine in the 2nd century CE. 2. It is also the acronym of Brit HaNoar Ha'Ivri al Shem Yosef Trumpeldor — The Joseph Trumpeldor Jewish Youth Alliance. Trumpeldor was a Jewish hero who died while defending a settlement in Northern Israel. His best-known saying before his death was: “It is good to die for our country.”

¹¹² Translation: Haber, 1978, p. 39

¹¹³ Temko, 1987, p. 36
In this way Betar, by its very name, linked the memory of ancient Jewish courage with the modern-day struggle for Jewish renaissance.\textsuperscript{114}

Menachem now spent every afternoon in the nascent Betar cell. His qualities as a leader were clear from the beginning. At first he was not elected leader, but he soon became the leader by dint of his natural ability. He was in the right place at the right time, conversant in Jabotinsky's teachings and able to promote them better than the others. He is described as having a special power that “draws support without exactly recruiting it.”\textsuperscript{115} There was no vote or change of title of his position; it wasn't needed. After a few weeks, he was in charge.

He kept a distance between himself and his followers. He offered them help in their schoolwork, but in Betar, never asked them to do what he would not do himself. He took the initiative. If someone asked for a favor, he would never oblige as he felt it would lower his status. He would initiate a conversation by citing Jabotinsky, Latin proverbs and the cultural greats he knew so well. We had a gossip culture, said one person who knew Menachem. Everyone — except Menachem — told everybody almost everything about everyone. He was more disciplined and you never knew what he was really planning.\textsuperscript{116} this acquaintance recalled. Menachem was serious, was not on a quest for self-discovery like many of his peers, and knew what he wanted.\textsuperscript{117} He

\textsuperscript{114}Hirschler, 1979, p. 38

\textsuperscript{115}Temko, 1987, p. 36

\textsuperscript{116}ibid

\textsuperscript{117}Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 35
would say what he wanted, but share nothing more. “He placed himself above us. We
looked upon him like a god, like someone better than the rest of us.”

Menachem wore his Betar uniform everywhere except in Traugutt high school. He
loved the muscle of Jabotinsky Zionism and had one friend, a veritable bodyguard, a
mountain of a boy named Avraham Stavsky. Friends said it was funny to see them
together -- Menachem, slight and beardless and physically weak next to his huge
friend. On the stage, however, Menachem was transformed. He often spoke at Betar
events, opening his speech on a high note with a citation from German poets such as
Goethe. Then he would modulate his tone and switch to Yiddish. He spoke with great
flair from the soul of the shtetl (the Jewish villages of Eastern Europe) — like one of
them, said a companion. He spoke in black and white terms and offered real salvation,
said another.

At this time (not only then, of course), people from the lower socioeconomic
classes tended to adhere to right-wing ideologies. At the other end of the political map
was Hashomer Hatzair, a gentler leftist Zionism that preached that sweat and toil,
rather than the Jabotinsky sword, would win Palestine. Menachem’s group felt
inferior in their rivalry, but Menachem kept shouting from the podium that every Jew
was a prince. His rivals admitted that when he spoke they were transfixed. He always
began with such energy!

118 Temko, 1987, p. 36

119 ibid

120 ibid, pp. 36-37

121 ibid, p. 37
In 1931, when Begin was soon to graduate with honors from Traugutt, Vladimir Jabotinsky came to town. Thousands greeted him. He whipped the crowd into a frenzy with his extraordinary ability as an orator and used a “juicy Yiddish” not even Menachem could emulate.\(^\text{122}\) Menachem said later: “I was more than won over”\(^\text{123}\) and in *White Nights* he wrote how he had felt the speech in all his bones and that it had taken him up… up… up…\(^\text{124}\)

Did you concur? No, more than that, you became consecrated, someone is whispering in your ear: You are consecrated unto me, for me, for the idea and forever. And you answer: Yes, I am consecrated forever.

Menachem used the Hebrew words uttered by a groom to his bride under the wedding canopy to describe his bonding with the teacher’s message. This is a unique opportunity to see how an idea can be experienced as a mate, i.e., the idea also has a libidinal erotic quality, not just an intellectual one. It also indicates where Menachem had invested his drives. From this moment on, Zionism for Menachem is an issue of love; there is no point trying to convince him to relinquish this love, or telling him that this love is not perfect.

He decided to devote the rest of his life to Jabotinsky and Betar.\(^\text{125}\) Jabotinsky, companions said, was God to him. Rumor had it that Menachem practiced orating like Jabotinsky in front of the mirror. But we understand that, for Menachem, Jabotinsky was an extension of his father and he identified deeply with both.

\(^\text{122}\) ibid, p. 58

\(^\text{123}\) Silver, 1984, p. 10

\(^\text{124}\) 1995, p. 58, Hebrew edition

\(^\text{125}\) Sofer, 1988, p. 7; Hirschler & Eckman, 1979, p. 36, 39

\(^\text{126}\) Temko, 1987, p. 38
Menachem arrived at the Warsaw University law school in 1931. He was 18 years old and it was his first time away from home. He had only one suit, a pair of shoes and a plan. He immediately contacted Aharon Propes, head of Betar in Poland, which by now had 150 branches, told him that he longed to serve Betar and would await his orders. “The moment I met Begin, I decided to co-opt him,” recalled Propes, who soon offered Menachem a job with a meager salary.\textsuperscript{122} Menachem lived for the work in Betar and put only enough effort into his studies to be able to pass the exams. Every morning he arrived at the Betar office wearing his brown Betar uniform, with buttered black bread and a hard-boiled egg wrapped in newspaper tucked under his arm. But the main thing he brought with him was an especially high motivation to work relentlessly for little reward (Betar didn't have much of a budget). When he had the opportunity to court a girl, he would prattle on to her about Jabotinsky until the girl wondered why he had started up with her at all. He spoke less in class than in the Jewish students’ dormitories where the Zionist debates took place. He was a very impressive orator when debating against the leftist Labor Zionists and was soon the undisputed leader of the student Revisionist camp.\textsuperscript{123}

When Begin arrived in Warsaw, the city was experiencing a westernizing transition; the Poles liked to refer to their capital as the Paris of the East, with its theaters, \textit{haute couture} and cafés. The 100,000 Jews of Warsaw were inclined toward assimilation. But things changed. In the early 1930s, the depression reached Warsaw,

\textsuperscript{122}Temko, 1987, p. 39

\textsuperscript{123}ibid

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then Hitler rose to power in Germany and the anti-Semitic National Democrats gained power in Poland. Against this backdrop, the Revisionists gained unprecedented power and in the World Zionist Congress of 1931, the Revisionist faction was not far behind Chaim Weizmann's Labor party (29%:21%). In such an atmosphere, Begin’s messages made sense to many.124

To understand Begin and the spirit of his time, we must devote a few words to Begin’s teacher, Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky, and his ideas. Jabotinsky was a journalist, novelist, poet and outstanding orator with a comprehensive knowledge of many languages. In 1923 he resigned from the Zionist executive and founded the youth movement Betar and then the Revisionist party. He differed from the Labor movement by insisting that the Zionist movement openly declare its goal: the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Most Zionist leaders, though, rejected this approach out of political caution or ideological reasons. He also challenged the decision of Winston Churchill, then British Minister of Settlements, in 1922, to separate the area east of the Jordan River (the East Bank) from the areas west of the Jordan River by inserting the Hashemite Abdullah - the great-grandfather of the present King Abdullah II of Jordan - as its emir. Jabotinsky thought the West Bank alone could not contain the millions of Jews who would arrive in the country from Europe’s ghettos (prior to the Holocaust). This is the origin of the Revisionist ideology expressed in Jabotinsky’s poem “The Eastern Bank of the Jordan”:

As a bridge is held up by a pillar  
As a man is kept erect by his spine  
So the Jordan, the holy Jordan  
Is the backbone of my Israel.

Two Banks has the Jordan –  
This is ours and, that is as well.

Though my country may be poor and small
It is mine from head to foot.
Stretching from the sea to the desert
And the Jordan, the Jordan in the middle.

Two Banks has the Jordan –
This is ours and, that is as well.

From the wealth of our land there shall prosper
The Arab, the Christian, and the Jew,
For our flag is a pure and just one
It will illuminate both sides of my Jordan.

Two Banks has the Jordan –
This is ours and, that is as well.

My two hands I have dedicated to the homeland,
My two hands to sword and shield.
Let my right hand whither
If I forget the East Bank of the Jordan.

Two Banks has the Jordan –
This is ours and, that is as well.  

The source for this vision is, of course, the “Promised Land” that God granted Abraham in the Bible (Genesis 15:18).

An additional controversy between the Jewish left (labor party) and the right (revisionist party) centered on Jabotinsky's assertion that Palestine was for all Jews, not just a select elite. Unlike him, most of his colleagues in the Zionist leadership sought to create an exemplary socialist society in Palestine. They built many kibbutzim and agricultural settlements and their great aspiration was for the Jews to return to the soil and conquer the wasteland and drain the swamps by the sweat of their brow. Jabotinsky called for a mass and unselective immigration so as to create a

\[125\] Jabotinsky, 1946, also: http://www.saveisrael.com/jabo/jaboraayon.htm
Jewish majority in the country as soon as possible. He envisioned more of a middle class industrial European society.\textsuperscript{126} He also argued it was the only way to save the Jews of Eastern Europe.

Jabotinsky said: “Weizmann believes that his way is that of a compromising realist, and mine is the way of a stubborn fantasist, of a utopian; and I feel that his line is the line of renunciation, of subconscious Marranism, while mine is a difficult, stormy way, which will, however, lead more quickly to a Jewish State” (Marranism was a reference to the Spanish Jews who pretended to adopt Christianity as a means of surviving the Inquisition).\textsuperscript{127}

The new revisionist movement spread quickly through the small towns and villages of Eastern Europe. Feeling threatened on the one hand and witnessing the renaissance of different ideologies (fascism, communism) and national aspirations on the other, the Jews were impressed by a Jewish youth movement with uniforms and military rituals like other nations, but especially with the idea of an independent Jewish state with a government, ministers, a military and a flag. Many of them found this much more exciting than what the Labor party was preaching, with its seemingly vague talk about a national home and new society in Palestine.\textsuperscript{128}

This is the Betar anthem written by Ze’ev Jabotinsky:

\textbf{Betar} —
From the pit of decay and dust
Through blood and sweat
A race will arise to us

\textsuperscript{126} Nakdimon & Golan, 1978, p. 33
\textsuperscript{127} Schechtman, 1956, p. 424
\textsuperscript{128} Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 33
Genious generous and cruel
Captured Betar
Yodefet and Masada [forts that fell in the Jewish revolt against the Romans]
Will arise in strength and nobility.

**Nobility**
A Jew even in poverty is a prince
Though slave or tramp.
You were created son of a king,
Crowned with the diadem of David's…
The crown of pride and strife.

**Challenge**
Despite every besieger and enemy
Whether you rise or fall
With the torch of revolt
Carry a fire to kindle: "No matter."
Because silence is filth
[It means] surrendering blood and soul
For the sake of the hidden glory
To die or conquer the mount.

Yodefet, Masada, Betar

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Masada (properly, *Metzada*) was the famous last outpost (southeast of Jerusalem) of the Jews in their struggle against the Romans. In 73 CE, when they despaired of any possibility of victory or escape, rather than surrender to the Romans and endure the devastating consequences, about one thousand men, women, and children committed mass suicide. This act remained a symbol of Jewish heroism throughout the ages.

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129Jabotinsky, 1946; also: [http://www.saveisrael.com/jabo/jaboraayon.htm](http://www.saveisrael.com/jabo/jaboraayon.htm). This translation was modified in some places by the author.
On different occasions, Begin described what Jabotinsky meant to him. One was on July, 18, 1947 in an article entitled: “Memorial Day for Ze’ev Jabotinsky — A day of Reflection” (Begin, 1961, Vol. III p. 205):

... the theory of Ze’ev Jabotinsky mainly is not a political theory. Above all, it is a Theory of Character: a personality theory of the free Hebrew, a character theory of the rebel, a personality theory of a person who succeeds through supreme effort to be freed from almost eternal slavery and he applies the liberty of spirit to his people even before restoring national liberty to them...

To understand the Jews’ feelings that Jabotinsky and Begin addressed so well, here is what Yisrael Eldad, a Betar contemporary and enduring right-wing critic of Begin, said about Begin’s messages:

His phrases were not empty and demagogic for the Jews of Poland. They gave just the right expression to the feelings of the Jewish people. Nobody asked in those days how much a Jewish state would cost. For them it was a concrete reality, a republic of millions. When you talked about a Jewish soldier, it was an ideal. The Jew went to be a soldier for the Polish army, but he hated Poland. When Begin said ‘Jewish soldier’ it made people proud. People wanted it with all their heart. The Irgun (Irgun Zvai Leumi; acronym: EZEL; National Military Organization; here referred to as Irgun) was already active in Palestine. In Poland when you talked of retaliation, of no more pogroms, a Jewish boy became proud. The youth was ready to suffer, to sacrifice for an ideal. The youth had no patience. Betar and the Irgun offered them the revolutionary way. They offered a way to hundreds of thousands who had nothing to do.130

But, of course, not all Jews felt that way; the majority was not politically involved. For example, Menachem’s brother Herzl, who studied mathematics at the university where Menachem studied law, told Menachem after one of his speeches: "You talked so much, but what did you actually say?"131

130Silver, 1984, p. 17

131Haber, 1978, p. 47
Before the Zionist congress of 1933, it looked like a toss-up between Labor and the Revisionists. Jabotinsky implored the Jews to flee Europe and immigrate to Palestine. The debate became so heated that David Ben-Gurion (1886-1973), Weizmann's heir (and later first prime minister of Israel) derided Jabotinsky as a Fascist, calling him “Vladimir Hitler.”

But then, on June 16, 1933, Chaim Arlosoroff, who was head of the Jewish Agency's political department, a Ben-Gurion protégé and a rising star of the Labor Zionist movement, was gunned down on the beach of Tel-Aviv. Three Revisionists were apprehended, one of them Abrasha Stavsky, Begin’s bodyguard from Brisk. Begin and the Revisionists were sure it was a frame-up and called it a “blood libel” of Jew against Jew. The incident had a major impact on the election, with Labor receiving 44% of the vote to the Revisionists' 16%. After a lengthy trial, the three accused men were acquitted. But in Europe and Palestine, a gaping wound had opened between the two camps. Forty-nine years later, the deep hurt of the false accusation had not yet healed, and in March 1982, in wake of an unsympathetic account of the event by Israeli journalist Shabtai Teveth, Begin, then prime minister, appointed a commission of inquiry into Arlosoroff's murder. Unsurprisingly, Menachem Begin also experienced the initial trauma via the pain of a mother.

After Arlosoroff’s assassination, Begin accompanied Stavsky’s mother to a meeting with Jabotinsky:

I brought Avraham Stavsky’s mother to see Zeev Jabotinsky. To this day her appeal and cry rings in my ears: 'Mr. Jabotinsky, save my child.' Ze’ev

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132Temko, 1987, p.40
Jabotinsky kissed her hand. Tears flowed from the mother’s eyes. Those tears will never be forgotten.\textsuperscript{133}

And also:

So, too, will I never forget the tears of another mother – my own. On one of those hot summer days in 1933, whilst I was in my parents home vacationing from studies, my mother returned from shopping and said to me: “Neighbors have told me, your son is a good man but why does he associate with murderers?” My mother cried. I comforted her, saying: “Never mind. You know that Abrasha [Stavsky] murdered no one. The truth will come out.”\textsuperscript{134}

Begin traveled much throughout Poland. He was appointed head of Betar’s organizational department, visited \textit{shtetls} (small Jewish villages and hamlets of Eastern Europe) and met with local Betar leaders. As a result, he significantly enhanced his own reputation when Betar was growing into a mass movement of almost 100,000 members. As is the case with many revolutionary movements, most of the members were young people in their twenties, and they felt Begin was one of them. “He had a way of making you believe,” said one, and others also attested to his tremendous powers of persuasion.\textsuperscript{135}

One of the rare instances of Begin’s open opposition to Jabotinsky occurred in 1935, when Jabotinsky sought reconciliation with Ben-Gurion. The Revisionist leader believed that Zionism needed unity in order to succeed. He also remembered that Ben-Gurion had served in the Jewish Legion he helped to establish during World War I. Begin, however, rejected the idea:

You may have forgotten that Ben Gurion once called you ‘Vladimir Hitler’. But we have a better memory.

\textsuperscript{133} Begin, 1980; Temko, 1987, p. 41

\textsuperscript{134} Jerusalem Post, 19 March 1982

\textsuperscript{135} Temko, 1987, p. 42
Jabotinsky replied:

I shall never forget that men like Ben Gurion… once wore the uniform of the Legion, and I am confident that should the Zionist cause demand it, they would not hesitate to don this uniform again and fight.\textsuperscript{136}

Later in life, Begin would adopt Jabotinsky’s approach (like that of his father), which put the good of the nation above internal political disputes, and he would strive to unite the Jewish people in every possible situation.

Meanwhile, in Palestine, life was not easy for the Jews. In 1922, the League of Nations gave Britain the Mandate for Palestine (following the Balfour declaration of 1917) in order to encourage Jews to settle there and establish a Jewish national home. But the Arabs who lived in Palestine rejected it. In 1920, in response to the friction between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, Jabotinsky started to organize self-defense (Hagana) units that succeeded in blocking some of the Arab attacks.

Jabotinsky's 1923 article, “On the Iron Wall,” became a rallying call for not denying reality and deluding oneself with dreams of peace:

It is impossible to dream of a voluntary agreement between us and the Arabs of the Land of Israel… Not now and not in the foreseeable future… Every nation, civilized or primitive, sees its land as its national home, where it wants to stay as the sole landlord forever. Such a nation will never willingly consent not only to new landlords, but even to partnership… Every nation of natives fights the settlers as long as there is a glimmer of hope of getting rid of the danger of foreign settlement. Thus they behave, and thus will the Arabs of the Land of Israel behave, as long as there is a glimmer of hope in their hearts that they can prevent the changing of Palestine into the Land of Israel.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{136} Schechtman, 1961. p. 252; Temko, 1987, p. 42

\textsuperscript{137} Jabotinsky, 1946
Jabotinsky was more candid than most of his Zionist contemporaries. He made explicit what was implicit in their politics, and he also accused them of insulting the Arabs by treating them as fools who could be cheated.\textsuperscript{138} His answer for the Arabs’ resistance was an “iron wall of Jewish bayonets.” “The only way to achieve an agreement in the future is by the absolute abandonment of all attempts to achieve an agreement in the present,” he argued.

In 1929, and until his death 11 years later, the British declared Jabotinsky \textit{persona non grata} and prevented him from returning to Palestine.\textsuperscript{139} In the thirties, following the debates between the Labor and Revisionist party in Palestine, many Betar members were denied jobs and many Jabotinsky movement gatherings were disrupted. Then a group split off from the Hagana and formed the Irgun Zva'i Leumi (acronym: EZEL; National Military Organization; here referred to as Irgun). They rejected the restraint (\textit{havlag\textregistered}) of the Hagana – which now tended towards the left – in the face of Arab attacks, and advocated fighting the British and forcing them out of Palestine while continuing to press for the establishment of a Jewish state. They asked Jabotinsky to be their leader and he agreed.

Now the British restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine and Jabotinsky focused his efforts on helping Jews reach Palestine by any means, legal or otherwise. Sensing Eastern European Jewry's great existential danger, in 1936 he called for their mass "evacuation" to Palestine to solve the Jewish problem. His slogan was that the Jewish national sport should be illegal immigration to Palestine (\textit{ha'apala}; in 1932 Jabotinsky wrote the article ‘On Adventurism,’ in which he promoted this ‘national

\textsuperscript{138} Silver, 1984, p. 12

\textsuperscript{139} Haber, 1978, p. 41; Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 34

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As a European democrat in his basic thinking, it was also very important to him to achieve a Jewish majority in Palestine. In fact, he based his whole idea of a Jewish state on the premise of a Jewish majority in Palestine.

In 1936, the Arab attacks against the Jews increased significantly. The Irgun rejected Jabotinsky’s view that they should fight only in self-defense, and launched preemptive attacks against the Arabs. Jabotinsky criticized them and demanded that they at least issue warnings before attacking to spare the lives of civilians. “How can your Irgun people,” Jabotinsky asked an Irgun officer, “throw bombs in Arab quarters at random, indiscriminately killing women and children? You must at least warn the Arabs in time to evacuate the sections where you are going to retaliate.”

Begin, in contrast, advocated that Jews not only defend themselves, but also go on the offensive. In this respect, he supported the Irgun stance. But when Menachem asked Jabotinsky what direction the Irgun should take, Jabotinsky replied: “One should not ask one’s father’s permission.” It was probably a sign of Jabotinsky’s ambivalence toward these violent acts.

At the end of 1937, Begin asked Jabotinsky's permission for a “leave of absence” in order to do a legal apprenticeship in Galicia and Jabotinsky, who was busy with Irgun-Betar dispute, consented. Begin did not have any intention of retiring and he remained involved in Betar affairs and continued to give speeches. But Menachem’s

140 Jabotinsky, 1946

141 Schechtman, 1961, p. 453; Temko, 1987, p. 44, 324

142 Temko, 1987, p. 43

143 Interview with Begin, Schechtman, 1961, p. 451, Temko, 1987, p. 324
colleagues knew that he had left because of his disagreement with Jabotinsky's policy.\textsuperscript{144}

Menachem met his future wife Aliza Arnold at her father’s house. Mr. Arnold, a lawyer and leading Revisionist, had invited Menachem for dinner after one of his speeches in their town, Drohobych. Aliza, then seventeen years old, had a twin sister and was an asthmatic, frail-looking girl who spoke little. She was not beautiful and the joke was that Begin liked her because she looked like Jabotinsky. Menachem's strongest impression of her that evening was that she had nice table manners. The next day, he wrote to her: “I saw you, my lady, for the first time, but I feel as if I have known you all my life.”\textsuperscript{145}

It was not the resemblance to Jabotinsky that attracted Menachem to Aliza as the joke had it, but probably to his mother. Menachem and Aliza had a preverbal connection expressed in the way he fell in love with her when she had hardly said anything and in his feeling that he had known her forever. Menachem would later confirm this assumption by stating on various occasions that “In my wife, I found the traits of my mother.”\textsuperscript{146} We shall have to follow their relationship throughout the upheavals of their lives, including Aliza’s death and its impact on Menachem, to understand the unique relationship Menachem had with his mother/wife figure.

Begin returned to Warsaw in September, 1938, to Betar's Third World Congress, full of confidence and ready to make his first ever open rebellion against authority - in

\textsuperscript{144} Temko, 1987, p. 44-46

\textsuperscript{145} Begin, White Nights, 1977, p. 86

\textsuperscript{146} Sofer, 1988, p. 4
this case, Jabotinsky. Though he had been critical of Jabotinsky in the past, he had tended to conceal these disagreements. Not anymore. Meanwhile, the situation of the Jews was sliding daily from bad to worse. British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain tried to appease Hitler in the Munich agreement, hoping to achieve “peace in our time” by ceding Czechoslovakian Sudetenland to the Germans. In Palestine, Arabs attacked Jews and a young member of the Irgun was hanged by the British for trying to retaliate. His last words were: “Long Live Jabotinsky!”147 In the midst of the growing chaos, and as a result of the violence, the British curbed Jewish immigration.

The following are excerpts from the confrontation that took place between Begin and Jabotinsky at the Betar Third World Congress on September 12, 1938:148 Begin stated that Jews tended to believe that “moral pressure” would help.

But everything has changed — both in Israel, in the Jewish community and in the world. We must draw conclusions. Most of all, the conscience of the world ceased to respond. We regret this. But it is a fact. It cannot be denied.

He accused the British, our 'partner', of sending "the best of our young men to the prison and to the gallows. We must face the truth: They must first and foremost consider the Arabs." Begin said that this was because Arabs were not afraid to fight and be killed, while Jews mainly talked. “We have enough of surrender!” he shouted. “We want to fight — either to win, or to die!… Kabour would not have achieved Italy's liberation without Garibaldi!” he proclaimed.

Jabotinsky interrupted: “Sir, you may want to recollect the ratio of Italians to non-Italians in the country at the time.”

147Temko, 1987, p. 46

Begin: "I will try to bring an example of the Irish War of Independence. It is possible for a people to fight for one’s homeland on occupied soil."
Jabotinsky: “Tell me, sir, how you propose to get Betar soldiers into the country without foreign mercy?”
Begin: "What I want is for us to start creating an independent military force that would not be dependent on others’ mercy. Once the Jews had an army, help from foreign countries would come."
Jabotinsky: “Have you taken note, sir, of the proportion between Hebrew forces and Arabs in Israel?”
Begin: “We will win with moral force!... Even if we are to fall in battle, we will fight. The time has come for war. Without war Zionism is being destroyed. Betar has no choice but to follow this road, in order to save Zionism."

Begin then forced a floor vote by proposing to change the Betar oath which stated "I am prepared to defend my people and I will raise my arm only in defense," to “I am prepared to defend my people and to the conquest of my Homeland.”

Begin argued that “There are millions of Jews who have nothing to lose. Our role is to exploit the power shackled within them.”

Jabotinsky:
Allow me to address some sharp words to the assembly. As your teacher, I have the duty to do so. Forgive me if I speak harshly. There are various kinds of noise… we bear the whistle of machines or wagons, for instance — and we abide them. But the creaking of a door, by contrast, is futile, unnecessary. The speech (of Begin) and the applause are like a crack of a door which is tasteless and useless. There is no room in Betar for such noise... and it must be ruthlessly repressed. Garibaldi spirit has its place in Betar… but only as a catalyst for the world conscience… Suppose we are heroes against whom would we rebel?! The goal must be to transport Jews to Palestine, and this must take precedence over shows of heroism. We immigrated to the Land of Israel by appealing to the conscience of the world… If there are those who feel there is no way out but Mr. Begin’s, you have weapons — commit suicide! If there is indeed no conscience in the world, you have the option of communism, or - stretching his arm in the direction of the river two blocks away - there are the waters of the Vistula.… If I am wrong, I suggest we disband Betar… To say there is no conscience is to despair. We must sweep such notions aside. Of course, we must all express our own opinions. But there is a limit to such freedom. Conscience rules the world. I respect this truth. To mock it, ridicule it, must be forbidden. I understand your pain. But to let pain produce despair is dangerous. It is the loud creaking of a door — futile and unnecessary.
The delegates accepted Begin’s amendment which also suited what the Irgun wanted.

Then, after the reelection of Jabotinsky as head of Betar, Begin turned to Jabotinsky and said: “Sir, world Betar in all its branches and ranks, camps and flags awaits your command!”

Jabotinsky: I shall serve in the spirit of Betar oath. I thank you for the honor.

What did all this mean for Menachem? He had taken a giant step, akin to a rite of passage marking his maturity. Menachem, then 25, rebelled against Jabotinsky, the great leader, who was then 58. Menachem rebelled and won. The confrontation had begun, as we have seen, before the conference. Menachem, who had never before rebelled and found his identity vis-à-vis an authority figure, now did so at the congress in an honorable manner without ruining their relationship.

Yisrael Eldad, a Revisionist professor who took part in the congress said: “Begin’s speech made him what he became.” Others stated that this confrontation against the great hero made him famous.¹⁴⁹ No doubt it was a formative experience for Begin who spoke from the heart, confronted authority, and in doing so achieved recognition and approval.

But how to characterize the relationship between Begin and Jabotinsky? It appears that it was more functional than personal. As with Menachem’s father, who was not heard to compliment his son even though he had followed in his path with much success, we also do not hear any compliments from Jabotinsky for Menachem. Menachem admired both men but his relationship with them seems businesslike, based on shared ideology and goals rather than on any kind of individual connection.

¹⁴⁹Temko, 1987, p. 48
or friendship. The impression is that Ze’ev Dov experienced his son Menachem as part of his mission and his Jewish identity more than as an individual person with autonomous will. Menachem internalized this attitude and experienced himself that way as the embodiment of the Jewish people. This absence of individuality, and the absence of any identity-search or rebellion during his adolescent years, makes Menachem's confrontation with Jabotinsky a powerful rite of passage to maturity in his life.

The differences between Jabotinsky and Begin at the conference are manifest. Begin is more emotional and Jabotinsky is more logical in the face of the danger. Jabotinsky believed in non-Jews' conscience and especially in the utility of negotiating with Britain, while Begin was more suspicious of non-Jews and did not have the same faith in them. Begin wanted to fight in order to win but Jabotinsky tended to advocate violence mainly in order to raise the world's consciousness. Begin was more combative and felt there were only two possibilities: win or die. For Jabotinsky, this was tantamount to choosing death or committing suicide as long as other possibilities also existed, as he believed. Jabotinsky, probably unintentionally, hinted at Begin's hidden inclination to commit heroic suicide in a moment of despair.

But the differences between Begin and Jabotinsky went much deeper. Jabotinsky was a 19th-century liberal who was shaped in a time of struggle for liberalism and who appreciated Britain for its democracy and respect for civil rights. He traveled widely in Western Europe, wrote prose and poetry and translated Dante and Edgar Allen Poe into Hebrew. He did not have Begin's profound religious roots and in this sense was also more of an assimilationist who was attracted to Judaism and Zionism out of a greater freedom and an appreciation of other cultures. Begin was also a person of broad horizons who was interested primarily in history and politics and excelled in
oration and languages and had a very keen memory. Though he was very emotional, Begin had a highly-ordered and logical manner of thinking. But he wrote only autobiographies (White Nights, The Revolt) and political articles. No doubt, Jabotinsky was the more creative and original of the two. He could joke about himself, something Begin, although he had a sense of humor, didn't do.\textsuperscript{150} He did not have a father to identify with as Begin had and he created things of his own. Jabontinsky's father died when he was six years old. He was a lone wolf (as Katz called his 1966 biography of Jabotinsky) from a very young age, hated school and rebelled against his teachers. Many years later he wrote:

\begin{quote}
To this day, I have retained in my heart an instinct to which probably no other father would admit: I hate a good pupil, such as does his homework. I reserve my love for the naughty one.\textsuperscript{151}
\end{quote}

He probably admired his intelligent, strong-willed and compassionate mother who surely helped to instill his self-confidence. But he nevertheless rebelled and left his widowed mother and sister, as well as school (after finally getting his mother's approval), at the age of 17, opting to travel alone to Switzerland and then Rome, where he studied and worked as a correspondent. Moreover, Jabotinsky wrote about Jewish-themed books he'd read in his adolescence that he found in them “no action, no movement, only sadness and boredom.”\textsuperscript{152} But Jabotinsky went on to remedy this experience for himself and for the Jews by creating a different reality for the Jews that could carry them out of their sadness and inaction and their monotonous life in the Diaspora and lead them toward freedom and liberty. For him, liberty was culturally-

\textsuperscript{150} Kaz, 1993

\textsuperscript{151} Katz, 1996, p. 18

\textsuperscript{152} Katz, 1996, p. 24
oriented just as much as it was military-oriented. “Let our enemies know,” he said, “that we can sing, dance, and drink a lot of wine. But we must sing and dance and drink in Hebrew.”\textsuperscript{153}

His story is just the opposite of Begin, who not only hadn’t rebelled against his family, but obeyed them with an inseparable feeling of identification. In order to be truly creative, one needs an established individuality and plenty of autonomy. Begin assimilated and deeply identified with Jabotinsky’s creation. More than that, Begin imitated Jabotinsky in many ways throughout his life. He combed his hair like Jabotinsky, with a fallen curl above the forehead, kissed ladies’ hands the way Jabotinsky did, made speeches like him and mimicked his body movements, etc. (Of course, this was not only characteristic of Begin but also of many other revisionists).\textsuperscript{154} If we have said that there is no such a thing as Begin the individual without the Jewish people, we may say that there is no such a thing as the Jewish spirit of revolt in the last hundred years without Jabotinsky. In this sense, Jabotinsky was a necessary teacher’s figure in Begin’s world in order for Begin to become what he really was. Begin was the executor of Jabotinsky’s ideology, and sometimes outshone his teacher. Jabotinsky could say in his Betar anthem: “die or conquer the mount” but Begin declared it operationally: “win or die,” and the subsequent calamitous years for the Jews proved that Begin and not Jabotinsky was right, as the Jews were unable to negotiate with Britain or the rest of the world to survive the Holocaust. It seems that Jabotinsky could also accept Begin’s rebellion against him, given his fondness for a rebellious nature (Only a very sympathetic authority figure

\textsuperscript{153} Perlmutter, 1987, p. 56

\textsuperscript{154} Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 38
can tell his subordinate “One should not ask one’s father’s permission”). And Begin – who soon after received a letter from Jabotinsky predicting that Europe would still regain its sanity - could tell his sister about Jabotinsky: “Maybe he is just too humane, too kind, to contemplate so terrible a war.” 155

In later years, Begin would lead in his own way, without ever asking openly what Jabotinsky would say about this or that, as others used to do. Begin evidently moved beyond the stage of trying to imitate Jabotinsky; he was able to internalize him while finding his own authentic voice. 156 But Jabotinsky, who believed in the conscience of the world, still foresaw the catastrophe. On October 24, 1938, in Warsaw, Poland, after Germany's invasion of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, he gave a speech entitled: Tisha Be’av (9th day of the Jewish month of Av, the day commemorating the destruction of both Temples), in which he said:

It is already three years that I am calling upon you, Polish Jewry, who are the crown of World Jewry. I continue to warn you incessantly that a catastrophe is coming closer, I became gray and old in these days, my heart bleeds, that you dear brothers and sisters, do not see the volcano which will soon begin to spit its all consuming lava. I see that you are not seeing this because you are immersed and sunk in your daily worries. Today, however, I demand from you trust. You were convinced already that my prognoses have already proved to be right. If you think differently, then drive me out of your midst. However, if you do believe me, then listen to me in this 12th hour: In the name of G-D!! Let anyone of you save himself as long as there is still time, and time there is very little.
And what else would I like to say to you on this day of Tisha Be’av: Whoever of you will escape from the catastrophe, he or she will live to see the exalted moment of a great Jewish Wedding: The rebirth and the rise of

155 Temko, 1987, p. 53
156 Kadishai, 1993
a Jewish state, I don't know if I will be privileged to see it: my son will! I believe in this as I am sure that tomorrow morning the sun will rise.\(^{157}\)

In April 1939, Jabotinsky appointed Begin commissioner of Betar in Poland. In May of that year, he traveled from Paris to take part in Menachem and Aliza's wedding. Aliza and Menachem wore their Betar uniforms under the wedding canopy.

\(^{157}\) The speech was given in Yiddish and was delivered more than two months after Tisha Be’’av. http://www.jewishpost.com/jp0606/jpn0606k.htm
By early 1939, Polish Jewry was in truly dire straits. Over the last year, Hitler had devoured Austria (March 12, 1938); signed the Munich agreement with British Prime Minister Chamberlain which gave Czechoslovakian Sudetenland to the Germans (September 29, 1938); encouraged the German mob to attack the Jews in what became known as Kristallnacht, or "the night of the broken glass," (November 9, 1938) for the hundreds of Jewish shops, homes and synagogues destroyed with their smashed glass strewn all over; and occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia (March 15, 1939). Subsequently he began deporting Jews to concentration camps. The threat against them was now so blatant and glaring that the Jews could no longer repress or deny the danger as so many had been willing to do in the past.

As for Palestine -- on March 15, 1939, the very day that Hitler’s army invaded Czechoslovakia, Britain published its new Palestinian policy, "The White Paper," which envisaged a Jewish National Homeland within 10 years, but restricted Jewish land purchases and set an immigration quota of 75,000 over five years. Any more arrivals would require Arab approval. The Jews of Poland were truly between a rock and a hard place. To the west was Germany, to the south was Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia and to the east was Russia. The only exit was through Romania, but the British pressured the Romanians and they closed the border to Jews. Thus even this option was removed.\textsuperscript{158}

\textsuperscript{158}Temko, 1987, p. 51
After the publication of the White Paper, Begin and his Betar comrades led a demonstration in front of the British Embassy in Warsaw. They threw rocks into the embassy and some of the Jews were caught and jailed. Begin was among those apprehended. According to his testimony, this first experience in jail was a difficult one. His head was shaven and he was placed together with criminals. He was only released after Jabotinsky intervened with the American Embassy. Characteristically, on the day of his release, Begin declined to talk about his prison experience and instead joined Aliza and another couple of friends to watch a satirical play starring a Jewish actor (Lupek Stokowsky) at a theatre in Warsaw. Following his release he also kept his word and sent some prisoners cigarettes.

Begin, now the head of Polish Betar, kept trying to help Jews emigrate to Palestine in any way possible, and also organized some military training at a Betar camp. Now, after the White Paper, even Jabotinsky declared that “the Irgun is your salvation… The White Paper will be ripped to pieces. It denies you the right to save your lives!”

With British intervention having led the Romanian authorities to block emigration to Palestine from their ports, hundreds of Jewish refugees were left stranded with nothing to lose. Then the Romanians offered 25 transit visas, an act which caused an uproar in the camp over who should get them. Betar officials planned to distribute the visas on a random basis according to a previous list they had compiled. Begin

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159 Haber, 1978, p. 48

160 Temko, 1987, p. 52

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gathered everyone together. Shouting above the heads of the grumbling refugees, he asked for discipline. He said there should be a certain order of priority. Top preference would go to Jews from Lithuania who would be arrested if they returned home, and then to draft-age youth for whom an exist visa would mean fighting for the Jewish cause in Palestine rather than conscription into the Polish army. “I appeal to you. I ask the first twenty-five names on the original list to give up your own places, to sacrifice them for the good of all!” David Yutan, Menachem’s comrade, said he was afraid of a riot because Begin was essentially asking them to risk their lives. Begin found the twenty-five, and David Yutan said he thought it was the most powerful speech Begin ever made.161

For Begin, who always thought of the Jewish people collectively and thus repressed the natural tendency toward self-preservation, it was not so difficult to demand that other Jews do what he would do in their place (he and Aliza would also later give up their visas for a couple of friends).162

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. Warsaw was bombed, and after a few days of preparations, Menachem, Aliza, and a few comrades started their escape. After a difficult trek, they arrived in Vilna, Lithuania. As a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact between Germany and Russia, Lithuania was now occupied by Stalin, along with part of Poland, but Vilna, the capital, was declared a free city. Begin began organizing Betar activities there. He encouraged his comrades to keep

161Temko, 1987, p. 52
162Golan & Nakdimon 1978, p. 56; Hirschler, 1979, p. 49
doing their routine work, such as dealing with emigration and organizing a newspaper, while he trained in a weapons course.

A letter arrived from an Irgun officer in Palestine (Shimshon Yunitchman), telling Menachem: “When the ship is sinking, the captain leaves last, not first!” Begin was deeply hurt by this letter. Indeed, Betar was the only mass movement of Polish Zionists left to face the Final Solution without its leaders. This, combined with Begin's knowledge that his parents, left behind in Brisk, would probably not survive, generated deep guilt feelings within him. He was the only one to suggest that they return to Warsaw, which was tantamount to committing suicide. What was it that pushed Menachem to suggest such an irrational act? We have already begun to trace the continuum of guilt feelings within Menachem -- first toward his mother whom he perceived as a sacrificing saint and then toward his suffering Jewish family -- and we will continue to explore its vicissitudes throughout Begin’s life. In the end, Begin did not go back; his friends dissuaded him from doing so.

On July 26, 1940, in the midst of a rally Begin had organized to mark Theodore Herzl and also the Hebrew poet laureate, Hayim Nahman Bialik death a message arrived that Soviet troops had entered the city. Some suggested that everyone run away immediately. Begin, though, called for order and declared: “We shall conclude this meeting — maybe our last in this country — by singing Hatikva” [i.e., ‘The Hope,’ the Zionist and later the Israeli anthem]. Participants in that rally would never

\[163\] Eldad, 1993/4

\[164\] Bauer, 1982; Silver, 1984, p. 23; Temko, 1987, p. 57
forget the *Hatikva* sung that day with tears in their eyes. "It was typical of Begin," they would say — "very dramatic but also very much appreciated."\(^{165}\)

Jabotinsky died on August, 3, 1940 in New York State at the age of sixty from a heart ailment that he had kept secret. He had come to United States in order to create an American Jewish army that would fight alongside the Allies. He was a nationalist, but not a religious person, and had asked to be either buried or cremated (cremation is contrary to Jewish law).\(^{166}\) In 1935, five years prior to his death, Jabotinsky composed his will, in which he said that when he died, he could be buried anywhere, as long as his remains were one day transferred to Israel " at the instructions of a Jewish government that shall be established."

Begin wrote:

> Catastrophe followed catastrophe… I am certain that if I filled whole pages I could not even attempt to explain what the death of the head of Betar meant to me. A stranger will not understand. The word 'stranger' in this special instance also includes some of my own people. And so all I will say is this: I felt that the bearer of hope was gone, never to return; and with him – perhaps never to return – hope itself…\(^{167}\)

Begin insisted on a commemoration convocation for Jabotinsky although it was quite dangerous to do so (this was likely the reason for his subsequent arrest). There, he

\(^{165}\) Hirschler, 1979, p. 51; Temko, 1987, p. 57

\(^{166}\) Silver, 1984, p. 20

\(^{167}\) Begin, *White Nights*, 1977, p. 15
said: “Since we could no longer fight for Zion, it is our duty to suffer for it.” His words, friends later said, were full of pain.\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 58}

Begin’s friends urged him to flee after it became clear that the Soviets were going to arrest him. He explained why he did not run away:

…But if you can no longer comfort; if you are unable to save; then nothing remains but the specter of inequality in suffering; a fearsome phantom that almost takes away the very zest of living. Therefore, I am telling nothing but the truth when I say that when the fateful day came and the agents of the Russian Intelligence arrived to take me on my long journey, I felt no anxiety. On the contrary, my principal emotion was one of intense relief.\footnote{Begin, White Nights, 1977, p. 16}

Begin simply wanted to die and did not care if he was caught by the Russians. The relief he felt is the same kind of relief people who decide to commit suicide feel after they make their decision, because for them the fight is over. He identified with his mother and his father and with Jabotinsky, but above all with the Jewish people. Begin literally identified with the Jewish people and their fate and wanted to die. Individuality and a healthy dose of narcissism are what sustain a person in such horrible moments. But this is not Begin. As we've said, there is no Begin the individual without the Jewish people. And, of course, he also felt intense guilt (sometimes called "survivor's guilt") over how his fate differed from the fate of his people. At the Betar congress, when he'd said that it was either "win or die,” he had really meant it.
On September 1, 1940, Menachem received an official letter containing an invitation to town hall “in connection with your request.” Menachem, of course, had not requested anything from town hall.\textsuperscript{170}

The game is clear: The authorities invites you to town hall. You go out of curiosity because you want to know what the authorities has to say. You are semiconsciously attracted to the authorities' power. Thus you play their game and grant them power over you. Here is the beginning of a very interesting method often used by other regimes as well. The invitation is far from naïve. The authorities could come and get Begin, as they finally did when he refused to play along. But to go to the authorities as if you were the one who wanted something from them or had any interest in them when it is actually they who want you, places you in the position of appellant, of you needing them, rather than them simply pursuing you, which is really the case. Answering such a summons marks the beginning of a process of identifying with the aggressor and a willingness to play its sadomasochistic game, with the respondent as the masochist who semiconsciously agrees to assume the role of the weak, frightened figure and eventually incriminates himself.

But Begin did not go. To win or to die, yes, but not to identify with the aggressor. In other words, Begin, who did not have clear boundaries between himself and the Jewish people had very clear boundaries between himself and his enemies, and even in such difficult circumstances, it was obvious to him that he was not going to play into the authorities' hands or satisfy them as many would do.

Twenty days later, on September 20, 1940, there was a knock on his door and three men appeared, a commander and two assistants.

\textsuperscript{170}Haber, 1978, p. 58
The man in charge asked me, angrily:

‘Why didn’t you appear at the municipality when summoned?’

It was a foolish question; the answer could only be “guileless”.

‘I have not submitted any application to the Municipality, I have no business with it. If the municipality has any business with me, let the official concerned be so kind as to come to me.’

‘You have to go to the municipality just the same, because you were, after all, invited,’ said the second detective in a more conciliatory tone.

‘No, I won’t go’.

‘Oh yes, you will,’ said the man in charge, drily.

I had no more patience for this game of hide and seek. I told my ‘guests’ in an angry voice: ‘Who are you, gentlemen? Why do you prowl around our house? Who gave you permission to enter my private home? If you will not stop disturbing our peace I shall be compelled to complain to the police.’

The face of the commander glowed:

‘The police? Please, do come with us to the police, now!’

‘I won’t go now. I’ll go when I find a suitable time.’

‘If you won’t go of your own free will, we will take you by force,’ he exploded.

‘Oh!... So, will you tell me who you are? Do you represent the authorities? Where are your identity papers? If you do not show me some official identification I won’t go with you.’

The detectives exchanged glances. When they had finished their wordless consultation the commander took out some sort of card and held it out to me, giving me a penetrating look as he did so.

I looked at it. It certainly was a most official card – issued by the Intelligence Service of the State of Lithuania. What had been clear from the beginning was clear again.

‘If this is the case,’ I said in a pleasing voice, ‘you’re here to arrest me. So, why hide it? Why didn’t you say so right away? Have you a warrant of arrest?’

(It was the same trick his father, Ze’ev Dov, used successfully twenty years ago. See page…). I knew perfectly well that the question would not ward off my arrest, but I put it just the same.

‘We have no warrant,’ the commander said, ‘but you were right. We have come to arrest you and have the authority to use force if you refuse.’

‘OK, OK.,” I replied. ‘Now I know that you’ve been sent to arrest me. Please, let me prepare myself for the way.’

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171 Begin, White Nights, 1977, p. 16-18
Begin forced the agents to engage in a real relationship with him and by so doing, avoided dependency upon them and also humiliation. He paid the emotional price of remaining alone in a very threatening and difficult situation at a time when many people would naturally tend to seek the help of the authorities or their captors. Begin’s ability to retreat into himself and remain alone and depressed without needing help from others is the source of his weakness but also the secret of his strength.

Before Menachem left the house with the Soviet agents, he told Aliza not to solicit feelings of pity because of his arrest. Menachem suggested that Aliza do what he had always done throughout his life: suffer the depression alone.

According to Yisrael Eldad, Menachem’s comrade, who with his wife Bathia shared the same house as Menachem and Aliza and was a witness to the event, Menachem turned his arrest into a ceremony:

Begin performed what I call a concert. He polished his shoes, dressed in a suit and tie, he was very polite. At the last moment, they told him to leave. He said, ‘I am in my home here, after you.’ He said to me we shall continue the game of chess. Later, I got a message saying I was in a winning position and conceding the game. It was not true, there had only been five or six moves. He was allowed to take the Bible and one other book. My wife wept, his wife did not. She was very strong

Bathia Eldad, who was a psychiatric social worker, says that Begin was in a depression at that time. She describes Aliza (Ala) as follows:

Ala is hard to understand. Even with all her health problems, she was a rock. I never saw her express any emotion. With her, it was the cognitive, intelligent, more intellectual side that came to the fore. But I never saw her get emotional. Even when Menachem was arrested and taken from our house, she acted like it was nothing, as if he’d only be gone a few hours. Maybe the threat was too much to cope with so she

172 Begin, 1977, p. 19

173 Silver, 1984, p. 26
repressed all her emotions, so as not to let him see that she might be breaking. She held herself very strong. I'll never forget the scene – When the Lithuanians came to take him... she even quietly invited them in for lunch. She packed a few things and her face was like a mask. She accompanied him to the gate and even said, 'So long and goodbye.'

Ala was a very sick woman even then. She had very severe asthma and depended on all this paraphernalia. If I think back, it could be that maybe the asthma had something to do with her being so reserved – We know that with asthma, people don't let out their anger, or their emotions. They keep them inside and then this can also later be manifested in asthma attacks.

Bathia also relates that the sickly Aliza decided not to immigrate to Palestine with them, but to stay and fight for her husband's release. They implored her to come with them because they knew she'd be endangering herself. She eventually immigrated at a later date. "For her, Menachem was God. She was in his shadow. I had the feeling she was living just for him," Bathia adds.  

The interrogations lasted a few months and were conducted mainly at night. It left Menachem fatigued, but not to the point of torture (with the possible exception of one occasion). Begin looked for tricks and methods to maintain his independence in prison conditions. One of them was the "student" pose in which he sought to view what was happening to him as an outside observer in a learning process. But he also admitted that if the prison term had been too long, he would not have been able to preserve this privileged position, if he could preserve life at all:

For as long as you are learning, your inquisitors will not succeed in establishing between you and them the relationship they desire; they, the superior beings, and you, the degraded. As equal to equal you will talk with them; they will interrogate you, but you will “study” them. You will not just be a “case”. And from the knowledge that around you are not only crudity and  

174 Eldad, 1994
humiliation, but also material for study, you will draw strength to stand up to the test of degradation - and remain a man.\textsuperscript{175}

Later, Begin insisted he was not invited to the interrogation, as his investigator put it, but arrested:

Why do you try to delude me? I know that I was jailed, and I am ready to answer your questions as a prisoner.\textsuperscript{176}

And:

Dante's warning about hope that should be forgotten is not on the wall of any of the offices of the Russian secret police... as far as it concerns the hope, most tend not to learn from the experience of others and believe they are the exception: do I still have a chance?\textsuperscript{177}

The fact was that he was a prisoner, not an invited guest soon to be dismissed and sent home. When Menachem succeeded in not building up false hopes – as the authorities encouraged him to do - he freed himself from dependence upon them. He was no longer awaiting a quick release. When the interrogator used foul language, Begin did not remain impervious, but asked to be treated more politely. It is true that Begin was not tortured and in harsher conditions would probably not have dared to speak as he did. But this still sheds light on his personality and how he confronted such difficult situations.

The interrogator said time and again that Begin was avoiding telling the truth and thus causing himself harm. In such a situation, where the interrogator professes to be concerned with the prisoner's well-being, even if the prisoner often perceives this as a

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{175} Begin, White Nights, 1977, p. 22
\item \textsuperscript{176} Begin, 1977, p. 22-23
\item \textsuperscript{177} Begin, White Nights, 1995, p. 43, (Hebrew edition)
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
lie, there is a temptation on his part, given the prison conditions of hunger and sleep deprivation, to create an emotional bond with the interrogator's "benevolent" side. The interrogator does indeed promise Begin that if he will just tell the truth about being a spy planning to sabotage the regime, his conditions will improve. The act of promising something the prisoner so desperately wants (i.e., sleep, release from jail) only increases the prisoner's dependence on the jailer. If the authorities say the prisoner will not be released no matter what, they have no chance of developing his dependency upon them.

The "good cop-bad cop" ruse is well-known, the idea being that if someone is questioned by two interrogators, one of them harsh and cruel and the other seemingly kind and offering favors, the prisoner will be pushed into developing dependency relations with the "good cop." In the Soviet system Begin described, a single interrogator issued threats and promises interchangeably, thus attempting to seduce the prisoner into making contact with his "benevolent" side.

Begin was punished; at one point, he was forced to sit with his knees pressed against the wall for 60 hours. To help him endure, he passed the time thinking about episodes from his past. One episode he remembered was his first speech, a failure according to him that engendered pity and ridicule. Characteristically, Menachem had felt that the pity was worse than the ridicule.

Begin refrained from complaining to the authorities, believing that complaints give them power and gain you nothing. When he was very thirsty and asked for a drink, the interrogator replied, "Oh! Didn't you get it yet? Never mind, be patient, I'll arrange
the tea for you”. It was another false promise intended to create dependency upon the interrogator; a rude answer would not achieve the same result.178

On one occasion, Begin heard a warden tell a worried prisoner whose wife could not care for herself and their baby that there was no reason to worry because they were in the Soviet Union. Here, too, the authorities were encouraging the prisoner's dependence.179

The use of such tactics was not coincidental. The interrogators may not have understood the psychodynamics underlying their methods, but they certainly knew that these manipulations might foster the prisoner's dependency and a steadily growing identification with them, thus whittling away his ability to resist.

Begin asked a new interrogator how to refer to him, a question that compelled him to clarify each one's role. He later mentioned how he learned that, even if very polite, an interrogation always remained an interrogation and could not be considered a conversation. Thus Begin did not delude himself into believing there was a favorable relationship between him and the interrogator, which would have caused him to be not only a physical prisoner, but an emotional one, as well. Indeed, the interrogator told him that in their system of justice, the citizen also paid for his thoughts, if they were counter-revolutionary, adding that they also knew those thoughts. The attempt to control the prisoner's thoughts and not only his deeds, this "reeducation," meant leaving nothing separate and autonomous in the way of the prisoner's identification

178 Begin, White Nights, 1977, p. 38

179 Begin, White Nights, 1977, p. 39
with the aggressor. (We used to tell children that there are no forbidden thoughts, only forbidden deeds, thus preserving the child's autonomy. In psychoanalysis, we encourage patients to say everything that comes to mind, regardless of whether it might sound stupid, clever or insulting, thus encouraging their individuation and autonomous function).

The Stockholm Syndrome\textsuperscript{180} refers to the phenomenon whereby a prisoner or hostage identifies with his captors, perhaps to the point of justifying their actions. It can occur in kidnapping cases where the victim, for example, helps the kidnapper blackmail his family. The Stockholm Syndrome can also develop in prison. The reason for the phenomenon is that when being held by a powerful authority, people tend to regress into a more childish position. The prisoner is often totally dependent upon the jailer just as a child is dependent upon its parents. The prisoner might need the guard's permission to go to the restroom, get food, etc. Under such conditions, people tend to regress to similar situations in their past. Actually, every one of us identifies with the aggressor or has somewhat of a Stockholm Syndrome when resolving the oedipal complex. We identified with the parent of the same sex, not because at this young age we thought they were right, but because they were stronger and we were absolutely dependent upon them. The authorities of some regimes understood this dynamic and exploited it to push their citizens into identifying with and totally justifying the regime. In our case, it sheds some light on the psychodynamic tools then used by the Soviet regime.

The interrogator struggled the entire night with Begin, trying to persuade him to confess by signing the following statement: “I admit my guilt of being a member of the chief committee of the national Jewish bourgeois of the Revisionist

\textsuperscript{180} Kuleshnyk, 1984; West, 1996; Wesselius, 1983
Zionist…Betar.” Begin only agreed to sign a statement that read: “I admit that I was a member of…,” thus not admitting guilt but only facts. That night of interrogation, described by Begin in detail,\(^\text{181}\) was confirmed by protocols released 51 years later (in 1992) by the K.G.B., which were added to the book’s most recent Hebrew edition (1995).

Begin asked:

> What is the spiritual source from which the rulers of the Kremlin derive their decision to impose on the accused the confession of repentance?

His answer is, interestingly, psychologically sophisticated.

Every despotism is by nature ‘paternal’. There is in it a ‘father-complex’, either positive or negative. The ruler is the ‘father’, and his subjects are the ‘children’. The father-ruler looks after his children-subjects if they are ‘good’, and chastises them if they are ‘bad’. That ‘father-complex’ has reached its climax in the Soviet regime since its discipline is absolute not only in the political sphere but also in the economic sphere. The ruler is the ‘father’ who provides their sustenance, and the subjects get their bread from the ruler like children dependent on their father’s table. As is well known, a father does not content himself merely with punishing his son who has sinned, but demands of him that he admit that he has done wrong, that he repent, that he beg forgiveness. In the past chastising fathers even used to demand that their sons kiss the chastising hand.

Perhaps one may therefore contend that if the father-complex of the rulers has reached its climax in the Soviet Union, the complementary complex, the child-complex, of the inhabitants of the Soviet Union has also reached its climax, and so the ‘bad children’ kiss the ‘father’s’ hand even if it chastises, tortures, strangles.\(^\text{182}\)

In the loneliness and hardship of prison, part of which was in a work camp in Siberia (He named his memoir 'White Nights' because the summer nights in this region are

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\(^{181}\) Begin, White Nights, 1977, p. 90-96; first edition 1953

\(^{182}\) Begin, White Nights, 1977, p. 99
very short and illuminated by the Northern Lights), his longing for his mother surfaced with great intensity.

A son was crying for his mother. A grown man who will always be her 'little son'… But sometimes… And then her tears meet his, and flow into one channel, the great river of human misery which has no explanation, and at times no purpose…\(^{183}\)

And also:

…[she] suppresses the primary and most natural of instincts, the instinct of self-preservation, for a nobler instinct, for the identification of her soul with that of her beloved son.\(^{184}\)

This sad togetherness and longing for his mother and his symbiotic relations with his wife who – as we have already seen - lived for him is a central developmental line in Menachem's personality and will accompany him throughout the upheavals of his life until his final depression.

But Begin tells us also that his relationship with his mother explains his attitude toward Zionism:

…The fighter resembles a mother who overcomes the primary and most natural of instincts, the instinct of self-preservation, for a nobler instinct, for the identification of her soul with that of her beloved son. Like a mother who endangers her own life to save the one she loves from danger, so is the fighter ready to sacrifice his life in order to ensure life to the fruits of his love, that which he believes in, his spiritual son: his ideal.\(^{185}\)

Begin reminds us that ideology is more than mere intellectual exercise, that it has deep psychological roots in various family constellations.

\(^{183}\text{ibid, p. 111}\)

\(^{184}\text{ibid, p. 104}\)

\(^{185}\text{ibid, p. 104}\)
Then he goes to explain why the Soviet regime had such success in breaking and coercing some people into signing a confession of "guilt" whereas other regimes, even when applying torture, had not been able to break those same people previously. According to Begin, the key was the isolation of a person from his people to such an extent that he feels there is no point struggling for the sake of the idea because no one will know about it. In order to sustain an attachment to an idea, he tells us, one needs a permanent audience and is dependent upon that audience:

But if the fighter knows that his service rendered worthless, that no one will hear what he says, no one will learn of his stand, no one will receive his sacrifice from his hands, and no one will learn from him how to sacrifice; then the thread between him and the ideal is likely to be severed; it is then that his inner recognition of his mission is completely eradicated, and his tortured soul asks: Who will know? Who will follow after me? Who will come in my place? What point is there in my suffering, what purpose in the tortures I undergo?186

In other words, Begin is telling us that his people were a source of life for him and that without them he might have withdrawn into himself. They gave him his strength while in prison: the hope that one day his contribution to and struggle on behalf the idea would become well-known. But Begin also gives us a tiny hint as to what condition might lead him to abandon his ideal. It is depression – like the (sometimes post-partum) depression of a mother who abandons her child.

As we have seen, Begin did not identify with the aggressor, which is also why he never joined in when others found a scapegoat to laugh at and humiliate. One prisoner, because of an illness requiring a treatment not available in prison, could not control his bladder, so the other prisoners called him a "toilet." He smelled, was ridiculed, and no one wanted any contact with him. It is not unusual for prisoners who identify with the aggressor and try to please them to find some relief in being

186 ibid
aggressors themselves and humiliating other prisoners. But Begin often conversed with the man and gave him some of his own tobacco allotment.

In June 1941, the Germans attacked the Soviet Union. Following an agreement between the Soviet Union (Stalin) and the free Polish government-in-exile, all Polish citizens were released from Soviet labor camps to help fight the Nazis. Begin was also released from the labor camp in Siberia. The best way to save himself and immigrate to Palestine was to join General Anders' Free Polish Army that was on its way to Palestine to fight the Germans. So he enlisted.

A comrade from his Anders days recalled that Begin was quite disorganized as a soldier. They had to keep their shoes polished, their shirts and socks pressed and their sheets well-folded. Menachem's comrades were afraid they would be punished because of Begin's improper appearance and they had to make his bed for him.\textsuperscript{187} Begin seems to have been highly organized and taken very good care of his appearance when he knew he was a symbol -- as in his Betar days and later on in his many emblematic roles. But when he had a role that was insignificant to him, as in the Polish army, he behaved differently.

\textsuperscript{187} Rochman, 2002
Declaration of the Revolt

In May 1942, Begin arrived in Palestine with Anders' army and reunited with Aliza. Their first child, Benjamin, was born in March 1943. As soon as he came to Palestine, already well-known as the head of Betar in Poland, Begin resumed his political activity.

“We learnt as early as the end of 1942 that our people were being murdered in Europe," said Begin. His father and brother were killed in July 1941 and his ailing mother was pulled from her hospital bed by the Nazis and killed. He said that learning of his family's fate “was the most terrible moment in his life.”

Menachem described his father's murder:

We were told he was drowned in the River Bug along with five hundreds other Jews. They were taken to the river and machine gun fire was opened on them from both sides. People who survived said that the river was actually red with their blood. As secretary of the Jewish community, my father went first. We were told that at his initiative the Jews started to sing ‘I Believe’ (I believe, I believe/With perfect faith/That Messiah will come/And although he may tarry/I daily await his coming) and then Hatikva (the Zionist anthem). And so he died.

Rachel Halperin dismissed this account as so many mayses (i.e., Yiddishized Hebrew for fairy tales). Her version:

What I know, what my friends in Brisk told me, is that the Germans passed a law forbidding Jews from burying their dead. My father went to bury a Jew in the cemetery. A German approached him and asked what he was doing. He told

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189 Hirschler, 1979, p. 106
him in German, and the soldier killed him on the spot. About the rest of my family I know nothing. They died with all the other Jews. But I have all the details about my father. I know the name of the Jew who died and that there was a burial.\textsuperscript{190}

It was probably Menachem's need to conquer his immense pain, in this case over the murder of his father, that made him resort to exaggerated heroism.

We know little about Herzl, who was murdered in the Holocaust together with his parents, or about Rachel’s baby, who was left in her mother's care. (Rachel, who supplied many details about Menachem’s childhood, and her husband succeeded in reaching Palestine). Part of the reason we know so little about Herzl is that Menachem did not often mention him, probably because of their rivalry.

One interesting story about Herzl, the gifted mathematician, is the following:

He was a victim of a cruel trick played by the Germans in September 1939. He was one of a group of young Jews lined up in the market square with their faces to the wall. He described the episode to David Jutan, a colleague of Menachem’s in the leadership of Betar. Soldiers surrounded them with machine guns, but when the order was given to fire, they shot in the air. Asked what he had thought while he was waiting for death, Herzl answered that he had set himself a problem in algebra. He had not yet solved it.\textsuperscript{191}

Herzl’s ability to overcome his fear of death was remarkable, as was Menachem's. The difference was probably in the way that Herzl used intellectualization as a defense mechanism, while Menachem tended to dramatize events.

\textsuperscript{190} Silver, 1984, p. 8; Halperin, 1978

\textsuperscript{191} Silver, 1984, p. 7
But the Holocaust for Menachem was much more than the murder of his immediate family. His description of his Holocaust experience is a vivid depiction of the unfinished and complicated grieving that accompanied him throughout his life:

Not once I asked myself, if I could travel to Brisk as one can travel to Johannesburg or to New York, would you go to the town in which you spent your sunny youth years? Whenever I ask myself this question I feel deep sadness and the bitter answer: You will not go to the town in which you grew, studied, dreamt, suffered and were also happy — because it does not exist anymore. Maybe the little house with the mixture of light of love and the sadness of poverty is still there; but the house, the house of Mom and Dad does not exist and will not come back again. Why do I need to come 'home', to walk in the streets, to ask and not to get an answer, to look for and not to find? Shadows will accompany me but they would not take me even to the grave yard. This is because, we, the generation of the destruction did not have even the luck to get an ancestor’s grave.

No, I will not go after the shadows, they are within me. They have never left me since the bloody cry, that bitter it was not heard since the birth of the world. I will not leave them until my last day on earth. They are vivid shadows therefore they will not disappear. They are inside me so why should I follow them.\textsuperscript{192}

Begin, who had a very intimate attachment to his mother and deeply identified with his father, and also experienced the Jewish people as his immediate close family, did not separate for individuality from either the former or the latter. Therefore, he could not complete a regular mourning process, which requires the ability to separate oneself from the object of love and leave it be by detaching some of the libido (emotional energy) from it and investing it in substitute love objects. The cry of depression we hear in these lines is one of loneliness, with the acknowledgement that there is no external comfort.

\textsuperscript{192}Steinman, 1954, p. 251
In psychoanalysis (or psychotherapy), people attempt to close circles from their past by allowing themselves to express feelings that were previously forbidden in their childhood. But the Holocaust dictated to Menachem that, while there might be a chance in later years to achieve change via a renegotiation of past emotions and a re-experiencing of his parents, for now, the probability of remaining fixed inside rigid personality boundaries was much greater. For the post-Holocaust, post-traumatic Menachem to examine and reappraise his childhood relationships with his parents will be an impossible mission. It is not easy to be angry with one’s parents regarding past actions - an essential stage in any separation process for developing individual identity and something Menachem had never done. After their traumatic murder, it was still harder to feel angry at them and separate from them because of the guilt feelings that could arise.

Menachem concluded his vivid article about his childhood memories from Brisk, saying:

No, I will not go to Brisk but Brisk will forever go with me. For there are three important things, some of them in happiness and some of them in sadness, I carry with me from Dad and Mom's home and I will keep carrying them in fearful nights and in critical days and they are:
To love Jews
Not to be afraid of gentiles
Third: it is good for a man to get married early in life.

Menachem tells us how his Jewish family experience helped to shape his personality prior to the Holocaust. Then he goes on to advocate early marriage. He was saying that, from his experience, it is not good for a man to remain without a female presence – a situation that happens to many young men who have already separated from their parents, or even left home, but without having married yet. Menachem preferred to have a continuous feminine presence around, whether mother or wife. In the absence
of separation from the feminine figure in his life, it remains to be seen what kind of relationship he will develop with Aliza and how he will cope when she dies - a developmental task that many men go through in the life cycle.

The trauma of losing his family in the Holocaust did not paralyze Begin; just the opposite. On February 1, 1943, he wrote an article in the Herut ("Liberty") right-wing newspaper called, “Yes, Rescue is Possible”:

…We have to count on our country in order to save, even ‘temporarily,’ what is possible to save. This is natural and understood by anyone with common sense. If we demand from the neutral countries, and also from Britain and U.S., that they absorb our persecuted brothers, we will be like beggars and not get anything but small change. But if we remember that we are not beggars, and have the right to live on our own land no less than any other people, then we shall demand the right to our homeland. Then it will become clear to everybody that the destruction of European Jews is not only because of the evilness of the Germans, but also because of the British, who locked our homeland's gates and have thus prevented the rescue and the redemption.

…The sect of Israeli leaders denies the urgent need to start a real and stubborn war for the purpose of immediately opening the gates of our land. Only one thing is not done: no real war is waged for the right of the Jews to their homeland!

Is a rescue still possible? Is it not too late? It is surely possible! The Jews of Bulgaria, Hungary and what is left of the Romanian Jews, are begging to be saved from the revolving knife and immigrate to their national homeland. And if we save the Jews of Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania, the situation of the rest of the Jews in Europe will also be changed. When the Jews get real help from the United Nations they will stop being a scapegoat in the eyes of the Germans and their allies. Then the neutral countries will also be willing to grant temporary shelter to a greater number of Jews.

…It is not so important who starts this war. The official authority is not important, but the moral authority emanating from the justified demand is. Every gentile will understand that the one who demands the opening of the gates of the homeland before the Jews who are threatened by slaughter — he, and not someone else, is the one who really represents the will of the people. Rescue is possible. But no one rescues.

As a newcomer, Begin was shocked by the complacency of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine). He asked Moshe Sneh (then deputy commander of the
mainstream Hagana, the underground defense arm of the official Jewish organizations in Palestine):

> What did the Yishuv sacrifice? It contributed little to fund-raising, mobilization and rescue work, it closed its shops for a couple of hours on a day of mourning, but the cafes are open, the Jews are busy making profits.\(^\text{193}\)

We see that as early as the beginning of 1943, Begin recognized the gravity of the situation and also offered a solution, without denying the reality, as the majority of the Jews in Palestine and their Labor leaders then did. One of the reasons for this difference is the individual personality structure that then (but not only then) characterized the mainstream Jews of the Labor movement as opposed to the collective thinking of Begin that he experienced as part of the Jewish family. With all the pain of the many Jews in Palestine who had left part of their family in Europe, those who belonged to the mainstream thought more in terms of individual self-fulfillment and much less strongly about belonging to the Jewish family. After the Labor movement-oriented Jews came to Palestine from Europe, they made a quick identity switch from Jew to Israeli, and were thus partially separated from their Jewish family (whether parents or religion). Begin, on the other hand, declared, even many years later, that he was first of all a Jew and only then an Israeli. For mainstream Israeli Jews, their private lives or at least their Israeli identity was more important than their Jewish identity. For Begin, however, there was no private life and all of his private emotions and thoughts were directed to the religio-national sphere. The abandonment of the exterminated Jews of Europe by the Labor movement derived from its abandonment of its Jewish identity.

\(^{193}\) Silver, 1984, p. 46
Beginning in 1920, when Jabotinsky organized the first Jewish self-defense unit (Hagana) in Jerusalem, the trade unions affiliated with the parties of Zionist left gained control over the Hagana. The strong socialist pioneering flavor of the early waves of Jewish immigrants from Europe made the “General Federation of Hebrew Labor” (Histadrut) the major center of political power in the community. It dealt with political activity and had cultural and professional institutions, but also coordinated the large-scale settlement in Palestine that later determined the borders of the State of Israel. Moreover, it also controlled the budgets and ideology of the Hagana.  

The members of the Irgun, the right-wing underground headed by Jabotinsky that split from the Hagana and was a minority in the Yishuv, were left in a state of ideological uncertainty after Jabotinsky’s unexpected death in 1940. They were looking for an authoritative leader. This confusing situation started when David Raziel, the former Irgun commander, declared a truce with Britain at the beginning of the war — as had been suggested by Jabotinsky — in order to join forces against the Germans. The immediate threat to the Jews of Palestine came from General Rommel and his Afrika Korps, which seemed about to overrun Egypt and reach Palestine. In reaction, a group of officers led by Avraham Stern (known for his underground name, Yair) rejected the idea of a cease-fire and seceded, forming a new underground movement called the "Israel Freedom Fighters" (Lehi). When David Raziel was killed in May, 1941 while on an undercover mission for the British against the Germans in Iraq, the leadership of the Irgun passed to Yaakov Meridor.

194 Haber, 1978, p. 88
“Meridor was brave but indecisive, more liked than respected,” said his fellows.\footnote{Temko, 1987, pp. 67, 336}

“…he looked like a real \textit{sabra} [i.e., prickly pear, as Jews born in Israel are known; supposedly, they are like the prickly pear -- thorny on the outside and sweet inside] rooted in the ground, far from the Diaspora image… but we needed someone with charisma,” said another comrade.\footnote{Silver, 1984, p. 40}

Then in February, 1942, the British killed Stern. When that occurred, many Irgun members wanted to go back on offensive and end the truce.

\begin{quote}
We had been rambling until Begin spoke, said one of his comrades. He synthesized all that had been said in his absence. He defined the situation in which we lived, and the future — the struggle. He assessed the role of the British, of Jews in the Diaspora…He had an answer to all our questions.\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 67}
\end{quote}

Another comrade emphasized that Begin “was new to Palestine, which we were not, so he listened more than he talked. He asked questions. And we told him — above all — that we felt the Irgun must no longer stay quiet. Menachem Begin agreed.”\footnote{ibid}

\begin{quote}
When it was first proposed that he command the Irgun, Begin “was hesitant. He said he had to think it over; that he needed experience.” He was invited to meet Meridor at the Irgun headquarters near the beach in Tel Aviv. “Begin reported in Polish uniform, snapped to attention, and declared: Commander, I am at your disposal.”\footnote{ibid, p. 68}
\end{quote}
Meridor was dumbfounded and embarrassed, recalled a comrade. “No one snapped to attention before Meridor in those days.” Recovering from the shock, he suggested that Begin take over the command. Begin, unlike many other Jewish soldiers, refused to desert the Polish army. “I gave my word,” he said, “I have sworn an oath. I will not desert.”\textsuperscript{200} He said he first had to be discharged from the Polish army. Moreover, he insisted on going through the proper formal channels, which meant a vote for his leadership and a vote on a declaration of revolt. Begin suggested a compromise in which he would meanwhile be a simple soldier.\textsuperscript{201}

The High Command only needed one meeting with Begin to discern his ability.

Rising to speak, Begin outlined a plan of action. Touching on history and politics, Europe and Palestine, he said he shared the others’ urge to fight. But this time, the target must not be the Arabs; or the aim, revenge. The Irgun must fight the British, who were reneging on their Balfour pledge and sealing tight the gates to Palestine. ‘We must do more than fight’, he said. ‘The world must be brought to understand why we are fighting’.

“It was clear,” continued Esther Raziel-Naor (David Raziel’s sister), “that even though he asked to join as a private, his personality, breadth of knowledge, and understanding of political issues set him apart.”\textsuperscript{202}

Begin asked for vote of confidence from the Irgun commanders and a declaration of a revolt against the British and won a majority. On December 1, 1942, Begin was released from the Free Polish Army with the aid of some Irgun ties there, and upon

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{200} Silver, 1984, p. 39
\item\textsuperscript{201} Temko, 1987, p. 68
\item\textsuperscript{202} ibid, p. 69
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
his arrival at Irgun headquarters, he declared: “I hereby present myself to you in Irgun uniform: civilian clothing.”

It is interesting to observe how Begin enters a new group that will soon be referred to by him and his comrades as "the fighting family," and how he relates to it in all possible terms of family endearment, intimacy and love. It resembles the way he entered Betar as an adolescent -- without asking for any position, only deeply identifying with the goals of the group, and then advancing as a natural leader recognized and appreciated by his comrades. With a Jewish family identity reminiscent of his actual family identity, Begin created an atmosphere of intimate group cooperation, not one of individual competition.

Batya Eldad, a friend from Poland (she and her husband, Israel Sheib-Eldad, had lived with the Begins while Menachem was under arrest) described Begin on arrival in Palestine:

“I remember when Begin came with Anders' army. He was in uniform, and projected an image of self-pride. He was a gentleman.”

Another comrade from Polish Betar days said:

I met him shortly after his arrival at the country. We were both in uniform. Begin wore that of a simple private in the Polish Army. I was a corporal in the British army. We found ourselves standing opposite one another —

203 Temko, 1987, p. 337; Hirschler, 1979, p. 70

204 Temko, 1987, p. 335
and Begin saluted me! I thought he was kidding. But no, he saluted my rank — quite seriously.205

This self-pride of his group identity, even if not Jewish, and his behavior was typical of Begin and distinguished him from many others at the time. Meridor, the Irgun commander, and the comrades present when Begin snapped to attention or saluted were embarrassed or found that behavior ridiculous. As did the comrade quoted above. They did not want hierarchical relations with friends or comrades. They had completed their process of separation from their families where every child lives in a hierarchical unit, and were now living in a world of individuation and equality with friends. Begin had not gone through this process; he needed the hierarchy and a role in it and felt comfortable within a hierarchical structure, whether as commander or subordinate. To his friends it was silly, even embarrassing, a reversion to their childhood experience. For Begin it was so natural that he even ignored the weird looks such behavior invited and was not insulted by the astonishment on his friends’ faces when he saluted them. His admiration for his father led him to identify deeply with his interest in the Jewish people, but their mutual relations were not defined by separation and individuation.

Begin signed his articles in the Palestine Betar newspaper with the pen name, “Ben Ze’ev,” “son of Ze’ev,” i.e., Ze’ev Jabotinsky” (Jabotinsky's first name in Hebrew was Ze’ev; this was also the first name of Begin’s father) and later, when he was the commander in chief of the Irgun, he was also called “Ben David,” son of David – referring to David Raziel.206 We see how Begin experienced himself as part

205 Dolev, 1977; Hisrchler, 1979, p. 62

206 Temko, 1987, p. 71
of a larger family. Other leaders might dislike the idea of being referred to as the "son" of an admired predecessor, preferring narcissistic gratification. But Menachem had no need for narcissistic fulfillment because there was no such thing as Menachem the individual, only Menachem the ‘simple Jew’ as he defined himself.

Esther Raziel Naor described the event where Begin succeeded Meridor as the Irgun chief commander.

Yakov Meridor presented Begin to us and announced his decision to transfer the Irgun command to him. He thought Begin was more suitable than him from a political standpoint for this position. He thought that Begin, more than others, would be able to provide political explanations for everything and also to influence and create international ties. He transferred the command to him. It was a generous and uncommon act. Usually, people compete for the command position and even fight each other to achieve it. The fact that a person decides out of his own free will to transfer command without any external pressure is very rare, not only in the history of the Irgun, but in the history of politics, in general. I think that all who were there were witnesses to a very rare incident.  

We see how competition, which is part of the basis for an individual's separated independent position, was not encouraged by Begin (nor by Meridor, of course); rather, the atmosphere created around him was one of harmony and a common goal.

Begin was appointed chief commander of the Irgun when he was 30. His comrades, though more or less his age, still referred to him as "the old man," a nickname he liked and in which he sensed warmth. Also, Begin was married while most Irgun members were still bachelors. They were not friends. Begin kept a clear

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Aizakson, 2003, p. 48

Begin, 1957, Vol. I, p. 21
distance from his comrades. But it was a ‘fighting family’ as they called it - a unique
group experience that Begin created around him.

In January 1944, as soon as Begin was appointed Irgun chief commander, he declared the Irgun revolt against the British Mandate in Palestine.²⁰⁷

The Declaration of the Revolt of the National Military Organization

To the Hebrew people in Zion
We are standing in the final stage of this World War. Today every people makes its national calculation…

10. The British government declared that it was not possible to save Jews because 'it hinders the achievement of victory.' This satanic and evil approach was not enough. They wrote with blood the story of the Hebrew immigration: Patria, Maurizio, Struma [names of ships packed with Jewish immigrants to Palestine the British ordered back to Europe, even during the war; many of the passengers drowned or were later murdered].

12. The White Paper is still valid. It is being fulfilled despite Arab treachery and Jewish faithfulness [i.e., regarding the war aims]; despite the many Jews serving in the British army; despite the armistice and quiet in Israel; despite the slaughter of so many Jews in Europe and despite the fact that even after the victory against Hitler there is no future for the Jews in the European countries were Jewish-hatred is rife.

The language of facts is both simple and horrible. During the four years of war millions of our best people have been lost. More millions are in danger of extermination. And the Land of Israel is tightly closed because the British rule it and carry out the White Paper that aspires to eliminate the last hope of our people….

Sons of Israel, Hebrew youth!
We are in the last stage of the war. We stand before a historical decision and the fate of generations.

The armistice that was declared at the beginning of the war [when the Irgun suspended anti-British activities] was violated by the British. The ruler of the country did not consider our loyalty, our concessions and our victims. They have fulfilled their goal — the extermination of national Zionism.

Four years have passed and all the hopes you had in your heart in 1939, have evaporated. We have not attained international recognition; a Hebrew Army has not been established; the gates of Israel were not opened. The British regime has completed its shameful betrayal of the Hebrew nation. And there is no moral reason for its existence in the Land of Israel.

We will arrive at our conclusions fearlessly. There is no longer an armistice between the Jewish people and youth and the British administration in Israel.
that extradites our brothers to Hitler — let there be war for the Jewish people against this regime, a war to the end.
This war will demand many painful victims, but we will go forward in the recognition that we are faithful to our brothers who were, and are still being slaughtered; we are fighting for them and it is to their will that we have remained faithful.
We demand that:

**The rule over the Land of Israel be immediately transferred to a provisional Jewish government...**

God will help us more and more....

Since the ‘Biltmore Program’ of May, 1942 in which Zionist leaders from many countries, headed by Ben Gurion (leader of the socialist Zionist party and chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive), ratified a declaration supporting for the first time the establishment of a Jewish state - as Jabotinsky had proposed many years earlier - instead of vaguely-defined “Jewish national home,” the Labor party was also thinking in terms of independence. But Labor's plans to achieve it were quite different from the Irgun's plans.

At the time, there were around half a million Jews in Palestine and around three times that number of Arabs. Much would happen in the coming years, though who could have predicted it? It was hard to conceive of the weak and persecuted Jews managing to get the British out of Palestine, that so many Holocaust survivors would soon immigrant to Israel from Europe or that in 1947, the United Nations would advocate the establishment of a Jewish state in a partition plan that also involved the Palestinians. Nor could anyone predict that so many Palestinians would be expelled from what is today Israel and become refugees. The only valid reality at the time was the 1939 British White Paper which envisioned a Palestinian state with an Arab majority in 10 years, with approximately 75,000 more Jewish immigrants being allowed in. For many Jews, there was no reason to believe in the possibility of
realizing the Jewish State dream by force. Nor were many prepared to pay the personal price of revolt. From Begin’s collective point of view, Jewish oppression and humiliation would have to cease, because they were the searing factors of the only emotional life he had.

Unlike the Lehi (also called the Stern Gang by the British), the Irgun did not see itself as fighting the British Empire. Its war was directed against the British administration in Palestine, not against the British government and nation. Begin suggested that the Lehi replace the term "British imperialism" with "rule of oppression." He believed the government in London should be persuaded that its policy was wrong, and that they should support the Jews who supported them rather than the Arabs, who supported the Germans. The Irgun did not attack British military targets until after the war in Europe, nor did they assassinate individual British soldiers, officials, or policemen as the Lehi did, or consider every British soldier the enemy. The Lehi also tried to cooperate with Fascist Italy to harm Britain. Thus Begin could make somewhat tricky and sophisticated distinctions as regards the British -- between the part that was the Irgun’s enemy and the part that was not, i.e., the part fighting the Nazis. It was a middle position between that of the Lehi, which had declared war on Britain, and the Hagana, which saw its main role as defending the Jewish community in Palestine against Arab attacks, hoping that after the war Britain would reward them for their quietist cooperation and assistance in the war against Germany.

Begin believed that Zionism had made a fatal mistake in the past 25 years by fighting the Arabs and leaving the British as the supreme judges. This was an additional point Begin threw into the hopper. The war in Europe was used by many

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Silver, 1984, p. 44
Jews in Palestine as a kind of justification for not fighting the British for declining to save their fellow Jews.\textsuperscript{209} Begin was also helped by the sense — in the beginning of 1944 — that the Nazis were about to be defeated, and that the moment when subjugated nations would demand their independence in a new world was approaching. Begin, as his comrades said, created order out of the confusion they experienced when many Jews were not sure just who their enemies were -- the Germans, British, Arabs or perhaps the whole world, whose attitude to the Holocaust, they felt, was one of passive anti-Semitic indifference.\textsuperscript{210}

Immediately after Begin became leader of the Irgun, operations against the British regime commenced. The Irgun's first operation was placing explosives in the immigration offices in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem. The symbolism of attacking the office charged with preventing Jews from coming to Palestine is clear. The next day, the Yishuv newspapers were full of opprobrium for what they referred to as violent attacks that could harm diplomatic efforts. However, most of the Yishuv still did not believe the declaration of revolt was serious.\textsuperscript{211}

The next target chosen was the income tax offices. This choice was explained the following day in the posters clandestinely put up by the Irgun, which stated that the income tax offices were the instruments used to exploit, humiliate and oppress the

\textsuperscript{209} Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 70

\textsuperscript{210} Silver, 1984, p. 44

\textsuperscript{211} Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 72
Jews of Palestine.\textsuperscript{212} The struggle was also articulated by Begin in emotional-psychological terms: the aim was to crush and humiliate what they had experienced as British omnipotence.

Now the reaction of the Yishuv majority was more solemn, with public opinion demanding a serious operation to prevent a handful of aggressive radicals from controlling the whole Yishuv.\textsuperscript{213}

Some of Begin’s comrades suggested putting the fight on a back-burner and taking a break, but Begin decided it had to be "a war to the end." Now he chose to plant bombs in British Police stations. Ordering his people to try to keep British casualties to the minimum, he instructed them to issue telephone warnings ahead of time. When evacuating their offices because of a message about a bomb, the British would understand that the Irgun's aim was not to kill Britons, but to gain liberation, Begin argued.\textsuperscript{214}

Begin perceived the British policy of blocking Jewish immigration so that the Jewish population of Palestine would not exceed 600,000 as another version of establishing a Warsaw Ghetto. On the eve of the Jewish new year, in mid-September 1944, he wrote in the ‘Herut’ newspaper:

\begin{quote}
We are not hot blooded people and also not Don Quixote. We know that the Empire is stronger than us and that the alien regime will fall not in a night. But we also know that we can no longer bear this situation. It is impossible because the land is burning under our feet and because in our imagination we already see how our homeland is to be surrounded by a huge wire fence just like a new Warsaw Ghetto, a ghetto no less horrible than those of the destroyed exile.”\textsuperscript{215}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{212}Begin, 1959, Vol I, p. 30-31
\textsuperscript{213}Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 72-3
\textsuperscript{214}ibid, p. 74

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And on ‘The Voice of Fighting Zion,’ the Irgun's clandestine radio station, Begin said:

The British suggests for us a Jewish Ghetto whose population will not exceed that of the Warsaw Ghetto and whose fate will be also the same as that of the Warsaw Ghetto.\(^{216}\)

On March 23, 1944, David Ben Gurion, leader of the Labor Zionists, called a hunger strike to protest the murder of the Jews in Europe. At sunset, Irgun units attacked British police headquarters in Tel Aviv, Haifa and Jerusalem. Two Irgunists and six Britons were killed. It was the first time in his life that Begin was responsible for deaths. “Now it does not matter if we die,” he said,\(^{217}\) probably meaning that some fear barrier inside him was removed and now he was completely ready to die.

The wall posters stated that the British Police headquarters — the oppression instrument of the betraying government — lay in ruins, and lamented the Jewish as well as the British casualties, but Begin added:

These victims fell in battle, in planned military attack. Soldiers of the National Military Organization [Irgun] do not shoot from ambushes at accidental opponents. There is morality to their arms and an aim to their war.

Begin said he fasted. “Yet we broke our fast, not with a feast — but a battle.”\(^{218}\) His mention of the Irgun not shooting from ambushes was a criticism of Lehi tactics. There were also Jews in Palestine who secretly enjoyed these operations and saw the

\(^{216}\) Begin, 1959, Vol. 2, p. 212; 11.8.1946

\(^{217}\) Begin, 1977, p. 63

\(^{218}\) Begin, 1959, Vol I, p. 38

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Irgun as reviving Jewish heroic exploits. For Begin, the essence of the revolt was first and foremost the psychological change it indicated within the Jewish people, and national independence only consequently.

Begin started the revolt with an order and a detailed declaration whose numbered paragraphs resembled a lawyer's legal document. His comrades suggested that they first attack and then explain their actions, as no one would any longer believe mere words. However, Begin explained that a revolt unleashed without setting forth its motives before a world opinion preoccupied by war would not be understood and could be portrayed by the British as an attempt to sabotage the war effort. Moreover, he argued, they also had to explain to the Yishuv, in which the Irgun was a small minority, the necessity of the struggle to save the Jews.

Begin's ability to delay gratification (i.e., not act immediately) in order to articulate his aims before taking action was later appreciated by his comrades. Amihai Paglin, Irgun operational commander, said about the declaration of the revolt:

At the beginning I also accepted it with a kind of smile... only later its importance became clear. When our first boys were caught and went to the gallows I started to understand how important it was to define the aims of the war up to its end. You knew for what you are fighting... It gave people a stable base.

Begin also considered it very important that a detailed explanation of every Irgun action and its logic be published. He insisted on telling the truth, even when painful for the Irgun. He argued that the Irgun must be perceived as reliable, otherwise it

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219 Haber, 1978, p. 108

220 Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 71
would not have the necessary impact. In one operation, he insisted upon publishing the exact small number of rifles caught — 14.\textsuperscript{221}

Begin was the political leader and not involved in operational details. He mostly stayed at home listening to the BBC at 5:00 AM every morning and reading newspapers from different countries (two or three from England; at least one from France, and two of the more important New York papers.\textsuperscript{222} He wrote the texts for the posters pasted on walls by young Irgun members. The British searched for Begin and his comrades. Irgun commanders used pseudonyms, grew beards, and changed hiding places. It became part of Irgun folklore how Begin became Rabbi Sassover with a long beard, and his comrades chose identities symbolizing whatever came to mind. It became a kind of heroic sport for them to trick the British police, and in this way they concealed their fears under a sense of humor. The British offered a large reward for Begin and imposed sudden curfews in the hopes of catching him in particular, as well as his staff. But Begin was never caught. Other Irgun members were apprehended and sent either to prison or the gallows, while some were expelled to prison camps in Africa and elsewhere.

Eliahu Lankin, a comrade, described how they offered Begin money. “If he said, 'Okay, give me few Liras (the Israeli currency then),' we knew that his wife had nothing. Because as long as they had a little money, he would answer that he didn’t

\textsuperscript{221}Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 75, 81

\textsuperscript{222}ibid, p. 108
need any.” He also had only one suit that the Irgun purchased for him and which he always wore.\(^{223}\)

Lankin also described the unique atmosphere in High Command meetings under Begin:

I do not remember even one session in which Begin took his liberty to decide as the commander-in-chief and against the opinion of the rest of the High Command members. There were issues in which Begin was alone or in the minority, and accepted without hesitation the opinion of the majority. The social atmosphere Begin created in the meetings enabled free expression of opinion without any tension or artificial formality. The members of the High Command felt they were equal participants to responsibility…

When Begin entered the meeting room we used to stand. He approached every one of us rapidly, shaking hands and asked to sit down. He had previously prepared the questions for discussion but we could add a question or ask for an agenda change…

He used to open the sessions with an overview of the situation. Then he would follow the agenda by presenting a question and giving each of us the opportunity to express his opinion… The sessions were mostly very short… I have never heard about so practical, thorough and short meetings as in the Irgun command.\(^{224}\)

The Irgun members had the sense that they were part of a "fighting family." But the creator of this unique family atmosphere was Begin, and we must examine his writings in order to understand what this family meant for him.

All these people became my personal friends. More than that: we were all like brothers. I loved them, every one of them, a love of the heart and the soul. It was a true love. And they loved me in return. This mutual love, the love of fighters, of which there is none holier, was the source of our happiness, perhaps the only happiness in the darkness of the underground. The happiness of love radiated far away, it also radiated to the depth. In our small army of freedom there reigned a profound spirit of fraternity, the like of which it would be difficult to find and that more than this does not exist. It was not by chance that one of the pseudonyms we used for the Irgun was 'the fighting family'.

\(^{223}\) Lankin, 1967, p. 68

\(^{224}\) Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 70
Brothers’ love did not interfere with discipline; the opposite, it strengthened it. Discipline was very strong in the Irgun. Its origin was not through compulsion. The Irgun was one of the few underground organizations that permitted its members to resign from its ranks. Despite the risk of secrets being disclosed, we never attempted to force anybody to remain in the Irgun if he wished to leave.225

There is no reason to doubt Begin's account of his inner experience of the "fighting family." He truly loved his comrades and the love was returned. What kind of love was it? One most similar to that of a father and son, one that contains warmth and affection, but also a certain distance. Although Begin called his comrades his brothers, and spoke about fraternal love, they were not equal. Later we will see that the most exciting moments in this type of post-oedipal love and identification of the son with his father are the moments of intimacy in which the father (Begin) acknowledges that his son (comrades) did better than him.

What needs did his comrades have that led them to participate in this shared experience? Some of them had left their families in Europe; others were just looking for a better father image than they had known. They were young (in their twenties) and the older generation in the new and changing country and culture was less relevant, in some respects even impotent, in regard to the trauma taking place around them. In such a world, a warm and confident father figure like Begin was an asset to some of them. Many of them would continue to view him in this position throughout their lives through their ongoing affiliation with his right-wing movement (first the Herut party after the establishment of the State of Israel, all the way through its evolvement into today's Likud party).

225 Begin, 1977, p. 73-74
But how did the loving family Begin created relate to the outside world? Begin’s attitude toward and perception of the Palestinians who have lived in Palestine throughout the years, is evident in his article “To our Arab Neighbors,” published on September, 15, 1944 as a wall poster in Hebrew and English and distributed among the Arabs in Arabic:

The Hebrew youth, who knows to use the arrow, has started its war for liberating its homeland. The National Military Organization in the Land of Israel with its thousands of soldiers equipped with new weapons is fighting the betrayal government that seeks to put an end to the vision of the great Hebrew nation. This is only the beginning of this war of liberation and it will grow wider and stronger.

This war is not against you. We do not see you as our enemies. We would like to see you as good neighbors. We did not come to eliminate you or to take your land from you. In the Land of Israel there is enough room for you, for your children, for the children of your children and also for millions of Jews who do not have life except on this land. The Hebrew government will grant you complete equal rights. The Hebrew and Arabic languages will be the languages of this land. There will be no discrimination between Arab and Jew for getting governmental position or public jobs. The holy places for the Muslim religion will be under the supervision of your representatives. The Hebrew government will enable your masses to get an education and illiteracy will not be found in the land of the Bible. Epidemics will also disappear from your villages and towns. The salary of your workers will be upgraded to European standards. There will be great development in your agriculture, you will build houses instead of tents and the network of water and electricity will reach every one of your villages. The Hebrew state will be a common home for all of us and peace and good neighborliness will exist between it and the independent Arab states…

However, take care not to heed the instigators. Do not try to lift a hand against the Jews’ life or property. If you do so against your personal and national interest we will immediately cut off this hand with the force of our weapons. You and the entire world have already learned that the New Hebrew Youth is powerful.

It depends on you and on your wisdom. If you do not listen to the instigators, peace and friendship will prevail between both nations forever. Together we will build this Holy Land; together we will be rewarded by its treasures and its fruit, together we will develop its agriculture and industry; together we
will march with the free nations of the world in a life of justice and freedom, a life of happiness and honor.  

Begin’s basic assumption was that ‘Greater Israel,’ on both sides of the Jordan River (what today comprises Israel and the West Bank on the west side and Jordan and part of Iraq to the east) belonged to the Jewish people. It required deep faith or a complete denial of reality, depending on your point of view, to envision at this time a Jewish majority in the land of Israel, which Begin also believed was a necessary condition for his democratic Jewish state. (In 1944, there were 1,740,000 non Jews and 529,000 Jews in Palestine, meaning the Jews made up about 30% of the population.) Under these conditions of weakness, it is no surprise that Begin felt the need to boast of Jewish might and courage. The Palestinian perception - that the Jews had simply entered someone else's house and suggested that the identity of that house be changed to a Hebrew one while promising to grant the long-term tenant equal rights - did not interest Begin. His proposal was portrayed not as having traumatic consequences for the other nation, but as a benevolent and generous act. Begin’s remarkable ability to direct his empathy inward, i.e., to his own people, to say the least was not matched by a similar outward attitude.

Begin himself explained it in the language of either-or: either we get everything or we get nothing:

Our God-given country is a unity. The attempt to dissect it is not only a crime but a blasphemy and an abortion. Whoever does not recognize our natural


right to our entire homeland, does not recognize our right to any part of it. And we shall never forego this natural right.\footnote{Begin, 1977, p. 376}

At this point in his life, it remains to be seen whether Begin will ever show any flexibility in his religious-national conviction.
Civil War: Yes or No

Toward the end of the World War II, as early as spring, 1944, hope was growing among the Jewish leaders of Palestine that the British would nullify the White Paper, open the gates of Palestine to the Jews and support the establishment of an independent Jewish state. These hopes were fueled by leaks from London and by the assumption that after the Holocaust, the British, pressured by world opinion, would have sympathy for the Jews and change their policy. Given these hopes, the leaders of the Yishuv saw the Irgun's terrorist acts of as harmful because of their potential to turn British opinion against the Jews.

Attempts were made by both sides to reach an agreement. Moshe Dayan, then a Hagana commander, met with Begin and told him: “You already have a historic achievement — you proved it was possible to hurt the British.” He promised Begin that if the Hagana's hopes for a change in the British stance were disappointed, it, too, would join the struggle. But he argued that the Irgun, for now, should cease its terrorist activity. Begin replied that nothing had really changed as far as the fate of the Jewish people and that the Irgun would be prepared to accept the authority of the Hagana and of Ben-Gurion if they also participated in the revolt.

A few more meetings took place between Begin and his Irgun commanders and the Hagana commanders -- Moshe Sneh and Eliahu Golomb, among others. The Hagana leaders presumed that they did, in fact, represent Jewish majority opinion as expressed

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229 Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 79

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in free and democratic elections. They were wary of possible Irgun intentions to undermine their authority, even the possibility of a *putsch*.  

Begin did not deny the fact that the Irgun was in the minority. In September 1944, he told his comrades that there should be no illusions about a Jewish state functioning without Ben-Gurion and that the Irgun might only constitute one component of a Jewish government:

> We promise nothing, no power in the Israeli state, only war, a war of independence.  

But Begin was not yet prepared to end the revolt. He deeply felt that he was fighting for his slaughtered brethren for whom nothing had changed. He argued that the real representatives of the Jewish people were those who were attempting to rescue them, and that there was no need to obtain permission to do so. Needless to say, Begin never considered a *putsch*. But it is also possible to understand how his religious-national aspirations could frighten people in the mainstream Labor movement.

The following is a conversation between Begin and Hagana commanders Moshe Sneh and Eliahu Golomb. It reveals Begin’s source of power and shows how the unrealistic Begin of "Greater Israel" was now much more realistic than his leftist rivals in regard to what Begin referred to as the Left’s "illusion illness":

**Sneh:** How can you decide on policy when you do not have contacts with politicians around the world, you do not have representatives abroad and you do not know what happens in the world? You only sit in your room, in the

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230Silver, 1984, p. 59

231Temko, 1987, p. 79, 344
underground, and do not know what is happening elsewhere. How can you determine policy?! We, for example, have information from all over the world.

**Begin:** O.K. So please teach me. What did you learn in London?

**Sneh:** I learned in London that Churchill is a friend of Zionism. Churchill asked to tell Weizmann — not in a direct way of course but an indirect one — that after the war the Jews would get ‘the biggest plum in the pudding,’ a British idiom meaning get the biggest prize.

**Begin:** Why did Churchill not invite Weizmann and tell him personally?

**Sneh:** Churchill did not find it suitable. But he told it to someone who told Weizmann at a cocktail party.

**Begin:** So, what does it teach you?

**Sneh:** My conclusion is that Churchill is a friend of Zionism and therefore we should not fight the British and wait till the end of the war.

**Begin:** I never met Churchill or Weizmann or this friend of Weizmann's, but my evaluation is different than yours. I think that Churchill is not a friend of Zionism. Why? Because Churchill has prevented the escape of Jews trying to reach the gates of Israel from a flaming Europe. Jews who succeed in escaping Europe have a place to go. The Land of Israel is the only country that wants them, but the British send warships in order to stop the immigrant ships. Churchill needs these warships at the front, but he sends them to fight immigrants. He is not a friend of Zionism. And there is nothing to this whole story about the biggest plum of the pudding.\(^{232}\)

Begin criticized what he perceived as the Leftist psychological structure and also warned against its "illness of illusions" — that the British would help us, that the Arabs would not attack us, etc. There is a clear feeling that his Holocaust experience taught him not to believe in others, to no longer try and please anyone, but to make evaluations on the basis of actions, not promises. A year later, at the end of the war, he wrote:

> You cannot be angry with them. They are Jews who like illusions, who create illusions… illusions have become part of their existence. Without it their comfortable existence will be shaken and ruined. Without it their world will fall apart before they fall under it… Now we come to the terminal [after the war] with the stupid belief in our hearts and a sack full of the bones of six millions of our brethren upon our shoulders. We achieved ‘victory’…”\(^{233}\)

\(^{232}\) Aizakson, 2003, p. 60; Begin, 1978, p. 195

\(^{233}\) Begin, 1959, Vol. I, p. 238
Begin was keenly aware of all kinds of British manipulations and especially abhorred the stance in which they pretended to console the wounded Jewish people while the Jews - sometimes unconsciously - participated in this kind of relationship. He compared Bevin — the soon to be British Labor Party foreign minister — to Hitler and the Nazis. Begin regarded him as very sly character with all manner of techniques to seduce and delude victims with pretty words and lull them smoothly and unawares to their death. In the British Balfour Declaration, argued Begin, the British promised the whole world that they would help build the Jewish homeland, but now they were encouraging Arabs and Jews to fight against each other. They were wasting time with all kinds of committees while the Jews were dying in Europe and their way home was blocked by the British.

The danger of the British patting our wounded back is greater than all the destructions and murders were executed by the Nazi-British violence.

As Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, approached in September, 1944, Begin planned the “Western Wall Campaign.” Also known as the Wailing Wall, the Western Wall (Hakotel Hama’aravi) is the last remnant of the Jewish Temple destroyed by the Romans two thousand years ago. Since the Arab-Jewish violence of 1929, British soldiers had prevented Jews from sounding the ram’s horn (shofar) signaling the end

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of the Yom Kippur. The idea for the action came to Begin on the previous Yom Kippur, in 1943, when he saw British police armed with rifles and batons roughing up worshipers after a Jew had defied official restrictions and sounded the shofar. Begin said: “A people that does not defend its holy places is not free, however much it may babble about freedom.”

We have decided that this Yom Kippur the shame heaped upon us by this government of oppression at the last vestige of our past independence — the Western Wall, symbol of our country’s sanctity — will be removed. This year, no foreigner will be allowed onto the Plaza in front of the Wall. The traditional prayer will take place there without any interference from the oppressor’s representatives, and the blowing of the shofar will be visible to all.

Before Yom Kippur, 1944, Begin composed a warning poster:

Any policeman, who on the Day of Atonement, dares to burst into the area of the Wailing Wall and disturb the traditional service, will be regarded as a criminal and punished accordingly.

As it turned out, it was a victory for Begin and the Irgun. No British policemen were there and, except for the previous year's lone act of defiance, it was also the first time since 1929 that the wailing of the ram’s horn was heard. Four British police stations were attacked on the eve of this day in a well-planned operation. Begin’s poster declared:

A change has occurred. Our warning — and our willingness to follow through— have borne fruit.

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236 Begin, 1977, p. 89

237 Begin, 1983, p. 88-91; Temko, 1987, p. 75-76


239 Temko, 1987, p. 76
Though not ready to assert that the British were in retreat, Begin still proclaimed:

But the will of the rule of oppression was broken; broken in a sensitive area, a potential starting point for Hebrew independence. We have shown we are free men, proud, ready to face our oppressors — not slaves ready to surrender in the interests of ‘peace.’

The Labor movement could no longer bear these activities. As early as April 1944, Ben-Gurion told the Jewish Agency Executive:

If there is to be no alternative, we shall face force with force. It will be a tragedy, but a smaller tragedy than the danger inherent in a small group gaining control over the entire Jewish community.

Near the end of 1944, the danger of fraternal strife had become palpable. Begin had a final angry meeting with Golomb, who had just returned from an official mission to London:

I am coming back from London where they think that we are cooperating with you. We act on the political front and you with terror. Even our friends are shying away from us.

He also had another reason for wanting to stop the terror: the expectation that the British Labor party would win the upcoming election and it was a friend of Zionism. Golomb added that the Irgun operations were “a semi-childish pursuit of heroics.”

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241 Haber, 1978, p. 135


243 Begin, 1977, p. 142
After another meeting, Sneh reported to Ben-Gurion:

Begin made a pathetic impression. He is incapable of framing his thoughts without resorting to rhetorical riddles. And when he uses rhetoric, he tends to become emotional.\textsuperscript{244}

In this meeting, Sneh also expressed his fear that Begin might be planning a \textit{putsch}.\textsuperscript{245}

On November 1944, two Lehi gunmen assassinated Lord Moyne, Churchill’s Minister for Middle East affairs, in Cairo. The Irgun had no advance knowledge that this was being planned, but paid the price anyway. The Jewish Agency Executive assembled immediately after the news broke. On November 20, Ben-Gurion said:

It's us or them. Zionism, settlements, Jewish people or Irgun and Lehi. There is no room for neutrality.

Two days later, Ben-Gurion proposed a four-paragraph program that became the prototype of the "Season" (i.e., hunting season, when the Hagana members pursued the Irgun).

1. Everyone who is connected to those gangs, publishes their writings and pastes up their wall posters … should be fired from his work… if they are youths they should be thrown out of schools...
2. Do not give them any shelter…
3. Do not give in to their threats
4. Grant the authorities all the aid required to prevent those acts of terror and to liquidate its organization, for our lives depend on it.\textsuperscript{246}

\textsuperscript{244}Haber, 1978, p. 136
\textsuperscript{245}Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 85

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{246}Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 86-7
\end{enumerate}
The operation was code-named “Bartholomew's Night,” after the action in which the Catholics eliminated the Protestant Huguenots in France in one night.\textsuperscript{247} Hagana intelligence was ordered to collect all possible data on the Irgun. It assigned 170 men of its crack Palmah unit to carry out the attack, and over the next seven months, hundreds of Irgunists were delivered to the police. Almost all of the top leadership was caught. It was a stunning blow for the Irgun.

Eli Tavin, chief of Irgun intelligence, was held by the Hagana in solitary confinement at Kibbutz Ein Harod from February to August 1945. Trying to pump him for information, they beat him, suspended him from a wall, knocked his teeth out, chained him in his own filth and staged mock executions.\textsuperscript{248} In June, when the "Season" came to an end, the Hagana was initially too embarrassed to let him go.

The Saison, as it was known in Palestine, was felt in the streets of the Jewish towns in Palestine and in many homes. People from the special unit of the Hagana were all over, spying on Irgun members. High school headmasters were instructed to expel any youth somehow connected to the Irgun or even suspected of having Irgun sympathies. Offices and shops dismissed Irgun sympathizers and Revisionist Party members. It divided families and neighbors and raised old hatreds on both sides.\textsuperscript{249}

Ben-Gurion gave Begin an ultimatum to stop his fight against the British or be responsible for a war of Jew against Jew:

\begin{quote}
We decided to strike out along a road which no underground had ever chosen in similar circumstances, wrote Begin. We decided not to suspend, or promise
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{247} ibid, p. 86
\textsuperscript{248} Silver, 1984, p. 51
\textsuperscript{249} Haber, 1978, p. 142
\end{footnotes}
to suspend, our struggle against British rule; yet at the same time we decided not to retaliate for the kidnappings, denunciations and the handing-over of our men.\textsuperscript{250}

Begin ordered his comrades not to fight back under any circumstances.

If we die, Begin said, others will take our place — from all sides — even the side that today curses us. Our blood will not have been spilled in vain.\textsuperscript{251}

From an individual point of view, death is the end of all desires and aspirations, but from Begin’s Jewish family point of view, it is part of the experience of being “gathered unto one’s people,” in the biblical phrase he often used; therefore, Begin’s collective identity does not die.

Being deeply rooted in Jewish history, Begin also knew what had happened nineteen centuries earlier and how the Jewish people had lost its independence because political factions inside the walls of besieged Jerusalem had battled each other in bloody civil strife instead of banding together against the Romans:

I thought Begin’s orders were crazy”, said one of the comrades. “Begin said we must not fight back because one day the Hagana would fight alongside us. It was absurd! They were following us openly, denouncing us, and we could not even slap their faces. And they knew this! Begin was saying openly we would not fight back. At first, I think they could not believe their ears!\textsuperscript{252}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{250} Begin, 1977, p. 152
\item \textsuperscript{251} Begin, 1959, Vol. I, p. 39
\item \textsuperscript{252} Temko, 1987, p. 83
\end{itemize}
Irgun operations officer Amihai Paglin attested:

We had difficulty in understanding his position. The best of our comrades were arrested, kidnapped, and beaten up, and we were ordered to sit with our arms crossed. At a certain stage I thought — enough! I can’t take any more. We can organize a few boys and retaliate against the Hagana. Finally we accepted his decision, and now I know how right he was in historic terms.²⁵³

Begin publicized his pledge for restraint on wall posters, and threatened the Hagana with a curse characteristic of his collective mode of thinking:

If you harm Irgun soldiers, your children will spit on your graves!²⁵⁴

Irgunists ached to react. They complained bitterly, but Begin’s authority held.

It was one of the most wonderful things…, said Begin, that for nine months, in spite of the persecution, not one of them created a breach of my instructions. Not one of them took up arms against the men of the Hagana.

Begin tells us that it was not his rational calculations that generated this “complicated attitude,” but rather his emotions that stopped him from retaliating:

It must be admitted that those who proposed this 'complicated' policy did not and could not produce logical arguments. They were moved by faith, a profound faith that believed the day was not far distant when all the armed camps in Israel would stand and fight shoulder to shoulder against the oppressor. In that hope and with that faith, we said, it was worthwhile enduring grievous suffering… Not logic, but the instinct said imperatively: No; this is not, not that in any price! And who knows: perhaps instinct is the very heart of logic.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Haber, 1987, p. 145
²⁵⁴ Begin, 1959, Vol, I, p. 173
²⁵⁵ Begin, 1977, p. 152
These values do not emanate from a separated-individuated democratic society that accepts a person's need to defend himself. They derive from family relations and from the perspective that Begin so often adopted. Here, love is needed more than abstract western concepts of peace in order to relate to the situation as Begin did. What's need in this case, for example, is the image of the father who accepts his son’s aggression against him — knowing that they will always remain father and son, and also reconcile in the end so that everything is fine.

In the December 3, 1944 issue of the Irgun newspaper, *Herut*, Begin published his article “There will be no civil war!” explaining at the beginning his deepest reason for his restraint:

> Against the eyes of every son of the nation appear and reappear the carriages of death. The images come as if of their own volition – even during daytime diversions; and most of all, maybe, in the nights: The Black Nights when the sound of an infernal screeching of wheels and the sighs of the condemned press in from afar and interrupt one’s slumber; to remind one of what happened to mother, father, brothers, to a son, a daughter, a People. In these inescapable moments every Jew in the country feels unwell because he is well. He asks himself: Is there not something treasonous in his existence. He asks: Can he sit by and allow the terrible contradiction between the march of death there and the flow of life here... And there is no way to run from these questions... 256

Begin is clearly expressing the tremendous guilt he felt toward his Jewish family and saying that after the Holocaust, no force in the world could make him harm any Jew whatsoever.

The experience of the Holocaust could not have been more fresh and searing than it was in those years (1944-48) and Begin lived it in all his thoughts and metaphors. He went on to explain his feeling that he was the embodiment of the Jewish people and how this emanated from the Holocaust:

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The love we carried in our hearts for the many members of our families we have to transfer to the entire people. Love your neighbor, love your fellow townsperson, love them as if they were your family members.\textsuperscript{257}

…the Jews who have nothing left in their lives besides a homeland that must fill the place of the father, mother, brother and sister, and restore the point and purpose of their lives.\textsuperscript{258}

The result is Begin’s deep experience of a single national Jewish body:

The rulers promise us ‘safety’ within the walls on condition that we give up on our slaughtered brothers. But we are the same flesh and blood… We came to Israel not to save ourselves but in order to save them, our tortured brothers… With the aid of our bodies, we shall break through the walls and the locked gates.\textsuperscript{259}

Begin’s pain burst out in an almost poetic way in February 1945, in a wall poster titled: “We shall Repay You, Cain”

You rampage, Cain, in the streets of Jerusalem, in Tel Aviv, in the towns and villages. You have used your might, Cain. But you did not use it when millions of our brothers perished as they turned their eyes to Zion.

You chose an ally, Cain. The oppressive regime in our homeland and the Nazi-British intelligence are your ally. To them, you turned over your brothers — into hands stained with the blood of millions thrown back from the gates of the homeland into the ovens of Maidanek…

Cars chase cars. Telephones ring. Signals are given and detectives appear. Tommy guns are raised. ‘Halt!’ – the foreign rulers command. ‘Out of the cars,’ the enslavers order. ‘Which one?’ the detectives — your allies — ask. And you, Cain, walk over, raise your hand, and point: That’s him. Take him!

You kidnap, Cain… torture them in the groves like the Gestapo does and at the end you hand them over to your allies, the Nazi-British intelligence for additional tortures and to exile in Eritrea.

\textsuperscript{257} Begin, 1957, Vol. 2, p. 189-190

\textsuperscript{258} Begin, 1959, Vol. 2, p. 211-2

\textsuperscript{259} Begin, 1959, Vol. I, p. 38
Your mouth brims with socialist rhetoric, Cain, but you are an exploiter. You incite, inform, betray, abduct, and hand men over. Cain... You put to sleep with your faulty optimism the nation in Zion and in exile. You gave up the east bank of the Jordan and two thirds of the West Bank. You also gave up free immigration and Hebrew independence and homeland. And when the Day of Judgment will come for those who are guilty of our people's extermination there will be there: the murderer German, the British traitor and you, Cain.

And we, the soldiers of Zion, are commanded not to repay you. Though our blood boils, it is blood that is totally dedicated to the nation and the homeland. Our eyes are directed, even today — especially today! — toward love of our brothers, toward the redemption of our nation, for peace toward inside and for war toward outside.

But a day of reckoning would come. And it is not far off. The nation will rise up, its anger will burst forth. And for your treachery and crimes, for your informing and libel; in the name of the maligned nation, in the name of the enslaved homeland, in the name of its martyrs, in the name of our imprisoned brothers, in the name of our bereaved mothers and deserted children, in the name of our sacred war and in the name of our spilled blood — we shall repay you, Cain!260

The Irgun's modesty and restraint won “the sympathy and understanding of many who abhorred their politics, suspected their motives and even doubted their sanity,” wrote the historian J. Bowyer Bell.261 And more people in the Yishuv now saw Begin as a leader with a genuine consciousness of national responsibility that could put him above narrow sectarian interests.262

On May 8, 1945, “after walking through the blitzed but ecstatic streets of London on VE Day,” Ben-Gurion, the elected leader of the Yishuv, wrote one line in his


261 1977, p. 135; Temko, 1987, p. 85

262 Haber, 1978, p. 146
diary: “Victory day — sad, very sad.”\textsuperscript{263} It became clear that six million Jews had been slaughtered and the battle for statehood still lay ahead.

In July 1945, a general election was held in Britain. The Labor party won and the General Federation of Jewish Labor in Palestine sent a congratulatory telegram to the victors, not forgetting to mention the hope that the new government would keep its campaign promises.\textsuperscript{264}

On August 25, the Colonial Office informed Chaim Weizmann that the immigration quota of 1,500 Jews a month would not be increased. It was a blow to Weizmann's personal authority and to the Labor Zionist establishment in Palestine which had invested so much hope in its relations with Britain.\textsuperscript{265}

On October 1, 1945, Ben-Gurion ordered Moshe Sneh to stop pursuing Begin’s men, attempt to patch up their quarrel and prepare for an armed struggle against Britain.\textsuperscript{266} The "Saison" had already begun slackening by spring 1945, when fewer Hagana men were willing to participate. At a press conference in Paris, Ben-Gurion said that “the acts of the new British Government are a continuation of Hitler’s policy of hostility.”\textsuperscript{267} Then Begin received an invitation from the Hagana to talk.

\textsuperscript{263}Silver, 1984, p. 62

\textsuperscript{264}Haber, 1978, p. 147

\textsuperscript{265}Silver, 1884, p. 59-60

\textsuperscript{266}Temko, 1987, p. 85; Silver, 1984, p. 62

\textsuperscript{267}Bar-Zohar, 1978, p. 129

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At a cabinet meeting thirty-seven years later (in February, 1982), Begin, then prime minister, said:

When we were in the underground, I wrote an article entitled, ‘Civil war — Never’. After my death, I hope I shall be remembered above all as the one who prevented a civil war. To me, this is more important than the command of the underground, than being a prime minister, than the peace agreement and than the Golan Heights' law.\textsuperscript{268}

\textsuperscript{268} Aizakson, 2003, p. 6
From Terrorist to Member of Parliament

With the end of the war, Britain came to the realization that it was no longer the dominant power. Colonies everywhere sought freedom. The euphoria of the victory subsided, and England’s devastated economy, which included food rationing, was a pressing everyday fact. The British were concerned about the safety of their 100,000 troops in Palestine and about the cost of maintaining such a large army when that manpower could be of use in the English economy. As a result, there were calls to bring the men home.

At about that time, the Hagana's Moshe Sneh suggested that Begin disband the Irgun and join the Hagana.

We want a common front against the British, Begin said. So long as the Hagana continues to fight, the common front will exist. But on the day that the Hagana abandons the military campaign against the British, we shall continue.\(^\text{269}\)

Begin was conscious of the Hagana's ambiguous situation. It was the defense force of the Jewish Agency, the Yishuv's governing body, and operated within the law as its elected representative. Any illegal activity by the Hagana could endanger the Jewish Agency's legal status. The Hagana and the Irgun agreed upon unity. They would remain separate organizations, but the Irgun would first have to get approval from the Hagana before carrying out significant operations. Begin was ready to accept Hagana’s partial authority and to exercise some flexibility while negotiating with his fellow Jews.

\(^{269}\) Silver, 1984, p. 62
The United Resistance Movement (URM) functioned from October 1945 to July 1946. Those days of unity, Begin said, were the happiest of his life. His dream of Jewish unity came true, and no less important, he and his men were no longer outcasts in the Yishuv.

In spite of everything that happened I regard the short period of the United Resistance Movement as the happiest in my life… In the days of the Resistance Movement, we were not publicly recognized, but we were recognized nevertheless. Part of the responsibility — though, indeed only part — was taken off our shoulders. The whole people were behind us.\footnote{Begin, 1977, p. 210-211; Temko, 1987, p. 93}

The URM carried out its first joint operation at the end of October 1945. Bomb attacks were staged throughout Palestine, wrecking British trains and boats. The Irgun continued to operate forcefully under the new unity. The 80,000 British troops and 20,000 British policemen could not control the 600,000 Jews then in Palestine. The Mandate became a garrison state under internal siege.\footnote{Silver, 1984, p. 65.} Nevertheless, an all-out war by Britain against the Jewish community was unthinkable so soon after the Holocaust.

On June 13, 1946, the British Mandate announced it was sending two Irgun captives to the gallows. In response, Begin ordered his men to kidnap British officers and threatened to hang them if Begin’s men were hanged. Begin could not allow the British to hang his men. He considered them soldiers and, when captured, prisoners of war. They were neither criminals nor terrorists who could be hanged. But the greater reason was that, as we know, the Irgun was family. All members swore an oath pledging: “I will give preference at all times to the Irgun above my parents, my
brothers, my sisters, and my entire family until we build an independent Israel or until I die.” Begin's deep experience of the Irgun as real family was strongly connected to the loss of his previous (and biological) family — parents and brother — and his survivor’s guilt. Now he had a new family — the ‘fighting family’ — and was determined not to abandon it again.

On June 23, 1946, on the Irgun’s “Voice of Fighting Zion” radio station, (which had many listeners and always opened with the song, “To die or conquer the mountain”), Begin declared that if the British sentenced his comrades to death —

...we shall set up whole avenues for the hanging of Britons. We do not want it. We are soldiers of a great and cultured nation. We slay in battle and we die in battle. Harming defenseless prisoners is alien to what we believe in. We also know that beyond the normal rules of warfare there is in every conflict the law of reaction; of reflex. And if the enslaved will dare to violate the basic laws of war we shall implement this law ruthlessly.

Begin received an indirect promise from the British via the Hagana that his men would not hang. It wasn't enough; he demanded an official declaration. On July 3, London capitulated and commuted the death sentences.

Begin wrote that there was a moral to this story:

A phenomenon which perhaps we alone can understand. It is the quality which had dominated our hearts and mingled with our blood. It is a simple quality, but there is none nobler. It is the quality of loyalty. This loyalty made us to a real family...

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272 Clarke, 1981, p. 31; Temko, 1987, p. 88

273 Haber, 1978, p. 196


275 Begin, 1977, 250; Translation Temko, 1987, p. 90
On June 29, 1946, which came to be known as "Black Saturday," the British seized the Jewish Agency headquarters and agricultural settlements in one fell swoop and detained 2,718 Jews. A curfew was declared throughout Jewish Palestine. The leaders of the Hagana, including Ben-Gurion (who had escaped to Paris) were not caught, but they were now less willing to cooperate with the Irgun.276

The King David Hotel in Jerusalem was (and still is) a luxury hotel, and housed the headquarters of the British administration in Palestine. It was also a meeting place for Jewish and British high society. The Irgun presented the Hagana with a plan for destroying the hotel. The Hagana agreed as retaliation for Black Saturday, and also as a way to eliminate the many documents that the British had seized during that Saturday operation. They asked the Irgun a few times to delay the operation, but the Irgun finally ignored the request. Begin and Galili (one of the Hagana commanders) agreed that the aim was to humiliate the British more than to kill them.277

On July 22, 1946, the Irgun planted a large amount of explosives in the basement of the Kind David Hotel and, to minimize casualties, phoned in a warning shortly before the time of the explosion. For some unclear reason, the hotel was not evacuated. One wing of the hotel collapsed and dozens of Jews, Arabs and Britons were killed. The first thing Begin told Paglin — the Irgun's chief operations officer — when he saw him was:

276 Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 114

277 Silver, 1984, p. 67
I understand the casualties were out of your control. You should not blame yourself. We all share the responsibility.\textsuperscript{278}

Begin argued in an Irgun broadcast that the rules of Land Warfare were not violated, that the intention was to avoid casualties and the tragedy was caused by the British who did not heed the warning.\textsuperscript{279} On Irgun radio he said:

\begin{quote}
We mourn the Jewish victims… The British did not mourn at all for the six million Jews who lost their lives, because of them, during the war. They did not mourn… the Jewish fighters whom they, the British, murdered with their own hands. On the contrary they were glad… Therefore we leave the mourning for the British victims to the British themselves.\textsuperscript{280}
\end{quote}

Begin did not mention Arabs, who accounted for the largest number of casualties.

Before the operation, the Hagana vacillated; afterwards, however, it denounced the attack and the United Resistance Movement of the Hagana and Irgun broke up. Begin was again a pariah and Ben-Gurion declared: “The Irgun is the enemy of the Jewish people.”\textsuperscript{281}

Soon afterwards, the British caught two teenage Irgunists with weapons, a capital crime according to British law. Nevertheless, when their attorneys proved the teenagers were under 18, they were sentenced to 15 years and 18 lashes. Begin then wrote in a wall poster:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{278} Clarke, 1981, p. 240; Temko, 1987, p. 92
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{279} Temko, 1987, p. 93; Tavin, 1982, p. 130
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{280} Temko, 1987, p. 93; Clarke, 1981, p. 249-250
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{281} Temko, 1987, p. 93; Bell, 1977, p. 173
\end{quote}
We warn the oppression Government not to carry out this humiliating punishment. If it is put into effect — British officers will be punished in the same way. Each one of them is liable to get 18 lashes.282

The British flogged one Irgun prisoner, whereupon the Irgun kidnapped two British officers and flogged each one with 18 lashes. This led to a quick amnesty for the second Irgun prisoner. Churchill declared in parliament: “This is the road to shameful defeat…”283 The British were mocked around the world and in their colonies.284 On an Irgun notice warning of possible whippings of officers, a British soldier scrawled “Don’t forget my sergeant-major.”285

In a wall poster, Begin wrote:

In the annals of nations, enslaved or uprising, there are small episodes which have enormous value. This is the case of the flogging of the British officers…. In the history of Israel there was no such a reaction for two thousands years and in the annals of the British Imperia there was no such a hurt for hundreds of years… there were those [Jews] who kissed the whip… there are still [Jews] like this also in the Land of Israel…286

We have already mentioned the traumatic effect of a flogging Begin witnessed at age seven, when Jews were forced to look on as a Jew was flogged in a main park in


283 February, 1, 1947; Begin, 1977, Vol II, p. 319

284 Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 137


Poland. It seems that Begin struggled primarily against its humiliating aspect, and experienced the present retaliation as restoration of Jewish pride. For Begin, questions of honor were directly associated with life and death. Begin often repeated:

The first step of extermination is humiliation. The enemy could not turn our people into ash after death before it turned our people into ash during life.\textsuperscript{287}

He also said:

Jews in Israel and the Diaspora should never again ask: what will the world say? Know that the world will never pity slaughtered Jews, but the world will always respect fighting Jews.\textsuperscript{288}

Begin was so sensitive about the humiliation of flogging that he threatened to kill the British if they ever again flogged an Irgunist:

If the oppressors dare in the future to abuse the bodies and the human and national honor of Jewish youths, we shall no longer reply with the whip. We shall reply with fire.\textsuperscript{289}

Never again did the British flog Jews, or Arabs, for that matter, in Palestine.

A comrade of Begin said:

We in Palestine had no doubts about Begin’s leadership. On the contrary it came to dawn on us that he had been right all along, that maybe we would see a Jewish state in our own lifetimes! We saw that our revolt was starting to affect the public in England, and that world opinion was more and more

\textsuperscript{287} Aizakson, 2003, p. 114

\textsuperscript{288} ibid, p. 114

\textsuperscript{289} Begin, 1977, Vol. 2, p. 318
opposed to British rule here… We felt our struggle was appreciated, recognized more.290

The Irgun intensified its operations. On March 1, 1947, it carried out 16 separate attacks, including a blast that gutted a British officers’ club, leaving 12 dead. The Irgun never attacked on Saturday, except for one attack on an officers’ club, explaining that the cause for violating the Sabbath in this case was the likelihood of sparing innocent lives.291 Saturday was Begin’s “Peace Zone” and symbolized the considered, calculated nature of the revolt as well his capacity for self-restraint.

In London, the Sunday Express ran a banner headline: GOVERN OR GET OUT.292 The British imposed a strict curfew, but the Irgun, headed by chief operations officer Amihai (Giddy) Paglin, ignored it and carried on with its attacks. Begin described his formal-loving relationship with Giddy and the fighting family:

With the lifting of martial law, which had achieved nothing for those who imposed it except further humiliation, we experienced a feeling of real triumph. And when Giddy, exhausted after nights of ceaseless action, but happy, came to see me, I gave vent to my feelings for the first time. Giddy, in accordance with our custom in the underground, stood to attention and waited for me to open the conversation. But for a few moments I threw off the burdensome cloak of the 'commander,' put my arms around him, and murmured, 'You've won, Giddy, you've won. Our boys have won’293

In April 1947, the British sent four Irgun members to the gallows. In the same month, one Irgun fighter - Meir Feinstein - and another from the Lehi - Moshe Barazani - blew themselves up with a grenade in their cell the evening before they

290Temko, 1987, p. 101

291Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 142

292Temko, 1987, p. 102; Bell, 1977, p. 190

293Begin, 1977, p. 323; Temko, 1987, 102
were to be hanged. The Irgun martyrs were sent to the gallows because they did not recognize British rule and refused to ask for a pardon.

At least some could have saved themselves if they had accepted the jurisdiction of the British courts. They were not forced to reject it, they were free to choose.\textsuperscript{294}

One of the martyrs, Dov Gruner, was tried before a military court in Jerusalem in January, 1947. When asked how he pleaded on the charge of planting explosives with the intent of killing men in his Majesty’s Service and using firearms against policemen, he remained seated without answering. When he did rise, it was to read a declaration:

I do not recognize your authority to judge me. This court has no basis in law since it is appointed by an alien regime without basis in law. When there is no legal regime, and its replacement is a regime of oppression and tyranny, it is the right, and even the duty, of the citizens to fight that regime and to overthrow it.\textsuperscript{295}

Begin touted their heroism and promised to repay the British. He experienced the executions as an additional loss of family members, this time from his "fighting family."

At this time, Begin used to hide intermittently in the house of the Luzki family. Hana, Mrs. Luzki, recalled:

When Dov Gruner was hanged, for a whole week Begin sat in his room weeping like a small child. He did not eat, his eyes were red and he did not want anything. I encouraged him and told him that he had to eat something.

\textsuperscript{294} Silver, 1984, p. 75

\textsuperscript{295} Haber, 1978, p. 175
She also recalled the first time Begin was brought to them.

He had nothing to wear. He came with a pair of pants that were too warm to wear. I gave him my husband's khaki pants that fell down on him. He tied them and lived that way. He also did not have pajamas. I bought for him two pairs of pajamas and slippers and he thanked me so much.

"My dear Hana'le," he told her, "in a few months we'll have a state. When it is established I'll appoint you to be the minister of nutrition." When her husband was late getting home and she was worried, he suggested that she read the poems of Haim Nahman Bialik.296

But Meir Feinstein and Moshe Barazani held a special significance for him. Their death was not a passive one as with the Jews in the Holocaust; they did not let themselves be led to the gallows. Instead, they controlled the situation even at the last moment of their lives and issued the enemy a final blow. They chose how and when to die so the enemy would not be rid of them with a neat and orderly hanging but instead receive a shock upon entering their cell at dawn to find the pieces of their bodies scattered all over and have to deal with the mess, and then with world opinion also. But the united heroic death of Sepharadi and Ashkenazi, of an Eastern and a Western Jew, a symbol of the united Jewish people, meant the most to Begin. Many years later, upon the reading of Begin’s will, the impact this had on him would be evident in his final request.

On July 8, 1947, the British announced that two more Irgunists were to be hanged. In reaction, the Irgun kidnapped two British sergeants. On July 19, the British hanged the Irgun members. Begin consulted with his high command, but without giving them any hint of his view. They all favored hanging, but Begin was hesitant, some comrades say even depressed. Probably there was something within him that could

296 Luzki, 2003

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not kill a helpless person on purpose. (He dedicated his autobiography ‘White Nights’ to “The Unknown Martyr”). Finally, he was swayed by Paglin, who argued that it was a matter of Irgun credibility, and the two British sergeants were hanged. The Jewish agency accused Begin of murder. Begin proclaimed the Irgun's responsibility:

Two British spies, Martin and Paice, under arrest in the underground since July 12, 1947, have been court-martialed following an investigation of their criminal, anti-Hebrew activities… The Britons were sentenced to hang by the neck until dead….They had been convicted of 1. Illegal entry into our country 2. Membership in a British criminal terrorist organization known as the British occupation force in Israel that is responsible for: … illegal possession of arms, espionage and premeditated attacks on the Hebrew Underground. A request for pardon was rejected… It was not an act of revenge for the murder of our Hebrew prisoners of war, but a regular legal action of the underground court that tried — and will continue to try — criminals of the Nazi-British occupation force.²⁹⁷

Begin cynically used the British terminology, “to hang by the neck until dead.” His legal tone was important in order to fight the legal British tone. Authority against authority and not hysterical Jews seeking revenge. Therefore, the trial was more important than the execution itself. The real Irgun breakthrough was in the shattering the convention…

It was perhaps the most revolutionary act in the history of revolutionary wars...Begin explained. It was the first time in the history of the British Empire that the sons of the ‘Master Race’ have been hanged in this country… It is as if there was an ‘agreement’ in the world that the enslaved fights and rebels and the enslaver oppresses and hangs. But nothing like this has ever happened, in which the enslaved deprives the enslaver of his last authority and hangs the enslaver himself²⁹⁸


Begin dared to assume the voice of authority — of the law — and so altered the rules of the “game.” After the execution of the sergeants, no other Irgun or Lehi members were executed in Palestine by the British. Begin claimed that this act saved the lives of many of his men and of also the lives of members of the Lehi.

One of the secrets of Begin’s power was the way he perceived the Jewish people at that time as having nothing to lose:

Will you transform Israel into one concentration camp? Will you murder us? Will you erect gallows in the streets? Will you establish Maidanek on our homeland? Will you exile us? To all those possibilities we have one short answer: we have already seen it... And why, for God sake, should we be more privileged than our brothers in Europe? Why did only they have to go through hell because of their Judaism? Didn’t we become orphaned of our mothers, fathers and brothers? How are you going to scare a community of orphans, a nation without anything?  

Begin had some insights into the 'leftist character'. On September, 1947, on The Voice of Fighting Zion, he said the leaders of the Jewish agency often behaved like ghetto leaders by calming the people on their way to death instead of encouraging them to fight.

The ‘committee of the Ghetto’ talks about ‘the screaming silence’ in which the homeland had accepted the new crime of the Nazi-British [deportation of Jewish immigrants]. Screaming silence?! In this silence our brothers went in their death marches to the gas chambers. And in this silence the whole world accompanied them on their last trip. This phrase is a lie. This silence is not screaming and is not calling for help. On the contrary, it is an attempt at calming to which one grows accustomed. It grants Bevin – the British foreign minister - the ability to argue that with these people one can do as one pleases. They are not resisting. They are accepting.  

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These leaders, argued Begin, cooperated with the Nazi-British by deluding the Jews in Palestine into believing that if they behaved nicely the British would reward them and take care of them. These leaders, according to him, also "sold" their Jewish brothers in Europe by not fighting for their entry into Palestine — because of the "small change" they hoped to get in reward.

Begin went on to describe what he called the Leftist “Basic Inferiority Complex” -- the tendency to harbor disguised guilt feelings toward the enemy:

At a time when Adolph Bevin wants to bring us to our knees, in some of the Hebrew press the search – characteristic of the sick Diaspora soul -- has begun for ‘self-accusation;’ the search has begun for so-called ‘objective judgment,’ for seeing the other's point of view.”

Begin also tells us about his perception of the Left's position, which does not appear to make the Holocaust and the collective Jewish experience the top priority...

Nothing that can disturb their peace of mind. Nothing can shake their superior, philosophical, critical position. They are not part of all that is taking place down here. They reside there, above, in the heights of a moral Olympus and it is from there that their silent, clear and reproachful voice emanates.

What is their worldview? We shall not err if we define it in a single word — compromise. Compromise, for them, is the whole purpose of life. It is the divine wisdom without which there is no existence and no progress.

Begin pointed out how adopting the Western value of compromise - particularly in the post-Holocaust era - could be carried to the absurd extreme of giving up one's life. Compromise for the Leftists, said Begin, is a sacred concept superior to survival.

\[\text{Begin, 1961, Vol. 4, p. 213}\]

\[\text{Begin, 1959, Vol. I, p. 251}\]
The unshakable silence of the people of eternal negotiation is reminiscent of the silence of sheep standing by the slaughterhouse awaiting their turn.\textsuperscript{303}

Colonel Grey, the last commandant of the Palestine police, told an Israeli journalist that, of all the acts of the underground, only three had shaken the administration enough to make it consider leaving Palestine:

In 1947 Britain was still an empire and an empire can permit itself to be unjust, even tyrannical and terrifying. It can permit itself defeats on the battlefield or in the diplomatic arena; but it cannot allow itself one thing: to lose prestige and become a laughingstock.

The three things that had shaken Britain’s hold were the flogging of officers, the break into Acre Prison [On May 1947, the Irgun breached the Acre fortress and released 251 Irgun, Lehi, and Arab prisoners] and the hanging of the sergeants.

When the underground killed our men, we could treat it as murder; but when they erected gallows and executed our men, it was as if they were saying, ‘We rule here as much as you do,’ and that no administration can bear. Our choice was obvious. Either total suppression or get out, and we chose the second.”\textsuperscript{304}

Still, three decades later, Margaret Thatcher reportedly told another Commonwealth premier that she could never shake the hand of a man responsible for hanging two British sergeants (she did, however, receive Begin at 10 Downing Street).\textsuperscript{305}

In August 1947, the United Nations committee - established at Britain’s request - announced its findings and proposed the partition of Palestine into adjacent Arab and

\textsuperscript{303}Begin, 1959, Vol. I, p. 260

\textsuperscript{304}Haber, 1978, p. 191

\textsuperscript{305}Silver, 1984, p. 75
Jewish states. Ben-Gurion agreed. On November 29, 1947 the General Assembly of
the UN endorsed the plan by majority of 33-13 and set May 1948 for Britain’s
departure. Palestinian Arabs protested and took up arms. As for the Jews, they danced
in the streets. The world's recognition of a Jewish state mattered more to the Jews
than its size. They looked to David Ben-Gurion for defense and leadership.

Begin rejected the partition plan. It called for a much smaller Israel than that which
was eventually established after the War of Independence in 1948-9. Jerusalem was
not included -- according to the plan it was to be under international control; nor was
Western Galilee, Lydda, Ramla and part of the Negev. In his December 1947 article,
“With the Knife of Logic,” Begin argued that the partition plan would not grant Israel
enough land to accommodate all the Jews who might immigrate there, and so to agree
to it was to violate their rights. According to him, the plan required Israel to give up
104,000 of the 116,000 square kilometers of "Greater Israel" and, with that, “the hope
of redemption for 90% of the Jewish people.” He insisted that this Labor movement
concession would not bring peace, but just the opposite.\footnote{Begin, 1977, Vol. 4, p. 101}

The November 29, 1947 UN resolution supporting the establishment of the State of
Israel made Begin’s psychological situation very difficult. If there's one thing that's
hard to accept, it's a half-fulfilled dream. It was even more difficult because he would
have to dismantle the Irgun, his supportive family, and become a citizen of a country
headed by his arch-rival, David Ben-Gurion.

During the war in 1948-9, the Hagana, and later, after the establishment of the
state, the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces), engaged in most of the fighting, including the
expulsion of approximately 700,000 Palestinians to neighboring Arab countries.
During this time, the Irgun was but a small part of the Jewish fighting forces. The Hagana trained an army to fight the Arabs, while the Irgun kept busy with terrorist acts against the British. The Hagana also carried out most of the immigration operations.

The Irgun gradually shifted the battle from the retreating British to the Arabs who were attacking Labor Zionist agricultural settlements and carrying out sniper attacks on the main Tel-Aviv-Jerusalem road. In response, the Irgun planted a bomb in a crowded passageway of the Old City of Jerusalem and shot Arab passersby. At this time it was not clear either to Begin or the Hagana whether the Arabs would launch a total war against the Jews. Begin admitted later:

My greatest worry in those months was that the Arabs might accept the United Nations plan. Then we would have had the ultimate tragedy, a Jewish state so small that it could not absorb all the Jews of the world.

On March, 1948, two months before the beginning of Israel’s War of Independence, when it was becoming clear that the Arabs were going to attack, Begin commented again on what he termed the Jewish 'illness of illusion'.

Must we mention that one of the decisive factors that brought the Ghetto captives to their end was the miserable illusion that ‘maybe, despite it all, they won't touch us’? Must we remind people that only four months ago all of the ‘leaders’ were certain that war would not break out in Israel?... Therefore the first thing we must do is cure the people of the germ of illusion that is consuming its soul and blinding its eyes in the very time of battle and on the eve of the decisive battle… we must free ourselves of the illusion of peace...

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307 Temko, 1987, p. 109
308 Temko, 1987, p. 365; Bethell, 1979, p. 354
309 Begin, 1961, Vol. 4, p. 231
Deir Yassin was an Arab village on the northwestern edge of Jerusalem. On April 9, 1947, the Irgun and Lehi attacked this relatively peaceful village in an operation approved by the Hagana. A week earlier, the Hagana had captured the Arab Kastel (i.e., Castle; site of a Crusader fortress) stronghold on the road overlooking Jerusalem, from where Arabs shot at Jewish traffic. Most of the force was composed of recent volunteers, mainly teenagers with no battle experience. There are contradictory reports of what happened at Deir Yassin, yet the fact remains that over 200 Arabs -- men, women, children -- were killed. Begin declared on the Voice of Fighting Zion:

… a great battle developed there in which, for the first time, soldiers of the Irgun and of Lehi and of the Palmach [crack forces of the Hagana] together took part…On the Jerusalem front, all Hebrew forces stood together… A covenant of blood, a covenant of conquest, of victory, was made among the Irgun, the Lehi and the Palmach… This is the thread of victory.”

Thousands of Palestinian Arabs then fled to the neighboring Arab countries. The Jewish Agency, for its part, issued a statement expressing “horror and disgust at the barbarous manner in which this action was carried out,” and Ben-Gurion sent condolences to King Abdullah in Trans-Jordan. Soon after, Ben-Gurion settled Jews there and in other deserted Arab villages and their former inhabitants were not allowed to return. Since then Arabs have dubbed Begin “the butcher of Deir Yassin,” a slogan the Palestine Liberation Organization used when Begin became prime minister in 1977. This incident alone did not change the larger picture of a struggle that resulted in 700,000 refugees.

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310 Begin, 1977, Vol. 4, p. 274; Translation Temko, 1987, p. 113
311 Temko, 1987, p. 113, 369
312 Haber, 1978, p. 210
When Begin learned the horrific details, he wrote a wall poster telling of the fierce battle that raged there, describing in detail how his men had upheld the moral code. Throughout his life he defended his fighting family against clear evidence that Deir Yassin was a massacre.

Jaffa was a large Arab town on the southern edge of Tel Aviv and it was used as a staging area for Arab snipers who shot at people in Tel-Aviv. On April 25, 1948, the Irgun attacked Jaffa and conquered it. As a result, the Arab population of Jaffa, which numbered about 70,000, took to the roads and joined the throngs of refugees. In "The Revolt," Begin relates his reminiscences from the battle. At its outset, he instructed his fighters not to harm children, women and anyone who surrendered. The fighting was tough with many Irgun casualties and the officers wanted to retreat. But the soldiers insisted on seeing the mission through to completion.

"... Fathers of the nation! Listen to the words of your sons that are whispered in the night, at the entrance to Jaffa, under enemy fire and pray tell: Have they not put you to shame? Have the sons of this generation not shamed your memory, the memory of the conquerors of Canaan, of the rebels of Judah, of the sons of Matthias, of the ancient conquerors of Jaffa? Does not your blood flow in the veins of this marvelous youth, that openly rebels against the retreat order and demands the order to fire?"

The dialogue ended. The soldiers' "rebellion" won out.

Begin described how the victorious fighters of the Irgun headed by Gidi (the commander of the operation) arrived at the Jaffa shore at dawn:

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313 Begin, 1977, Vol. 4, p. 276, 282
312a Begin, 1962, p. 454
The sea was calm. Shining like the light of the sky. Its waves caressed the legs of the young men, welcoming them... We waited for you, sons. We waited three days and three nights. We roiled and rumbled, too. Didn't you hear our voice at all? No, you must not have heard. You were roiling and rumbling and thundering. And the thunder of the great battle stirs up stormy waves... You tarried in coming, sons. But you came. And we are yours, as in ancient times, as in the days of Simeon the Hasmonean, yours, yours, forever yours... Gidi dips his foot deep into the seawater. We are here. We conquered, Jaffa is ours, its shore is ours as in ancient times, as in the days of Simeon the son of Matthias.  

Just before the Sabbath, on the evening of May 14, the members of the provisional council of state met in a special session at the Tel Aviv Museum. Under the huge portrait of Theodor Herzl, Ben-Gurion proclaimed the establishment of the modern State of Israel. Then, one by one, the members of the council stepped up to the platform to sign the document. No representatives of the Irgun had been invited to sign the declaration, or to attend the ceremony.  

On Saturday evening, May 15, 1948, Begin spoke on Irgun radio declaring:

Citizens of the Hebrew homeland, soldiers of Israel, Hebrew youth, my sisters and brothers in Zion:

After many years of underground war, of persecution and torture, torture of body and soul, the rebels against the evil kingdom now stand before you with a blessing of thanks on their lips and a prayer to God in their hearts. This is the prayer our ancestors recited on holidays; this is the blessing their lips uttered over new fruit...  

The State of Israel has arisen. And it has arisen "only thus..."

The ‘Herut’ movement, which will arise from the depths of the Hebrew underground, which will be established by the great fighting family that gathered together from all the movements, from all the Diasporas and all the streams around the flag of the National Military Organization [Irgun] will fight for the sake of these principles, in the framework of the Hebrew law, in the framework of the Hebrew democracy. The National Military

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312b Begin, 1962, p. 458-459

314 Hirschler, 1979, p. 154
Organization disbands the underground within the borders of the Independent Jewish State. We descended to the underground, and we ascended to the underground under the oppressive foreign regime in order to vanquish it and throw it out... Now, in part of the homeland for now, a Hebrew regime has been established. And in this part of the homeland, in the liberated part, in the part where Hebrew law will reign — which is the only legal law in this country — there is no need for a Hebrew underground. In the State of Israel we shall be soldiers and builders. We shall keep its laws because they are our laws. And we shall respect its government because it is ours. But the Hebrew government should take care — the temporary government or any other government that replaces it — that it not give rise to, by concessions to outside powers or inward-directed tyranny, a new underground. The Hebrew government must maintain the independence that was acquired with the blood of heroes and martyrs and not discard it through submission to tyrants. The government must preserve human and civil rights without discrimination and preferences. It must uphold the principles of freedom and liberty so that our home is illuminated with the light of brotherly love and Jewish comradeship.\textsuperscript{315}

Begin’s difficulty in making the transition from terrorist to parliament member, in changing his rebel character and disbanding ‘the fighting family’ — the source of his power — is evident. He accepted Labor rule only within Israel’s borders, meaning that the Irgun might fight outside Israel’s borders for the "Greater Israel." It is, of course, absurd to think that the Israeli government would shirk responsibility for such actions. Begin also warned the government to behave "nicely," meaning not to repeat the Saison and to make no concessions to the Arabs. These threats never materialized. But in this transition period, Begin’s fear of being treated unfairly as a minority by Ben-Gurion and the Hagana, and his aspirations for ‘Greater Israel,’ were too strong to be immediately relinquished. Though he also understood that he had to disband the Irgun and merge it with the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces), we shall see how difficult this was for him.

\textsuperscript{315}Begin, 1977, Vol. 4, p. 326
When Begin finished his speech, one of his comrades suggested that he meet with Ben-Gurion. Begin replied:

What meeting with Ben-Gurion?! You want me to meet with Ben-Gurion? With this informer? With this British collaborator?!  

He was reminded that he had just recognized the new government headed by Ben-Gurion. But the truth was painful to Begin. Time and again, Ben-Gurion refused to meet him, sending others instead — when Begin was craving approval. Some days later, Begin showed his comrades a letter from Ben-Gurion stating his impressions about the Irgun's conquest of Jaffa. Begin, who was relatively immune toward the outside world, was very vulnerable toward the inside – toward the Jewish family.

This is how Begin described his difficulty in disbanding his family after he had already lost another, and in relinquishing the fatherhood of his people to none other than David Ben-Gurion:

It was not an easy matter to send our comrades to an army whose officers had hated the underground, persecuted it, besmirched it, kidnapped its members and handed over its officers. Only a few months before the State was established a new wave of organized sadism on the part of the Hagana, acting under the instruction of the official Jewish leaders, had flooded the country. Skulls were broken and also legs and hands when ten armed people broke into a house in the middle of the night and had beaten an underground comrade in front of his wife and his frightened girl…Great nobility of spirit and considerable persuasion were needed in order to forget the past for the sake of our embattled people. There was nobility. Thousands of our boys went into the army, to the front line of fighting…

But it cannot be denied that their hearts were filled with pain and anxiety. They loved the National Military Organization. They had given it their all. And the Irgun had given them everything. They had fought in its ranks for years. They had gone forward, under its victorious banner, to battle and danger, to concentration camp and

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316 Temko, 1987, p. 116
torture-cell and death. The Irgun was no longer just a military organization; it had become their life. It is hard to be separated from an organization; how difficult is it to be separated from your beloved one? I remember our last parade of officers. In the hall there were hundreds of experienced, veteran fighters. In many cases we saw each other for the first time. A time for rejoicing? Certainly. Had we not been privileged to emerge from the underground? Had we not seen the victory with our own eyes? But the occasion was a very sad one. I told my beloved officers that henceforth I was no longer their Commander. Other officers, officers of the unified Jewish Army, would now lead them and to them they owed unqualified allegiance. The National Military Organization had ceased to exist as a military force. There was dead silence in the hall. I saw battle-seasoned veterans, ‘men of iron,’ who had faced death again and again — with tears in their eyes. The old order changes, yielding place to new. A whole world, the world of a glorious and pure ideal, of comradeship and loyalty, a noble and uplifting world, had gone — perhaps never to return. True, it had been worth while. Everything was worthwhile. We had won. Our nation had arisen again. But the Irgun… and who will lead us now?\[317\]

During the second half of May, Begin informed the Hagana that the Irgun had a ship, the Altalena (Jabotinsky's pseudonym in his early writings), loaded with all kinds of weapons and setting sail from France to Israel. Begin suggested various deals to Ben-Gurion whereby the Hagana would get most of the weapons, with a relatively small portion going to Irgun units in Jerusalem that had not yet been integrated within the army and some to Irgun units already in the Israeli army. Ben-Gurion was furious. Now there was a state. There was no room for the Irgun, in any form, anywhere! One army meant one army, he said. No more deals. No more percentages.\[318\] This tough message was relayed delicately to Begin by Ben-Gurion’s aides. Yet Begin kept on bargaining. He was concerned about his "fighting family," that they might be deprived relative to the rest of the IDF units, and wanted them to have the best weapons. In Jerusalem, independent Irgun units still existed in the hope of fighting to liberate the

\[317\]Begin, 1977, pp. 166-7

\[318\]Temko, 1987, p. 117-8
city and have it included within Israel borders. When Begin saw that his bargaining wasn't working, he asked the Hagana for some kind of symbolic recognition — just to be permitted to tell the IDF’s soldiers who had supplied the weapons.

Ben-Gurion told the cabinet that:

If the Irgun chief were not humbled once and for all, he would saddle Israel with two armies... Hand over the government to Begin, or tell him that if he does not stop these actions — we will shoot.1319

On June 20, 1948, Begin and his comrades arrived at the shore by Kfar Vitkin, some miles north of Tel-Aviv, to receive the Altalena. It was Begin's first and last time taking part in an operation. There are different versions about what exactly was said during those negotiations. What is clear is that each side understood, or wished to understand, different things. Ben-Gurion, probably wary and threatened by what he perceived of as Begin's ceaseless undermining of his democratic authority, believed Begin capable of a coup. Begin, for his part, in what were extremely difficult moments for him, probably only wanted to take care of his ‘fighting family’ and also to gain some recognition for their contribution. He had to transform himself as well as his Irgun family from terrorists into lawful citizens of a democratic state. He was aware of many underground movements whose members had ended up as criminals when their dreams of independence came true, whether because of their unruly character or because they had not acquired decent occupations throughout the years of their underground terrorist activity. As we see, Begin knew what needed to be done and also did it partially, but still could not accept it completely and craved Ben-Gurion’s help, even if only in a symbolic gesture.

When he arrived at the shore, Begin was warned by a comrade who had noticed some signs of a possible trap. Begin dismissed the idea, saying: “Since (the conquest of) Jaffa, the Hagana boys adore Gidi (Paglin – the Irgun operational commander)!” and ordered his men to start unloading the ship. When signs that they were besieged by the IDF mounted, Begin ordered David Grosbard, commander of Tel-Aviv district in the Irgun to round up the media as soon as possible. At that point, an army envoy arrived with a message: “Surrender and turn the cargo over to the army within 10 minutes.” Begin rejected the “stupid ultimatum” and told the envoy he wanted to meet with the officer who had sent him. A response from the officer came soon enough: “No.” So Begin ordered his men to keep unloading. Paglin suggested an escape back to the sea before it was too late, and to later find other ways of unloading the ship. Begin said: “The army has no ill intentions.” He was unable to persuade Paglin and, for the first time, replaced him with Meridor to command the operation.

At this point, the impression is that Begin really believed the new Israeli army would not shoot at its brethren, just as he, Begin, would never do. He projected his attitude onto them. Begin also wanted to believe that the Left respected and admired Giddy and therefore (in the case of the Altalena) would not attack the Irgun. But this was not to be.

“Pacing the beach like a field officer, he addressed the others in Yiddish and Hebrew slang. ‘These Hagana guys are a bunch of kakers [i.e., pieces of shit]!’

Meanwhile, Grosbard, who had not managed to fetch reporters because of the siege,

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320 Nakdimon, 1978, p. 196

321 Temko, 1987, p. 119-120
was ordered by Begin to return to his IDF unit. Instead, as a vice commander of the Givati Brigade's 57th Battalion in the new IDF, he decided to set off and bring some help from their Irgun comrades who were now his soldiers. When he got there, he ordered his comrades to leave their weapons and go help their comrades on the Altalena. The idea was to demonstrate their presence without giving the IDF any reason to believe they had combative intentions.

When a group of Jewish mayors tried to negotiate, Begin said: “What? Do you think we are going to negotiate with these bozes?” (appropriating Labor's own epithet for reactionaries). Two UN officers came to inquire about the Altalena's cargo. Begin sent them back and then exclaimed with delight, “They thought I am a sergeant!” When one of his men asked Begin what they were planning to do, the Irgun commander replied: “Do not worry. Everything will be all right. Jews do not shoot at Jews!”

The next morning, the beach was surrounded by Hagana men. Begin kept on bargaining and unloading, but Ben-Gurion demanded surrender. Begin again exclaimed that he was not going to head to sea. Summoning his men, he declared, “The Irgun has once again been proven right…” whereupon rifle fire erupted on all sides. Begin and some of his high command quickly boarded the Altalena. According to some sources, Begin was literally dragged onto the ship cursing and protesting in Hebrew and Yiddish that it was a dishonor to retreat. The Altalena set a course for Nakdimon, 1978, p. 209, 226-227, 286


323 Temko, 1987, p. 120

324 Bell, 1977, p. 323; Silver, 1984, p. 105
the Tel Aviv shore where Begin hoped to find a more favorable reception, and also hoped that the presence of a foreign press there might bring Ben-Gurion to his senses. Two cruisers from Israel’s fledgling navy shadowed the Altalena, shooting from time to time.

The Hagana announced by loudspeaker from the shore that a government official would board the ship to arrange for unloading. Begin again accepted on condition that members of the Irgun High Command were first allowed to board for consultations. The answer was, "No!" By this point, it was already a struggle between Ben-Gurion, who wanted to humiliate Begin once and for all, and Begin, who was fighting for recognition at least of the fact that the Irgun had managed to bring a ship loaded with weapons to Israel at a time when they were critically needed for Israel's survival.

Someone suggested to Begin that he put on a hat to avoid recognition from the shore, but he refused, saying, “Nothing is going to happen!” According to another source, he did put on a hat.325 A crowd was gathering on the shore to watch the show, many of them Irgun members who had deserted their units. Begin took the loudspeaker and shouted to the army troops:

Do not open fire! We have brought weapons for ourselves and for you. We have come to fight together! We shall not fire; we shall not fight our brothers. We have brought you arms! Come and take them!326

Begin felt that the bullets were directed at him. "Whenever I ascended to the captain's bridge, the fire was directed there," he remembered, "and when I descended

325 Nakdimon, 1978, p. 255
326 Temko, 1987, p. 121
it stopped. When Begin sent the first launch of weapons ashore the army opened fire. The captain of the Altalena ordered his crew to answer the fire. Begin shouted at them to halt, but no one listened. Then the captain hoisted a white flag. Begin ordered his men to take it down and went to talk to a wounded comrade:

Do you know what has happened? [Monroe] Fein [the captain] ran this white rag up the mast without asking me! We must all perish here. If we do, this will be a sign and a symbol of Labor’s true colors. The people will rebel. A new generation will come to avenge us.³²⁸

Begin could not bear the thought of surrender. The comrade suggested hoisting the white flag again. Then Begin was buttonholed by Fein who told him:

We are going to lose our ship and our cargo and a lot of lives unless someone makes some sense out of the situation.³²⁹

According to another version, Begin was “pinned to the deck, stomach down, with a sailor’s knee in his back,”³³⁰ before agreeing to wave the white flag, adding that he would also resume negotiations. According to still another version, Fein “ran up a white flag. Begin continued to demand that it be taken down, but Fein paid no attention.”³³¹ Moments later, some cannon shells fired by the army on the shore hit an Altalena still loaded with munitions. The ship caught fire and there were explosions everywhere. The captain gave the order to abandon ship. The wounded went in rafts and the others jumped into the water and swam toward shore, some of them waving white handkerchiefs. But the fire aimed at the survivors did not cease. Meanwhile,

³²⁷ Nakdimon, 1978, p. 284

³²⁸ Temko, 1987, p. 122

³²⁹ Temko, 1987, p. 374

³³⁰ Silver, 1984, p. 107

³³¹ Bell, 1977, p. 326
Grosbard, observing the scene from the beach, ordered his comrade - Yoel Kimhi - to paddle a surfboat and save Begin. Other Irgun men from the beach also paddled out on surfboards to rescue the survivors. “Fein and Lankin (the commander of the volunteers who came with the cargo) insisted that Begin jump, but he refused – he would be the last off. Fein ordered two seamen to toss Begin over the side. He could be heard cursing until he hit the water.” Begin was boarded on Yoel Kimchi’s surfboat and brought to the shore.

Soaking, but uninjured, Begin rushed to the Irgun radio transmitter. Sixteen Irgunists were dead and dozens injured. Also, hundreds of Irgun men were arrested, but Ben-Gurion did not risk arresting Begin who was now addressing the nation.

Alternatively shouting in rage and pleading for his people’s understanding, at times weeping into the microphone, he called the attack on the arms ship 'the most dreadful event in the history of our people, perhaps in the history of the world.' He denounced Ben-Gurion as a 'foolish idiot' — a man, he said, who had so desperately wanted to kill the leader of the National Military Organization that he was ready to risk civil war to do so. 'Vain fool!' Begin shouted. 'Do you know what would have happened if they had succeeded in their plot? They would have sunk us to the depths of Hell!' Begin demanded freedom for the Irgun men who had been jailed. If Ben-Gurion and his men — some of them, 'real Nazis' — dare to harm the captives, he vowed, 'Their fate is sealed!' Yet he also cried out an order to his own men: Hold your fire; sheath your weapons. 'There must not be a civil war with the enemy at our gates!' The people of Israel would see through Ben-Gurion’s designs. 'The people of Israel are not Ben-Gurion!'

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330a Nakdimon, 1978, p. 309
332 Bell, 1977, p. 326
333 Nakdimon, 1978, p. 311
334 Temko, 1987, p. 374
335 Temko, 1987, p. 122

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“His charismatic image as the vigorous resistance leader was badly tarnished”, said some of his comrades. “He had a shattering story to tell, but did not realize that he was in no state to tell it… His voice broke and he wept. He sounded incoherent, out of control,” said another. Others, from the Left, called Begin the “hysterical demagogue.” Ben-Gurion remarked that the cannon that shelled the Altalena was sacred and ought to be placed in the future Jewish Temple. It became known as the "sacred cannon." Ben-Gurion felt that he saved Israel by his actions. This was the end of the Irgun; it was soon outlawed by Ben-Gurion who abolished all prior agreements with the Irgun. “The fighting family” was disbanded and merged into the Israeli army. Begin was in bad shape. A woman comrade described him:

Begin just wanted to be alone. He read a bit, talked less. He was a completely broken man. He came to stay with us in Ramat Gan for a few days to recuperate in the quiet, calm atmosphere. In all the time I had known him in the days of the underground, I had seen him worried and distracted, but never depressed and hopeless. During this crucial period in his life he touched the very depths of depression and only his natural resilience and buoyancy bore him back to the surface of the swirling, dark pool of horror and despair.

336 Katz, 1968, p. 250
337 Haber, 1978, p. 224
340 Temko, 1987, p. 123
Begin’s disbanding of the Irgun plunged him into depression. For him, it was akin to a second Holocaust in which he again lost his family. He wanted to disband the organization, he understood completely that it was imperative to do so, but it was not something that he could do easily. And then there was democracy: Begin had never agreed to simply accept the majority’s opinion without any reservation. He also had to give up, at least temporarily, the idea of “Greater Israel” and submit to Ben-Gurion’s authority. So it makes sense that the transformation from being a terrorist with unlimited freedom to being a lawful citizen or parliament member who must act within clear limits required him to go through a period of sadness or melancholy, if not depression, before he was able to relinquish this freedom.

But Begin also wanted to be a martyr. It was not the first time he had such a wish when he found himself in an unbearable situation. We saw it in his attempt to go back to his family and his people who were under Nazi occupation. We saw it again when he did not flee from Russian Intelligence and said that if there was nothing else he could do, then his duty was to suffer as the rest of his people did. The same feeling is implicit in his declaration: “To win or to die.” We have also traced it to the intimate sadness he shared with his mother. But now reality gave him enough opportunities to revive it. In such moments, he perceives dying as a martyr, like his comrades who blew themselves up with a grenade on the eve of their scheduled hanging, as better than passivity or surrender. It is a way to triumph over the depression. Being the embodiment of the Jewish people grants his martyrdom additional value – a heroic contribution to the nation which mitigates any other pain.

Years later, Begin would speak about the tears that no hardened fighter should be ashamed of, adding that it was those tears that prevented civil war:
There are times when the choice is between blood and tears. Sometimes, as our revolt against the oppressor taught us, it is essential that blood should take the place of tears. And sometimes, as the Altalena taught us, it is essential that tears should take the place of blood.³⁴²

This is another definition of Begin’s psychological structure: blood, or combat, toward the outside, and tears, i.e., sadness, guilt and forgiveness, toward the inside.

It will be interesting to see how the rivalry between Begin and Ben-Gurion, which nearly culminated in murder, unfolds throughout the years.

³⁴² Begin, 1977, p. 176
New Horizons within Democracy

In the Altalena affair, Menachem yearned for martyrdom and came very near to death. He wept openly on the radio before the entire nation and then sank into depression. The main factor that brought Menachem to this point was not his desire to fight for Greater Israel, but something more basic: the difficulty in disbanding his family, the fighting family, and his fear that once again he was going to lose his family. He wanted to arm his family with weapons, not disband them.

During the first years of Israel's independence, most of the country accepted Ben-Gurion's version of the Altalena debacle in which Begin was a traitor planning a coup who had to be stopped. The novelist and journalist Arthur Koestler interviewed Begin a few days after the Altalena affair and found him remarkably different than usual, speaking in a whisper that conveyed more sadness than hatred. He said Begin spoke “as thoughtfully and unfanatically as his propaganda is bombastic and violent.”

In July, some of his comrades who had been exiled to Africa by the British returned to Israel. One of them recalled how Begin greeted them one by one, and held their hands. Begin held his hand for about five minutes and looked into his eyes without saying a word. One could feel the warmth in his heart, said the comrade.

Later, in the summer of 1948, Begin resumed his pathos-laden rhetoric, at least in private forums. “We were led into a trap, and we fell for it!” he said to an American reporter. Ben-Gurion set the first election for January 1949 and Begin predicted that

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343 1949, p. 266

344 Avinoam, 2001
Herut would win between 30 to 40 percent of the seats, more or less the same as the Labor.\textsuperscript{345}

Gradually, Begin the commander became transformed into Begin the party leader. The old rage reappeared briefly only in certain situations, such as when Ben-Gurion accepted the UN truce with the Arabs at a time when they were in retreat. Begin argued that it was “one of the most deadly blunders.” The government relinquished “by a stroke of a pen, the advantages gained through the blood sacrifices of our best sons.” Yet he stopped the Jerusalem section of the Irgun, which had not yet disbanded, from attacking Arab East Jerusalem during the cease-fire. His opinions had not changed, but the melody had: now, everything had to be subsumed under democratic law.\textsuperscript{346}

In August 1948, he made his first two public speeches, one in Jerusalem, the other in Tel-Aviv. Thousands of people came to see the man who had emerged from the underground. It was an open-air gathering and people climbed trees and roofs to see him. During his speeches, the stillness of a temple prevailed, punctuated by occasional bursts of applause. The people were perhaps more eager to see him than to hear him — this mysterious hero upon whose head the British had put such a heavy price. In Tel-Aviv, Begin began his speech with the words: “Peace upon you, Tel-Aviv of blue and white”\textsuperscript{347} – the same words Jabotinsky used to begin his speeches in Tel-Aviv (the first city built by Jews in Palestine in two thousand years). Begin quoted him as he stood before a huge portrait of Jabotinsky. Of course, the colors are

\textsuperscript{345} Temko, 1987, p. 124

\textsuperscript{346} Temko, 1987, p. 125

\textsuperscript{347} Aizakson, 2003, p. 95
associated with the flag of the new-born country, but they are also fitting for Tel-
Aviv, the whitewashed city on the Mediterranean. Begin still rejected the partition
plan, but there was no longer any threat of his doing anything about it.

In Jerusalem, he visited the neighborhoods of the Orthodox Jews and Sephardic
Jews who were his greatest supporters. (The term Sephardic comes from Sepharad,
Spain in Hebrew, identifying Jews with roots in medieval Spain and Portugal. In the
modern Israeli sense, it means those or their parents or earlier generations who came
to Israel from the Middle Eastern or North African countries, some of the areas wehre
the Jews expelled from Iberia in the 1490s later settled.) Reuven Rivlin of the right-
wing Likud party, the present Knesset Speaker, witnessed Begin’s first public address
in Jerusalem in the winter of 1948 when he was nine years old:

I stood there in silent awe at such a moving sight, wondering how this
refined and gentle-looking, short and soft-spoken man could be the
mysterious figure of my childhood, the admired commander of the Irgun,
someone whom I’d likened to figures such as Bar-Kochba and Yehoshua
Bin-Nun. 348

In September 1948, when the Lehi murdered a Swedish UN negotiator, Count
Folke Bernadotte, who was proposing international control of Jerusalem, Begin was
assigned part of the blame by a government trying to appease the British, but he
clearly dissociated the Irgun from the assassination. Arthur Koestler saw this step as
the completion of Begin’s transition from a terror group leader to the leader of a
political party. 349

Begin also had to disband the Irgun branches in Europe before the election in order
to convince the public that he no longer harbored any terrorist aspirations. In Paris,

348 Aizakson, 2003, p. 51
349 1949, p. 281
the Irgun cell was commanded by Eli Tavin. This group rejected the partition plan and plotted attacks on diplomatic missions and on British and Arab ships.

Begin initially made an emotional appeal to them using his "fighting family" concept. “Gather together, brothers, as a council of sages,” he wrote to them in Paris. “Give us good counsel, that we may trust in it, since it surely be worthy and wise.” Only when they rejected this appeal did Begin speak more to the point. He told his comrades that he, too, would like to fight the partition, but thought that it was impractical and “politically dangerous” to operate from the underground. They did not have the means — weapons and troops — and there was no point maintaining the underground cell. He also stated that the world supported the partition and they could not now fight this reality. “There is no choice but to wait for a time in the future when we will be stronger.”

When he saw that his appeals were of no avail, Begin flew to Paris to speak to the Irgun officers in Europe who assembled there to meet him. “Menachem launched into a report on the situation — with his point of view of the Altalena and the aftermath, the creation of Herut.” He said the Irgun in Europe had performed heroically, but now it was time to win the battle for an un-partitioned Israel in the polls. Tavin said he could see his comrades surrender, one by one. “Menachem was convincing my friends. He was still their commander. By the revolt, by his conduct, he had built up an incredible personal influence.” In the end, the vote to disband the Irgun was unanimous.

During the election campaign, Begin led parades and torchlight rallies, denounced Ben-Gurion's surrender and declared that the Jews had not survived the Holocaust to beg for a partitioned homeland. But now his protest was solely verbal. Begin declared

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350 Temko, 1987, p. 128, 379
351 ibid, pp. 128, 379
that Herut would win the election by the 'holy ballot' alone and impressed upon his followers that this was the only way to achieve power.\footnote{Eldad, 1993/4; Shamir 1995} This declaration was probably also intended to counteract his terrorist image and past. Begin’s Herut party finished fourth in the election, winning 14 of the 120 Knesset seats. Ben-Gurion's Labor Party had a clear victory with 46 seats.

Begin took the defeat in stride, consoling himself with the thought that Herut would recover from the damage caused by the Altalena affair and, with 14 seats, could act as a significant opposition party and safeguard the true values of the nation.

While Ben-Gurion toured farm settlements with his open shirt and touched the soil with his fingers, Begin gave impassioned speeches wearing a tie and jacket. He repeatedly declared to his supporters, "I am just a simple Jew in the Land of Israel." Begin accused Ben-Gurion of acting like an East European autocrat who discovered his true self in the Altalena affair. But the real difference between these two leaders, and between their respective supporters, was encapsulated in one word: Jew. The Left in Israel never used this word to identify itself. In fact, it rejected this identifying symbol, while the Sephardic and religious saw themselves first and foremost as Jews. The Herut party was run by Begin as a "fighting family," but words now replaced guns. Begin addressed some of his old comrades by their underground names. He would make a presentation, then there would be a discussion; Begin would summarize the debate and ultimately, his opinion was usually accepted without a vote. When someone still protested, "he had a habit of disarming you by pretending to agree with you, and then going his own way," wrote one of his comrades.\footnote{Katz, 1981, p. 13}
In the Knesset, Begin argued that the government lacked a "spine." He advocated a self-reliant, defiant Israel and decried the government’s efforts to secure peace with the surrounding Arab countries. “Herut wanted peace through victory rather than through negotiation.”

When Begin was reminded by one of Ben-Gurion's supporters that two peoples existed in the region, Jews and Arabs, Begin dismissed it as irrelevant. For him, the only valid claim was the Jewish one, and to the entire Land of Israel.

Begin strongly rejected any recognition of Jordan as an independent state. “The whole of Israel is our homeland - Amman like Nablus, the Gilad like Samaria, Bashan and the Sharon.” It was his deep belief that giving up what he considered our national rights would not enhance peace. To him, it was like forfeiting one's honor, which is of no help. He told the foreign minister, Moshe Sharet: “Peace is like honor, the more you chase it, the farther it runs.”

Ben-Gurion sensed Begin's weakness and exploited it to bully him. In the Knesset, he would listen to Begin for a while and then shout: “Who killed Arlosoroff?” or something similar and send the debate veering off into uncharted territory. Ben-Gurion also mocked Begin's leadership of the Irgun, stating that all he had done was write wall posters and murder civilians. “When did you actually fight?” Ben-Gurion challenged him. After one such clash, Begin complained to his comrades: “You left me alone! You left me alone against Ben-Gurion.”

Begin's comrades urged him not to let Ben-Gurion provoke and distract him from the main issues, but it was no use.

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354 Stock, 1967, p. 27

355 Naor, 1993, p. 92

356 Temko, 1987, p.133
Begin craved Ben-Gurion's approval and, on one occasion, remarked to another comrade with satisfaction that when he had passed the prime minister's seat in the Knesset, Ben-Gurion had smiled at him.

At this time, the legacy of the Irgun and Lehi was not studied in schools, their songs were not played on the radio and even the heroic stories of the youths who went to the gallows singing Hatikva (then a Jewish national hymn and later the national anthem of Israel) were erased from the history books. Labor socialist policy and doctrine were everywhere.

Surrendering to democracy opened a new horizon for Begin: Israel's internal affairs, where he could use his family-oriented attitude to promote civil rights in the socialist Israeli world. In April 1949, he addressed the Knesset about the need to secure the rehabilitation rights of veteran Irgun and Lehi fighters, just like those of the Hagana veterans. In the existing situation, the government cared for the Hagana veterans’ needs, while the needs of Irgun and Lehi veterans were left to Herut. Begin spoke for the deprived in a conciliatory tone:

We are not asking for favors… It is not we who seek to take away the rights of others, but others who are coming to take away our rights… We are astonished that men who spilled their blood, risked their lives, sacrificed their lives, went to prison and to concentration camps, became crippled, mobilized completely for the sake of defending the homeland and the people, and because of these things lost their jobs -- are denied the most basic right of receiving full equal rights from the state for their rehabilitation.

I do not want to use the word pardon… but if there is a place for pardon after the revolution that has taken place here, it is only for mutual pardon.\(^{357}\)

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\(^{357}\) Aizakson, 2003, p. 57
In May 1950, after Jordan formally annexed the West Bank, Begin blamed the government for giving Abdullah and the Bevin government supporting him the green light and turning what Begin considered an act of plunder into one that was *de jure*.

The second Israeli election, set for the summer of 1951, was approaching. By this time, tens of thousands of Jews had arrived from the Arab countries and all the poor new country could offer them were tents. The government encouraged the new immigrants to become socialist settlers and farmers, but they were more inclined towards Begin. They were hungry and angry and Begin's critiques of the prevailing economic chaos made sense to them. They also rejected Ben-Gurion’s aspirations for peace with the Arabs from whom they had just escaped. In the campaign, Begin went around the country making enthusiastic speeches, but the results were disappointing: Herut plummeted from 14 to 8 seats. The people's rejection “affected Begin deeply.”

After the defeat in the second election, Begin assembled the Herut activists and announced that he was retiring and going to practice law. His comrades were aghast and stayed up the entire night remonstrating with him to remain at the helm. But Begin stuck to his guns, and when the Knesset reconvened on August 20, 1951, he was not in the plenum to take the oath of office. Instead, he was home receiving party members and Irgun comrades. “They were shattered,” said one of the comrades, “they had devoted their whole life to this cause and now Begin was simply walking away!” In response, Begin expressed some resentment and fatigue, as well as guilt feelings for the party's failure. “He said it was his duty to retire since he had not brought success in the election.”

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358 Hurwitz, 1994, p. 54
chose Ben-Gurion and the partition plan. “He had not expected this ingratitude from
the nation so soon after the glorious Irgun struggle and victory.” But he also felt
that some party members had failed him. “In the Irgun Begin had no rivals,”
explained another comrade. “There were no intrigues. No one was vying for office.
Herut was different.”

In the fall, Begin took a vacation in Europe with Aliza. What finally brought him
back in a rush to the Knesset was the debate regarding the reparations from Germany
on January 7, 1952.

The background to these events was the virtually total financial bankruptcy of the
young state. Waves of immigrants had arrived in the preceding months to a country
poor in natural resources, underdeveloped in many respects and with huge security
needs. Ben-Gurion hinted at British willingness for Israel to join the Commonwealth,
but the idea was rejected, as was the suggestion of an appeal for aid. Then he
proposed that Israel be the West’s base, granary and workshop in the Middle East, but
this idea also failed to take root. In May 1951, some money came in via bond sales by
American Jews, but it was far from enough.

Then it was suggested that Israel should demand that the Federal Republic of
Germany make financial reparation for Jewish lives and property lost during the Nazi
period. The Israeli boycott of Germany was now so total that Israeli passports were
stamped: “Good for all countries except Germany.” With no other alternative, the

359 Hurwitz, 1994, p. 54

360 Temko, 1987, p. 135

361 Silver, 1984, p. 115
Israeli government directed a request for reparations to German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Adenauer, who had been an anti-Nazi activist, indicated his readiness to pay compensation. Germany was far from being in a position to be reinstated in the family of nations, and a gesture to Israel could help her in this regard.\(^{362}\)

In a country with many citizens who were survivors of the Holocaust and had lost kin in the Nazi gas chambers, people of all political persuasions were shocked and waves of emotional protest arose. On this same day of January 7, 1952, when the Knesset was set to convene, Begin spoke to a crowd of thousands not far from the Knesset building in Jerusalem. The police, expecting trouble, deployed with nightsticks and tear gas grenades and encircled the Knesset building with barbed wire.

In the middle of his speech, Begin slowly opened a note that had just been handed to him. There was total silence. Begin held it up and announced: “I have not come here to inflame you; But this note which has just been handed to me states that the police have grenades which contain gas made in Germany — the same gas which was used to kill our mothers and fathers. We are prepared to suffer anything, “torture chambers, concentration camps and subterranean prisons – so any decision to deal with Germany will not come to pass.”\(^{363}\) The charge was not true, but at that moment it made no difference. “That maniac who is now prime minister…” Begin continued, urging that “a war of life or death” be waged against the reparation agreement. “Go to the Knesset,” he exhorted the people, "and everything that stands in your way will be shattered like glass on a rock.” The crowd, some with stones, broke through the barbed wire barrier and hurled stones into the Knesset. The police fired tear gas and

\(^{362}\) Haber, 1978, p. 233

\(^{363}\) Channel 8, Israeli TV October/November 2003, program about Begin; Jerusalem Post, Jan. 8, 1952
warning shots but to no avail. The rioting raged for hours, leaving a few hundred protestors and policemen wounded.

In the Knesset, Begin said:

Today the Jewish prime minister is about to announce that he will go to Germany to receive money, that he will sell the honor of the Jewish people for monetary gain, casting eternal shame upon it... There is not one German who did not murder our parents. Every German is a Nazi. Every German is a murderer. Adenauer is a murderer. All his aides are murderers. But their reckoning is money, money, money. This abomination will be perpetrated for a few million dollars.... In what tribe of men, however primitive, does the son of a murdered man go directly to the murderer and ask for reparations?
The goyim [gentiles] will see only one fact: you sat at one table with the murderers of your people, you admitted that they are capable of signing an agreement, that they are capable of keeping an agreement, that they are family in the family of nations. The goyim not only hated us, not only murdered us, not only burnt us, were not only jealous of us — it was especially contempt that they felt for us. And in this generation, which we call the last of servitude and the first of redemption — in the generation when we gained a position of honor, in which we came out of slavery to liberty — you come, and because of a few million defiled dollars, because of foul goods, and throw away the little bit of dignity which we have earned for ourselves... you cut the ground from under our feet, you endanger our honor and independence. How we shall be scorned.\footnote{Official Knesset Record, January, 7, 1952, VOL. X; The Jerusalem Post, January, 8-11, 1952. Translations Temko, 1987, p. 137-138, Silver, 1984, p. 115,116, 118 and Haber, 1978, p. 235}

Staring at Ben-Gurion he cried:

“I appeal to you not as a political rival — as rivals there is an abyss between us, there is no bridge, and there will be no bridge. It is bloody abyss. I appeal to you at the last moment as a Jew to a Jew, as the son of an orphaned nation, of a mourned nation. Stop! Don’t do this thing — it’s obscene! There has been nothing like this since we became a nation, and I am trying to give you a way out. As an adversary I would not give it to you. As a Jew I shall give it. Go to the nation. Hold a referendum!”
By now, the wail of ambulance and police sirens and the cries of the injured were resonating in the Knesset. Shattered glass from the windows stoned by the crowd was strewn around and the sting of tear gas was in the air. The police were struggling to prevent the crowd from entering the Knesset; it seemed like war.

At a certain point, when Begin listed well-known people who rejected the reparations, Ben-Gurion shouted: “Those people are not part of your mob of hooligans!” Begin yelled back: “You are the hooligan!”

He was asked by the speaker of the Knesset to apologize, but refused. Ordered to return to his seat, he shouted: “If I am not permitted to speak, no one will!” The session was halted and continued only after Begin agreed to apologize.

I have apologized,” he said, “not out of fear of losing my Knesset seat. That issue is trivial compared with the issue we confront today. I have apologized because there are things I must say, a role I must fulfill — perhaps my last, but I must do it.

Looking at Ben-Gurion, he shouted:

“When you aimed your gun at us and I was standing on the deck of the Altalena as it burned, I gave the order: ‘No. Do not answer fire with fire.’ Today: I give the order: ‘Yes!’ For there are things dearer to a man than life; just as there are things more terrible than death. These ‘reparations’ are an issue for which we shall give our souls, for which we are willing to die. We will leave our families, say farewell to our children. But there will be no negotiations with Germany! People have died for lesser issues. We who saw our fathers dragged to the gas chambers; we who heard the rattling of the death trains; we who saw our fathers thrown into the river with 500 other Jews from glorious Brest-Litovsk, and saw the river get red with blood. We who saw an old mother murdered in hospital; we who saw events unequalled in history — shall we hesitate to sacrifice our souls to prevent negotiations with the murderers of our fathers?!”

Begin ended with a cry of sorrow and determination:

You have power. You have prisons and concentration camps, an army, police, detectives, guns, machineguns. No matter! On this issue all your power will crumble like glass against rock. We shall battle this issue of right until the end. Physical power, in such battles, has no value. Power is vanity… I know you will drag us off to concentration camps. You have
arrested hundreds today. You could arrest thousands. It does not matter. They will go and serve their sentences. We shall go with them. And if necessary we shall die with them. But there will be no ‘reparations’ with Germany.

Then he announced that he was relinquishing his parliamentary immunity.

Ben-Gurion replied:

Over six million Jews were put to death by torture, starvation, massacre and mass suffocation… Before, during and after this systematic mass murder, came the pillage — this too on an unprecedented scale… A crime of such enormous proportions can have no material compensation. Any compensation, of whatever size, is no restitution for the loss of human life or expiation for the sufferings and agonies of men and women, children, old people and infants. However, even after the defeat of the Hitler regime, the German people continues to enjoy the fruits of that massacre and pillage, of the plunder and robbery of the Jews who were murdered. The government of Israel considers itself bound to demand of the German people restitution for this stolen Jewish property. Let not the murderers of our people also be the beneficiaries of its property!

Ben-Gurion accused Begin on the radio —

“The first steps in the destruction of democracy in Israel were taken”. He said that “a wild mob incited by men of Etzel and the Communists, stormed the Knesset building and threw stones into it…. I consider it my duty to tell the nation of the gravity of the criminal and treacherous plot… and to assure the nation that we have taken and will take all appropriate measures… to safeguard the security and peace. …I do not underestimate the declaration of Menachem Begin that he is preparing for a war of life or death, nor have I any illusions against whom these threats are directed. I know too that it is not too difficult to carry out acts of murder against members of the government, of which I have the honor to stand at the head. Nor am I ignorant as to who is the principle target of Mr. Begin’s plans. …The State of Israel will not be turned into a Spain or a Syria.”

The next day, Ben-Gurion won the vote on the reparations issue 61-50, with nine abstentions.

365 Jerusalem Post, January, 9, 1952
Some of Begin’s comrades took his words literally and understood it as a call to renew the underground. One consequence was a leather-bound dictionary fitted with explosives that was smuggled into Germany and mailed to Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. Two post office employees opened it and were killed. There were other plots, but they were not carried out. In September 1952, the reparations agreement was signed between Israel and Germany. The next month, a 29-year-old Dachau survivor and Begin admirer named Dov Shilansky, was arrested by the police outside the Israeli Foreign Ministry building. Searching his possessions, they found a suitcase with a bomb set to explode mere minutes later. At his trial, he received a light sentence of just 21 months. Shilansky subsequently joined Herut and eventually became a member of the Knesset and later its speaker. Begin ignored all these incidents as if they had nothing to do with him. Whether he knew the details of those planned operations or not, some comrades, such as Dov Shilansky, were deeply insulted by what they felt was an initial warming to them by Begin and then a sudden detachment.

No doubt the trauma of the Holocaust, which Begin had grappled with so intensely in his underground years and which had partially subsided after the establishment of the state, was fully revived and relived. In such an emotional state, the gap between Begin’s rhetoric and deeds is clear. The drama had emotional value, to counteract his pain, but talk and action were different issues for him and usually not mixed. Ben-Gurion later said, “I do not believe he lies on purpose; he is simply incapable of distinguishing between truth and imagination,” implying that Begin was somewhat psychotic. This shows how Ben-Gurion, like many others, especially on the Left, were

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366 Silver, 1984, p. 112
so far from an understanding of Begin that they took his words - instead of his pain - literally.

Begin, who perceived himself as the embodiment of the Jewish people, envisaged Ben-Gurion sitting, as he said, with the murderers of his biological family and his Jewish family together around the same table, negotiating money for reconciliation. Begin experienced it in the most personal and emotional terms (no wonder, in his speech to the Knesset on the issue, his associations led him to speak of primitive tribes) while Ben-Gurion saw it in a more abstract and detached way. Ben-Gurion said he was torn between his emotions and his intellect. His emotions told him not to agree to reparations and his intellect told him that Israel badly needed the money to survive. In the end, he decided according to individual calculations of loss and gain, while issues of honor, shame, revenge and hatred were at best of only secondary importance. We cannot bring the dead back to life; we also do not forgive, and we want our money back, is what Ben-Gurion argued with logic. He also spoke about the personal reparations made by Germany to many Israeli Holocaust survivors, some of them old, ill and alone. They badly needed the money for food and other basic needs.

From Begin's point of view, it was something else entirely. For him, individual calculations of money and personal needs were not of first priority. He wanted to preserve his last weapon against evil – anger - and was correct in his perception that a reparations agreement would alter the psychological and emotional situation between the two nations. The boycott declared and observed by many Israelis on German products subsequently weakened, full relations were established between the two countries and the Holocaust was repressed in some ways by Israelis as well as by Germans. Begin, as a collective thinker, had a good grasp of these historical

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367 Haber, 1978, p. 237
emotional processes. For Begin, as we have seen, humiliation and extermination were synonymous. If goyim (gentiles) thought Israel had relinquished its honor they would attack it. In collective terms, honor is a defense against attack and allowing it to be breached is tantamount to committing suicide. No wonder Begin’s associations involved the terms of prostitution. “From the time of the concubine on the hill” (Judges, Chapter 19), he said in the Knesset, “there was no such an abomination in Israel.” Israel in this case is compared to a prostitute who, as Begin explicitly said, had sold its honor and therefore will be treated accordingly. We are orphan brothers, Begin shouted to Ben-Gurion, feeling that the Holocaust united them with a shared trauma. But Ben-Gurion did not feel they were brothers sharing the same trauma. In fact, he strongly rejected Begin’s emotions. Their ways of thinking were so far apart that they could hardly meet.

Following is an example of Begin's collective personality. Geula Cohen, a former Likud member of Knesset, related something Begin once told her that exemplifies how even his most private life was subjugated to the nation:

> You know, when I was in Betar in Poland, when someone wanted to express his love for his girlfriend and tell her how much he loved her — and I was the same way when I had a girlfriend — When I wanted to express how much I loved her, I would say: ‘I love you as I love the Land of Israel.’ Nowadays, if someone said something like that, he would be committed, Cohen said.  

In Begin’s case, personal, adolescent love was experienced in national terms.

Last but not least, we may have already forgotten about the depressed Begin who decided to leave politics after his failure in Israel's second election. Now he returned to this activity with his full energies. The memory of the Holocaust infused him with life.

368 Aizakson, 2003, p. 175
In the mid-1950s, tens of thousands of Sephardim, most of them Moroccans, immigrated to Israel. They were proud of their traditions, strong in their sense of community and insulted by the "welcome" they received from the Labor Party. A 1949 report in the Haaretz newspaper (Israel's equivalent of the New York Times; a paper mainly representing Labor voters that favored “selective immigration” – i.e., keeping the Sephardim out of Israel as long as possible) when the first North African Jews arrived, said that the Moroccans were:

a race we haven’t known before in Israel. We are dealing with a people of record primitiveness. Their level of education borders on total ignorance and worse, they totally lack the capacity to absorb anything spiritual. Generally speaking they are only slightly better than the Arabs, Blacks and Berbers among whom they used to live. In any case, they are of a lower order than the Palestinian Arabs we are accustomed to… But more then anything else there is one basic fact — their total inability to adapt to life in Israel and, above all, their chronic laziness and hatred of work.\footnote{Chafets, 1986, p. 117-118}

Chaim Nachman Bialik, the great Hebrew poet, was reputed to have joked that he hated the Arabs because they reminded him of Sephardi Jews. The encounter between the Ashkenazi culture, represented mainly by leftist voters emanating from Europe, and the Sephardi one of Jews immigrating to Israel mainly from Arab countries was difficult. Ben-Gurion argued: “The primitive element is subjected easily to Begin’s political and social demagogy. Its hatred for the Arabs is great, and the talk about conquest of historical borders captured their hearts.”\footnote{Kurzman, 1983, p. 430}

Begin’s encounter with the Sephardi people was different. Here is the description of a colleague who accompanied him to one such encounter.
My brothers and sisters, the speaker's voice echoed in the air of the transit camp, touching the hearts of the hundreds of residents who had gathered to listen to what he had to say. It was love at first sight. Menachem Begin took them by storm. He, a man of the establishment and of politics, did not come to them as a superior, as representatives of the big ruling party did, but as one of them, and he spoke to them brother to brother.

His speeches in the transit camps in the early ’50s made waves and attracted thousands and tens of thousands to his party, the Herut movement.

We must keep in mind the background of those years in order to understand the magnitude of what he was doing. The State of Israel was still in its infancy. It had absorbed hundreds of thousands of immigrants from all over the world, from east and west, Holocaust survivors from Europe and refugees from the Arab states. Obviously, the young country could not absorb all of those immigrants, and so transit camps and immigrant camps were built. Families with many children and no means lived in tents and shacks. Conditions were inhuman, there were no jobs and deep despair abounded. The government was in the hands of Mapai (the early Labor Party) and headed by Ben-Gurion. Government emissaries exerted total control in the transit camps and made their inhabitants understand that the state is Ben-Gurion and Ben-Gurion is the state. They also prevented representatives of other parties from making any inroads in the transit camps.

This was a rebellion against this conception. Begin began visiting the transit camps and poor neighborhoods and immediately found the way into people's hearts, and they streamed to his party -- first and foremost because of his endearing and genuine personality; only later did they come to a full understanding of his ideology and his attitude toward the Land of Israel.…

One of his most unforgettable appearances was in the Kiryat Ono transit camp [outside Tel Aviv]. We arrived there with apprehensions that people from the ruling party would try to disrupt Begin’s speech. And then I witnessed an extraordinary spectacle that I will never forget. Mr. Begin appears in a small car accompanied by a few party activists. He gets out of the car wearing a jacket and tie and the crowd cheers as Begin waves to them in greeting.

In the center of the slum, a makeshift stage had been put together from some crates and wooden boards. Begin stood on it and emotionally called out to the crowd gathered around him: ‘My brothers and sisters, children of Israel, I am here to tell you that we will do everything, and we will raise a loud outcry, in order to ensure that the state, which receives millions of dollars from world Jewry, uses this money in the right way and gets the inhabitants of the transit camps into housing that is fit for human habitation.’
Begin spoke to them 'at eye level,' not as someone who was above them but as one of them, and they returned his love and support. And the rest is part of Israeli history.\textsuperscript{371}

I believe Begin's first three words, “My brothers and sisters,” encapsulated the entire difference between Begin and the Labor leaders. For Begin, these were real brothers and sisters, a loving family. For Labor, they were a separate people whom they genuinely wanted to help, but without sharing the same fate.

What was it in Begin that enabled him to communicate so easily with the Oriental Jews? This is what Yithak Shamir (his successor as Likud prime minister) said about this ability:

It is a fact, in my opinion, that Begin came to power solely because of his speeches. He…was probably the first to speak to an audience that he did not know — the new immigrants from the eastern countries. He found the way to their hearts. Over the years, they and their children and their children's children became his most devoted supporters. This is what essentially stamped his political influence on the course of events in Israel… It was entirely his own project. No one in the country came close to him in this respect. No one else could claim similar oratorical success.\textsuperscript{372}

Begin’s example of sacrificing one’s entire individuality to become a simple Jew or the embodiment of the Jewish people was the truth that won over these new immigrants. He offered them their rights as brothers. Labor leaders, in contrast, had individual calculations and interests and they offered the newcomers their civil rights in legal terms only.

\textsuperscript{371}Aizakson, 2003, p. 15

\textsuperscript{372}Aizakson, 2003, p. 68
But Begin did not just offer them only brotherhood; he was also able to translate Israel's democratic system of law for these oriental Jews from the Arab countries who had never experienced anything like it. Surprisingly — to some — he did the same in regard to Arab Israelis. In a 1952 speech entitled "Life Perspective and National Perspective," Begin said:

… but there is no doubt that the danger in blurring the boundaries between the executive and the legislative branches is less severe than the danger of erasing the boundaries between the executive branch and the judicial one. An independent judiciary is the final bastion of human liberty in our times. As long as this bastion exists, the murk may be repelled. Should it fall, then nothing can save a person caught between the ruling authority's grindstones. …The epidemic of 'emergency laws' only goes to show that today in our country we must to fight for [judicial independence]… The superiority of the law will be expressed by a group of independent judges that are granted not only the authority to determine, in the case of a complaint, the legality or justness of an order or administrative directive from the executive branch, but also the authority to judge, in the case of a complaint, whether the laws enacted by the parliament (which are enacted, as we have seen, under significant or decisive government influence) are reconciled with the Basic Laws or if they contradict the civil rights guaranteed to citizens by those laws…. Every citizen should have the right of redress in regard to legislation he believes causes him harm, either directly or indirectly. 373

As an opposition leader, Begin explained to citizens that the role of an independent judicial system was the defense of the ordinary citizen vis-à-vis the authority. At this time, the emergency laws were primarily intended to restrict Arab Israelis in various respects (banning night travel, for example).

In the same spirit, Begin rejected Ben-Gurion's proposal that Knesset members who were Communists should be expelled from the parliament for being ‘foreign agents’. “If you can prove that they have endangered Israel’s security, you can take

373 Aizakson, 2003, p. 17
action against them,” he said. “But as long as they were legally elected, you cannot expel them.”

In the third election, in mid-1955, the Labor Party won 40 seats, a loss of six, and Begin’s party rose to 15, a gain of seven. Thus Herut became the largest opposition party in parliament.

The background to the following debate was an attempt by the government and the Jewish Agency to institute selective immigration from Morocco by excluding the ill and elderly. On September 1, 1955 Begin told the Knesset:

Dear chairman, our country has withstood, and will continue to withstand many tests of blood, tears and death. But nothing is more grave and exalted than the test of rescuing brethren. This is the test we face today. This time, trouble has befallen our people in the North Africa countries, especially Morocco.

But what reactions do we hear about the danger confronting our brothers? I will start with an unofficial reaction. A major newspaper recently published an article whose author tried to argue that it has yet to be proven that the danger to our brethren in Morocco is a danger to the Jews. Maybe it is a danger to non-Arab citizens, among whom there are also Jews; therefore there is no point in rushing in and transferring them to Israel. There is still time to consider it. I would suggest to the writer of this article, or to the chief editor of that newspaper, that he do a personal experiment: Let him go spend one Saturday in a town called Kamed-Zam, let him sit in a house there and suddenly hear the shouts of a wild crowd. Looking through the window he will see wild people, knives in their hands, led by women who have scratched their faces with their fingernails, coming toward the house to attack him. I would like to know if the author of this article or the newspaper's chief editor would be able at that moment to judge whether the danger to him was a danger to a Jew or to a European, and I would await – should he come out of this experiment alive – a telegram from him: 'Don't hurry to bring me to Israel, because the type of danger I'm facing still hasn't been clarified.'

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374Dov Goldstein, Ma’ariv, Sep. 12, 1977
Don’t you hear the echo of those words: 'the scope of immigration is dependent upon absorption ability?' Once you conducted demonstrations against [this attitude] … …I’ve heard the familiar words: 'Don't panic.' We heard it in the past, we heard it in Europe, we heard it before the Second World War and we all know what the results were...

I did not come here today to criticize or talk about the past. Certainly, if during the past years you had established a system of investments instead of a system of monopoly that hinders investments, there would be no need to call upon the Jews of the world. If you had not wasted millions building luxury palaces there would be money for absorption... The saving of life takes precedence over not only the Sabbath [i.e., observance of the Sabbath laws], but also the development of our economy for a more distant future…If there is a rescue plan, we will also assume the burden, because rescue supercedes everything else.\(^\text{375}\)

The idea of selective immigration to Israel, an idea rejected by Jabotinsky, was supported by the Labor Movement many years before the establishment of the state. In this case, as in others where Jewish human suffering was concerned, Begin, as in the Holocaust, saw the individual need while the Left tended to make colder calculations. In the long run, Begin was proven right – for one thing, because the contribution of the Oriental Jews to Israel was immense. What is it in the psychological separation-individuation process that the Israeli Left goes through that hinders it, at least to some extent, from being able to feel sympathy for fellow Jews? When one deconstructs the Jewish family, he or she separates not only from his parents but also from his people and thus is no longer incapable of understanding Begin's mindset.

In a July 9, 1956 Knesset debate entitled “A Constitution for Israel,” Begin spoke about the importance of a constitution for defending the weak. His life experience led

\(^{375}\) Aizakson, 2003, p. 102-103
him to be very sensitive to institutional aggression, power relations and the struggle of the deprived against authority. The massive Labor majority in the Knesset during the first three decades of Israel's existence, and a relatively small opposition was problematic in various respects as regards the democracy of the young state. For example, members of right-wing parties could not get government jobs or be employed in many institutions, companies and enterprises where, given the socialist economy, the government was involved. Promotion in the army was even more of a problem. The ruling party, along with its allied leftist parties, also controlled the workers through the General Federation of Workers (Histadrut), and the services of the country's major health services and welfare facilities which belonged to the Histadrut were also denied to Herut members. Begin and his party were also being ignored by the media at this time. Begin, as the head of the opposition, had to be the guardian of democracy when Israel did not have a constitution that could have made his job easier by putting limits on the Parliament's legislative freedom. (Israel does not have a constitution today [2004] because of deep fundamental problems concerning the relationship of state and religion; the religious parties reject the very idea of a constitution, claiming that the Bible, its commentaries and the rabbis as arbiters is enough. The secular and many modern religious citizens favor a constitution.) Begin ended his speech with a reference to the government’s control of the people through fear -- the fear of losing one’s job, or not getting one at all, and starving.

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376 Haber, 1978, p. 245

377 Kadishai, 1993
…It is a mistake to think that the rule of the people or democracy is expressed only in that there is a majority and a minority. It is clear that the majority decides and the minority accepts its decisions even if it opposes them. But the minority appeals to the people, and so one day the minority becomes the majority and the majority becomes the minority, and this happens time and again. This is the formal side of the rule of the people. But even for the elected ruling authority, rule is not unlimited and the ruling authority freely acknowledges this.

In this respect, [the American statesman, Alexander] Hamilton, one of the greatest [political] philosophers, warned us: ‘Concentration of all authority — constitutional, judicial and executive in the same hands — whether those of one person, a few, or in the hands of the many, whether inherited, self-nominated or elected — in such cases this concentration of authority can rightly be called a dictatorship.’

What is the situation in our country? The government supervises its majority within the Knesset more than the Knesset supervises the government. According to the Emergency Regulations, the government also has juridical authority. If you take all these factors together, you will arrive at Hamilton's conclusion: even if it has a duly elected majority, the concentration of all authority — constitutional, judicial and executive — in the same hands is the very definition of tyranny.

In order to prevent this from occurring, we propose that the House [Knesset], of its own free will, legislate a law regarding itself, limiting its authority, and state that the Knesset will not legislate any law that restricts freedom of expression, whether in writing or speech, nor that it restrict any kind of union or other basic human and civil rights.…

These are our fundamental proposals regarding amendments to Knesset legislation — in light of the fact that we do not yet have a complete constitution. If the majority rejects our proposals, esteemed Knesset members, and if years pass by without a constitution for Israel, I am convinced that the day will come when a government elected by our people fulfills the first promise given to our people at the time of the state's founding: the selection of a constitutional committee whose role, like in any other country... is to grant a constitution to the people that ensures the freedom of the citizen and of the entire people. I am sure the day will come when the people will elect a government that will institute this constitutional act. Then the people will be free — free from fear, free from hunger and free from the fear of being starved by others. This day will come. I sense it approaching. 378

378 Aizakson, 2003, p. 78-79
In late 1955, there were armed infiltrations from Egypt and Israeli reprisals along the common border. Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian president, accelerated the pace of his country’s rearmament with large stocks of weapons from Czechoslovakia. He demanded that for peace, Israel cede to Egypt that part of the Negev Desert outside the UN partition plan (conquered during Israel’s War of Independence). He even had the tacit support of the U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, who upheld President Harry S. Truman's position that those parts of Israel outside the partition plan were occupied Arab territory.\(^{379}\) In another belligerent move, the Egyptians barred Israeli ships from entering or leaving the Red Sea on their way to or from Eilat by blocking the Tiran Straits. Furthermore, after Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, in July 1956, it was closed to shipping to and from Israel.

Begin ridiculed the idea of the “security guarantees” or the mutual defense agreement with the White House that were then on the agenda. As usual, he felt that humiliation leads to extermination, because no one wants to help the humiliated, while everyone respects the strong and powerful:

> If the Mexicans invade America, we will rush over to save the day and drive them back across the border! But if the Arabs attack, from America we will get a mere promise. He said security can come only from within. “To ask for a guarantee is a mistake. To beg for it is a humiliation. To receive it: a catastrophe! Israel must go to war: a war of self-defense, a war to put an end to an undeclared war that gets worse with each day.”\(^{380}\)

\(^{379}\) Temko, 1987, p. 143, 385

\(^{380}\) Official Knesset record, November 2, 1955, translation Temko, 1987, p. 143
In January 1956, Begin spoke to the Knesset about whether a small state can resist the pressure of great powers. For Begin, as we have seen, any sign of surrender or weakness was out of the question. Honor was the only guarantee for survival. The Labor Party, on the other hand, thought in entirely different terms, those of negotiations, bargaining, partial agreements, etc. Begin said:

In the thirties, the impression was that it [a small state] could not. In the fifties it has been proved possible, provided the small powers found they had something hard in their grip. There are the examples of Yugoslavia and Formosa… The small state must not be ready to make concessions, for once it offers concessions at a time of pressure it only invites more pressure upon itself. 381

In spring 1956, as the situation along the Egyptian border kept deteriorating, Begin submitted a no-confidence motion in the Knesset which, naturally, failed. He declared that Israel would have to fight sooner or later, the only question was when Ben-Gurion would wake up.

When Ben-Gurion replied things immediately got out of control.

Ben-Gurion: “You did not fight in the last war and will not fight in the next!”

Begin: “You were a traitor to Israel! Traitor!”

On October, 28, 1956, Ben-Gurion, laid up with bronchitis, called Begin to his bedside and informed him about the Anglo-French-Israeli stratagem the world was to know as the Suez War, and the Israelis as the Sinai Campaign, telling him that the next day Israel would invade Sinai with French and British help. Begin was less surprised by the war than by the fact that Ben-Gurion shared the information with him. He approached Ben-Gurion and declared: “I applaud your courageous decision.

381 Knesset records, translation Temko, 1987, p. 144
Rest assured of our support.” Then he grasped Ben-Gurion's hand and held it “as if they were lovers.”

In a few days, with the aid of Britain and France, Israel conquered the Sinai Peninsula. International pressure, including economic and military threats from the US, Russia and the UN, began to mount for Israel to withdraw from all of Sinai. At the beginning of 1957, Ben-Gurion gave in and ordered the army to pull back. Begin protested the action. In his speech entitled: “The Flag of Israel Will Yet Fly Over Gaza,” Begin said:

Complete withdrawal! At that moment every man in Israel must have recalled our history – when the nation first set foot in Gaza. After the death of Joshua, the Lord ordered the tribe of Judah to continue with its conquest of the land. And Judah turned to his brother Shimon and asked him to cast his lot with him; and they went together and conquered Jerusalem, Hebron, Safad, and Gaza and its border, and Ashkelon and its borders. All this happened before the Judges judged, before the Kings reigned and before the Prophets prophesied. Four thousand years ago Gaza was a town in Israel and part and parcel of the country! At that time our standard was flying aloft in that town. In later years this town fell into the hands of the enemy. The Bible tells of Midian and Amalek who destroyed the harvest of the country right up to Gaza; of the Philistines against whom a Judge arose, a hero in Israel, who fought the Philistine enemy, was imprisoned by them and brought to Gaza to die; and who in his last moments said: “Let me die with the Philistines”…

Gaza will not remain under foreign rule forever – we will yet liberate Gaza again!.. When he [Jabotinsky], and we, fought for a Jewish State - you opposed the idea of its establishment for 20 years… But you remember the day before the Sinai campaign when you invited me to your house, when you offered me your hand and told me of the Sinai Campaign. I did not refuse to accept the hand which you offered me. I did not hesitate to offer you my hand in order to put a stop to the intrigues of those who wished us ill. My friends – I did not refuse for the sake of our country, for the sake of our people, for the sake of our army, for the sake of our victory, for the sake of our security, for the sake of Israel. And united nation arose behind our conquering and victorious army. But later you started to retreat…

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382 Temko, 1987, p. 144
Soldiers of Israel – you will once again fly anew the Hebrew flag from liberated Gaza!... Gaza was, and Gaza will be, a liberated Hebrew town. Gaza to us is like Beersheba, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.383

Abroad, Begin argued that the West Bank and Gaza are part of Israel, annexed or conquered illegally by Jordan and Egypt respectively. He did not criticize Ben-Gurion — it was a Jewish family matter — but he did attack the US and Russia, and argued that after Israel proved its strength, if the US has any sense it would crave Israel's friendship.384 Ben-Gurion did gain a significant achievement: American guarantees for free Israeli passage in the Red Sea and peace along the Egyptian borders for a decade.

It was well-known then that most of the army high commanders, and especially the commander in chief, had Labor Party attitudes. On June 18, 1958, in a speech before the Knesset entitled, “The Participation of Army Officers in Party Assemblies,” Begin also assumed the task of guarding another aspect of a democratic society, declaring that the army not be politicized:

Esteemed chairman: Two principles must be adopted concerning our attitude to the army: A. The Israeli army is the army of the entire nation, loved by all its faithful sons; B. The principle of absolute superiority of the elected civil authority over the state's armed forces. In order to uphold these two principles, all of our commanders must refrain and distance themselves from any political or party activity. I am sorry to say that recently there have been breaches of this rule and one of them — though not the only one — is connected to the former Chief of General Staff.

383December, 1956; Hurwitz, 1977, p. 74

Concerning Major-General Dayan, none of us needs to be told that he should be treated with courtesy and respect. I am sure that all of us, regardless of political party or outlook, respect Major-General Dayan as an outstanding soldier and excellent commander who has contributed much…. And I say these things although I believe that perhaps next year Mr. Dayan will issue a call to support a certain party that my friends and I will be calling to transfer to the opposition. There is no contradiction. We support rivalry out of respect, mutual respect.

… Whether Major-General Dayan's ideas are original or derivative, helpful or harmful, right or wrong, does not matter. The question is whether he should express them at all while still a major-general in our army. And he is not the only one [i.e., army officer] who has appeared in party promotion assemblies. Other senior officers have also participated in what were obviously party assemblies. This is not a good thing. It is not good for the army, nor is it good for the senior officers themselves. At one party assembly in which high-ranking officers participated, one of the orators tried to prove that the major-generals are faithful to one party — or as the member of this same party like to call it: The Party. Again, this is a very unhealthy phenomenon.385

Then and for years afterwards, many retiring senior army officers immediately joined the Labor Party, which was full of retired generals. Those retired senior officers were well-known and appreciated by the people and, as such, were electoral assets. In Israel, where the military has such a central role, it was and still is especially important for it to be detached from politics for the sake of democracy. There has been no real threat to democracy by the army in Israel as is the case in some other countries, where there have been military coups, for example. But still, the affiliation between the power of the military and a certain party is in itself enough to create a less liberated and free atmosphere among the people, as Begin made clear.

Begin also differed from the Left as well as from most of the Western world by his rejection of the separation between religion and state. For him, such a detachment from Judaism, from his connection to himself and to his past, was unthinkable. While

385 Aizakson, 2003, p. 128-129
for most of the leftists, the new identity of Israeli, often separated from religious family roots, was adopted naturally.

The following debate in the Knesset concerned the question of whether it was possible for Jews to separate nationality and religion. Many secular Jews in Israel complain they suffer from the religious laws that have such dominance in various aspects of society. For example, there is no public transportation (in most cities) on Saturday and many movie theaters are closed; non-Kosher food cannot be purchased in most groceries and supermarkets, and there is no official civil marriage because the clergy hold sway in matters of personal status. Moreover, ultra-orthodox youth in the yeshivas (religious studies academies) do not serve in the army. Other examples may be cited. In this debate, Begin related to the many people who felt they were Jews, or wanted to be Jews, and also immigrated to Israel, but were not considered Jews by the religious establishment because their mother was not Jewish (Jewish identity is matrilineal). The rabbis still place many obstacles along the way of those wishing to convert to Judaism (difficult tests in knowledge of Judaism, long waiting periods, etc.). As a result, much animosity has developed between secular and religious Jews. The seculars complain about the “religious coercion” that restricts their freedom in different respects. Religious Jews, on the other hand, argue that Israel is a Jewish state and religion must be respected. The mutual animosity has soared to such proportions that with a platform calling for an end to religious coercion, the Shinui (Change) Party won 15 seats in the 2003 Knesset election. (Labor won 19 seats, half as much as the ruling Likud). Compared to the West, where there is a tradition of separation of religion and state, the situation in Israel is complicated by the fact that there is usually a delicate political balance between the secular and religious parties. Though the secular have a clear majority, the religious parties can tip the balance between leftist
and rightist domination, which impedes moves towards major change (a quarter of Israelis voted for religious parties and many others are traditional to one extent or another).

The background to this speech was Ben-Gurion's attempt in the middle of 1958 to liberalize the criteria for determining Jewish identity. According to his proposal, a Jew would be able to declare himself as such without need of approval from the religious authorities. Begin, as we see, rejected the idea of nullifying rabbinical authority, but still believed that the rabbis should be more flexible and accept a person’s declaration of belief.

…Now we have the question of whether it is possible for Jews to separate between their nationality and their religion. My conscience tells me: we do not need this separation for Jews between nationality and religion, separation is not possible, separation is forbidden, it is impossible.

You may ask: why? There are large civilizations for whom such separation does exist. The French can be Catholic, Protestant or Muslim. Arabs can be Muslim or Christian. Indians can be Brahmin, Buddhist, Muslim or Christian. Why is separation not possible in our case?

This question reminds me of a conversation that once took place between Ze’ev Jabotinsky and the esteemed French philosopher and statesman, De Monzie. The French statesman told Jabotinsky: I accept the whole Zionist philosophy. I understand your desire to return to the land of your forefathers. I recognize your right to establish a state. There is one thing I can not understand or accept: Why do you need Hebrew? There are so many important and rich European languages while Hebrew has been a dead language for so many generations. Why do you need Hebrew in Israel? Ze’ev Jabotinsky thought for a minute and then replied: That's just how it is. De Monzie said: Now I understand, and added that there truly were questions for which the absence of a verbal explanation is the explanation.

And that is the answer why it is not possible to separate between nationality and religion for Jews – it's just not possible.

…There was a time — one of great eminence — when our rabbis sought to make it difficult for a non-Jew to join the Jewish people, both in terms of religion and nationality... Now is a different period, and as I see it, in accordance with my conscience, we do not have the right to dictate

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386 Kurzman, 1983, p. 426
conditions. We have the right, perhaps even the obligation, to demand from
the rabbis of our generation that they consider the different circumstances of
our time. A third of our people has been exterminated. Some [whose lives
were in danger] were saved by gentiles. They endangered their lives in order
to save our brethren. We must recognize this as a precious human vision.
And if they come to us, we must invite them in and accept them with love
and compassion... We cannot impose Judaism on them, but if they want to
accept Judaism, we should not put obstacles in their way... On the contrary,
we should make it easier for them... The rabbis of Israel made the Torah a
source of life because they knew how to make amendments that suited the
spirit of each generation. This is the demand that we can and maybe even
must make, and it will also surely change the atmosphere that has existed
until now. ... But I call on you... not to disconnect the bond... between our
people and the God of our forefathers.\footnote{July, 1958; Aizakson, 2003, p. 121}

Begin simply tells us that a separation of state and religion is inconceivable for
him. This may be because Begin had not gone through the psychological separation-
individuation process in which a person gradually separates from his family, people
and past while crystallizing a new individual identity in place of a collective one. But
there was an advantage to it as well. Begin had a rare ability to live the Bible in his
everyday life. In other words, he was able to connect Biblical language and ideas to
contemporary events and create an important sense of continuity for the Jewish
people. For example, he suggested combining Holocaust Memorial Day with Tisha
the Ninth of Av, the mourning day for the destruction of both Temples, as a way to
make the connection between the Jewish past and present.

Two incidents characteristic of Begin (which could never have happened to Ben-
Gurion, for example) hindered him in those pre-election days from changing his
public image (especially after the Altalena affair and the reparations agreement riots)
to a more calm and sober one.

\footnote{July, 1958; Aizakson, 2003, p. 121}
The first was on April 1, 1959. In the midst of a Knesset debate over the state budget, Israel Radio broadcast call-up codes for three army reserve units. This indicated an emergency and so was clearly not the time to criticize the government’s budget proposal. Begin asked for the floor and opened in a dramatic tone:

'The General Staff of our army has declared a general mobilization…’ Other Knesset members tried to remind him that only three units had been called… 'If our army mobilized as a result of what has happened, and is called into action, we shall all stand behind it.'

Soon it became clear that it was not a general call-up, only an exercise, and Ben-Gurion accepted responsibility. This showed that “Begin had rushed to support a possible war without even knowing the reason for the mobilization.”

The second episode was on Election Day. Begin hurried to keep up his packed speaking schedule in a sleek Cadillac, escorted by leather-jacketed Irgun youths on motorcycles. The association with fascist leaders was obvious and the damage was done.

No doubt, both mistakes were of the Begin type: a quick readiness to fight in the first, and an admiration of power in the second. Nevertheless, Begin became calmer over the years. He fully adopted the democratic system of the Knesset, was one of the more diligent of its members and was present at all its sessions. He was totally invested in his democratic role as head of the opposition. Actually, the Knesset became his new family (the fourth one after his original family, Betar Poland and the fighting family) and his loyalty to and respect for his new family members, whatever their opinions, were well known. From the moment Begin accepted democratic

388 Haber, 1978, p. 251-252

389 Temko, 1987, p. 147
authority, a new door opened for him to deal with the country's internal problems. Now that his outward aspirations were blocked, at least for a while, he could invest inwardly and bring a sense of pride and belonging to all the people ignored by the Labor Party.

Begin’s party won 19 seats in the 1959 election, two more than in the previous election, but Ben-Gurion’s party did better than ever with 47.
Begin kept on fighting for the deprived and against the ruling authority in his own Jewish style. On December 16, 1959, in a speech before the newly established government entitled, “Basic Problems of our National Existence,” Begin said:

Turning to internal problems, esteemed chairman, I would like to express my hope that in the fourth Knesset we will have time to legislate the Basic Laws, above all, the Basic Law that is called ‘The Rights of the Person and the Citizen.’

We do not accept the semi-official opinion that we heard in the third Knesset’s tenure whereby the state grants rights and the state also has the privilege to revoke rights. We believe that there are rights a person has which supercede the form of human life called a state.

Actually, this is the Hebrew tradition from ancient times. And this is the belief of all people who aspire for freedom. Maybe the simplest, most modern, and accurate definition of those rights, which predate the establishment of the state, is that of Jefferson: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. If this law is accepted by the Knesset… every person in Israel will know that he has the right to life, liberty, work and the pursuit of happiness, which is not granted as a favor, but belongs to him and will always remain his without regard to outlook or party affiliation or whatever his opinion about whatever government. Then, after an Israeli election, we will no longer be witness to the grave spectacle of people being fired out of political revenge.

In speaking about equal rights, I should like to touch upon the problem of the non-Jewish citizens of Israel, I mean the Arabs, Druze, Christians and Muslims…

1. The military government contradicts the principle of equal rights for all citizens. This principle should be completely fulfilled in the State of Israel.
2. The regulations of the military government are often exploited by the Labor Party to press the Arab citizens economically and politically for its own party needs…

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Aizakson, 2003, p. 12-15
For Begin, civil rights were not an abstract exercise in justice and fairness. Just as the Bible pities the orphan and the widow and instructs us to help them, he empathized with the suffering person – in this case an Arab or a right-wing voter, who finds himself helpless against the authority of the state. Begin's attitude toward civil rights also had a strong emotional component and therefore held a broader appeal.

Because of the crisis Ben-Gurion faced within his government, an unexpected election took place in 1961 in which Herut again won 17 seats and the Labor Party lost five. In 1963, Ben-Gurion abruptly retired for good, but not without leveling a number of parting shots at Begin.

“I was no partner of theirs when they glorified the name of Hitler,” he said in the Knesset and was not allowed to continue his speech. Herut members were on their feet screaming insults at the prime minister. The speaker of the Knesset closed the session. The next day, Ben-Gurion wrote a letter to one of the journalists who attacked him because of what he had said:

Begin is clearly a Hitlerist type. He is a racist willing to destroy all the Arabs for the sake of the completeness of the country, sanctifying all means for the sake of the sacred end – absolute rule. I see in him a severe danger to the internal and external situation of Israel. I cannot forget the little I know of his activity, and it has one clear significance: the murder of scores of Jews, Arabs, and Englishmen in the demolition of the King David Hotel; the pogrom in Dir Yassin and the murder of Arab women and children; the Altalena, which was designed for the seizure of power by force; the stoning of the Knesset by an incited rabble on the instructions of Begin – and had I not used the army to prevent the rabble from breaking into the Knesset, there would have been a massacre of Knesset members. These are not isolated acts, but a revelation of method, character, and aspiration.”

Ben-Gurion predicted that if Begin took over, he would replace the high command of army and police with his hooligans, and would rule the way Hitler did in Germany, suppressing the workers’ movement with force and cruelty and indulging in a political adventurism that would destroy the state.
“I do not doubt that Begin hates Hitler, but that hatred does not prove that he is any different. When I first heard him make a speech over the radio, I could hear the voice and screeching of Hitler. And when I saw in the Knesset the fervor on the faces of Begin and Ben-Eliezer, I was familiar with that murderous expression.”

What made Ben-Gurion hate Begin so much? What was it about Begin that he could not bear?

Ben-Gurion gives us the answer in his final statements. It was not Begin’s intellectual ideas that first aroused this aversion in Ben-Gurion, but his voice and the fervor of his expression. For a person who went through a separation-individuation process as Ben-Gurion had, and whose emotional life was invested inside and not outside, it might be - as for many Westerners or, in our case, Labor Party voters - hard to tolerate someone who radiates emotion and actually invites you to have the kind of highly involved relationship that you have left behind or repressed many years ago and no longer want. It is indeed well known how badly Begin craved a closer relationship with Ben-Gurion and how Ben-Gurion rejected him. Individuals who have made themselves distinct from the group celebrate their uniqueness and self-fulfillment and strongly reject dramatization emanating from group relations. In this case, Ben-Gurion went to an extreme, but over the years, many others despised Begin too, for the same reason if not with the same vigor.

In 1964, Levi Eshkol, Israel’s Labor prime minister who succeeded Ben-Gurion, agreed to Begin’s request to bring the bones of Jabotinsky and his wife to be buried in Israel. Ben-Gurion dismissed this idea, remarking cynically that we should bring to

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391 Haber, 1978, p. 255
Israel live Jews and not dead ones. Herut could have done it without an official government order. But then it would have contradicted Jabotinsky’s will, which said: “I request that when a Jewish government arises in the land of Israel, it will order my bones re-interred in the Land of Israel.”

The funeral was conducted on July 9, 1964. No government representative attended and the government did not contribute any money for this purpose. But Eshkol suggested that Jabotinsky should be buried on Mount Herzl in the plot reserved for Zionist leaders. Herut members willingly paid and also painted their rented cars in military colors for this occasion. The Irgun High Command members marched before the coffins and among the thousands who participated in the funeral.

“When the coffins of Jabotinsky and his wife arrived in Israel, it was as if Herut, the Irgun and Betar had all finally attained legitimacy.” Begin, according to many, was finally accepted and granted recognition. Respect for Jabotinsky by the Labor Party was also a sign of respect toward Begin.

In April 1965, six months before Election Day, an alliance was signed between the Liberal Party and Herut. The background to this act was Begin’s gradual understanding that it would be hard for him to triumph over the Labor Party alone. The Liberals were more interested in economic issues than in political ones and they objected to Labor’s socialist approach. In the 1961 election, they won 17 seats, the same number as Herut, and most of their voters were middle-class merchants, landlords, etc. Herut accepted their economic policy and the Liberals accepted Herut’s foreign policy. In this way, a centrist-right party by the name of Gahal (Herut-Liberal

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392 Kadishai, 2002

393 Silver, 1984, p. 257

394 Haber, 1978, p. 257, also Channel 8, Israeli TV, Oct/Nov, 2003, program on Begin
bloc) was formed and headed by Begin. It had a total of 27 seats (because a few Liberal parliament members rejected the agreement), which made Begin still more acceptable. An additional important concession was Begin’s willingness to give up mentioning both banks of the Jordan in favor of a vague formula: “The right of the Jewish people to their historical homeland is eternal and irrefutable.”

On Election Day, November 2, 1965, Gahal won 26 seats, one fewer then its previous combined strength, while Labor won 45, four more than the pre-election strength of its constituent parties, and despite the fact that Ben-Gurion ran on a separate list.

For some people in Herut, this additional defeat led by Begin and his close comrades was enough. They blamed the leadership and especially Begin, claiming that his rigidity distanced voters from the party. They criticized his old-fashioned mannerisms that were unlike those of a “sabra,” his image as someone who invites war and also his attachment to his old comrades from the Irgun.

At Herut’s eighth national convention in June 1966, the opposition to Begin led by Shmuel Tamir (a successful lawyer and former Irgun officer who was liked and promoted by Begin) rebelled and called for Begin and the entire leadership to resign. Pandemonium broke out. Begin sprang up to defend the opposition, saying that if they were not permitted to talk, he would leave the convention. He said he was proud that there were delegates ready to express their opinions and make proposals.  

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395 Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 218

396 Silver, 1984, p. 125
On the next day of the convention, Begin announced his resignation as leader and, after some pressure from his loyal supporters, consented to remain a member of the party executive. “He is not a private person, but belongs to the movement and is part of the nation’s history,” said one of his loyalists.\footnote{ibid}

But Begin was stunned; “You could see how it hurt him,” said one of his comrades from the Irgun.\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 167} Suddenly he began to speak. There was silence and he spoke for three hours. He craved acceptance from the Jewish people and also from Ben-Gurion. He said he had been tired and had considered retiring anyway; maybe, he said, Herut could do better without him:

But there is a limit to what a public figure can bear. There is a limit to public cruelty towards a man. They call on me to retire from public life. I did not retire, neither because I was hated nor because I was loved. But what wrong did I do to this people all my life? What wrong did I do to Mr. Ben-Gurion that he hated me so? Was it because my friends and I fought for the state, of which Ben-Gurion became the first prime minister with our consent...? They worked behind my back [Tamir and his group]. They set up a coalition. They did not inform me. They left me like a blind man groping in the dark. Did they think I was the premier of Monaco to have a cabinet thrust upon me without my knowledge?\footnote{ibid}

As many of the crowd wept, Begin announced that he was leaving the party and would not return; they could get along without him. “The hall reverberated to thunderous applause as, pale-faced and red-eyed, he stepped slowly off the platform,” said one of the journalists who was there. He described the atmosphere:

The speech was a painful experience because of the confession of deep personal hurt. Some of the journalists at the press table to whom I spoke afterwards confessed to a considerable measure of embarrassment, as they sat in the midst of this
intimate confession from the distraught man on the rostrum, while around us sat crying women. We felt that we were witnessing the disintegration of a public figure.400

Begin indeed went home. He refused to participate in any party meetings. “He lost his appetite, dropping more than 20 pounds (9 Kilograms) in the week after the convention,” said Shmuel Tamir. “He seemed so hurt. He felt he had opened himself up to Tamir,” said another comrade.401

Finally, Meridor (One of the people closest to Begin; Meridor had given Begin the command of the Irgun), succeeded in throwing Tamir and his group out of the party because of a scandal over a forged anti-Begin letter to Haaretz newspaper.

I had to do it,” Meridor said. “There are a lot of things I did for Begin because I knew he would not do them on his own, but that had to be done. I never asked him. I did them. Later, he might shout at me, say I shouldn’t have. But I knew it was for his benefit.402

After Tamir left the party and Begin’s loyalists remained, Begin returned to the party. He regained weight and kept on working as though nothing had happened. Meridor’s description of his relationship with Begin closely resembles the kind of clear, inseparable bond we often hear mothers describe regarding their relationships with their children. Mothers do things for their child that, while both of them are probably aware that it is for the child’s benefit, the child would not do for herself and would leave her mother to do for her over her protests – while remaining exempt from any responsibility for doing this unpleasant thing. In this case, Begin remained the poor good guy who did not have to throw Tamir out of the party because Meridor did

400 Silver, 1984, p. 126

401 Temko, 1987, p. 168

402 Temko, 1987, p. 168
the dirty work for him. Thus Begin remained the pure victim and did not have to retain within himself his “bad” characteristics, his aggression towards those who attacked him. And indeed, when he spoke at the convention, people wept. He evoked within them guilt feelings, because he did not fight back. More than that, he expressed support for those who attacked him at the convention. Yehiel Kadishai (Begin’s chief personal aide from 1964) said that he knew when Begin was angry by how he looked, but that he did not express it in any other way. In this way Begin invited his closest comrades to understand him without words, as a mother understands her preverbal child, thus creating an inseparable, unified bond between them. These accounts of Begin exemplify what it means for the separation-individuation process to be absent.

A close aide's description of Begin’s relationship with his wife Aliza gives us an additional insight into this absence of individuality:

Begin relied on Aliza as he did on no one else… and consulted with her about everything… Rarely would Aliza deliver an opinion on a particular issue; almost never would she disagree. This, Begin neither sought nor needed from anyone. Her role was to listen, support. In times of crisis she gave Begin a haven for recovery, encouragement to carry on. She was his foundation… Begin came before everything to Aliza – even before the children… He would never consider participating in a particular event without having Aliza by his side… They understood each other without talking… For Aliza, Begin had no defect”

Above all, this relationship resembles the one between a child and his adoring mother who sacrifices herself and her narcissistic needs, and places the child completely at the center. The type of nonverbal mutual understanding depicted in Kadishai’s relationship with Begin requires identification and the feeling of being as one. We must also remember that Aliza had an identical twin who was murdered in the Holocaust together with the rest of her family. The traumatic separation Aliza had experienced probably aggravated her need for an inseparable type of relationship.

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403 ibid, pp. 205, 407
Giving herself over so completely to Menachem seems to have been a kind of replacement for her lost twin and family. Actually, they were two orphans sticking together in an attempt to build a new family and survive. Their first two children, son Benjamin Ze’ev and daughter Chassia, were named after Begin’s murdered parents; the last child, Lea, was named after Aliza’s twin.

In one of his speeches, Begin incidentally pointed to the connection between his absence of individuality, his relationships with his parents and historical events. His Jewish family orientation had crystallized prior to the Holocaust, as we have seen. But the Holocaust led this attitude to become fixed without any change throughout the years, as he explained to the Knesset when voicing his support for the law prohibiting the breeding of pigs:

…Could I, respected chairman, tell you about a personal experience of mine? Once, as a small child, I came to a gentile school. The first event of that day, which I will never forget, was the attempt by other students to force me to eat this [pig] meat or to spread its fat on my lips. I was a child and they were many in number. I remember the fight, the struggle and everything that happened inside me - my attempt to prevent it, the emotional shock. I was 10 years old. And I believe every child who went through such an experience behaved like me.

We came from Jewish homes. We received a certain education. These homes were demolished. Our fathers were exterminated. We were taught the eternal commandment: ‘Honor your father and your mother.’ This is one of the greatest historical visions of our tradition, for this commandment contains all of the good and exalted human emotions; The relationship of a child to his mother, of a son to his father, good-heartedness, compassion and kindness are all included in this instruction. But our parents are gone. This commandment to honor your father and your mother applies to a living father and mother. In my view, it is even more imperative in regard to a father and mother who are gone.⁴⁰⁴

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⁴⁰⁴ February 19, 1962, Aizakson, 2003, p. 118-120
Begin was saying that the murder of his parents and his people in the Holocaust obliged him to remain faithful to what he considered their will. As trauma often does, the Holocaust left Begin -- like many other Jews -- fixated in part of his past emotional life and unable to contemplate any move toward separation and change.

In May 1967, Egypt’s President Gamal Abdel Nasser moved his army into the Sinai and ordered United Nations peacekeepers there to leave. In addition, he again blocked Israel’s outlet through the Red Sea by closing the Straits of Tiran to the passage of Israeli ships. The blockade took place despite US guarantees given when Israel withdrew after the Sinai war of 1956, as Begin had predicted. Now Begin demanded that Nasser be issued an ultimatum. If he took one step more, there would be war! On May 22, 1967, Begin also argued before the Knesset about the need to be clear:

…”We must speak clearly to the world and to our enemy. There is a famous story about the eve of the First World War. The foreign minister of England then was Gray. After the war, analysts said that he had not been clear with one of the European countries, and had he warned it about the consequences of an aggressive declaration of war, and had he spoken more explicitly on England's behalf, perhaps this terrible war could have been avoided.

In order to prevent a deterioration of the situation and a hostile action that could develop into an all-out war, your obligation today, Mr. Prime Minister, is to speak clearly and explicitly. It is the Knesset's obligation to speak clearly.”

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405 Temko, 1987, p. 169
406 Aizakson, 2003, p. 128
With the threat of war hovering, and weakened by the split of the Rafi party (headed by Ben-Gurion and including Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres) from the Labor Party, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol invited Begin for consultations concerning the formation of a national-unity government.

Begin told Eshkol that his party would join the broadened coalition if it were headed by Ben-Gurion as its prime minister. He explained this demand by emphasizing the genuine danger facing Israel and asked Eshkol to compromise by accepting Ben-Gurion’s leadership again. Eshkol rejected the idea, saying that “these two horses can no longer pull together.”

Begin called Ben-Gurion, met with him and tried to persuade him to lead, as prime minister, an invasion by the Israeli army into Sinai. Ben-Gurion did not believe the Israeli army could win and suggested seeking assistance from the Great Powers. Ben-Gurion also suggested that the army capture Sharm e-Sheikh, at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula that controls the strait, and end the crisis in this way. It was clearly the unrealistic plan of someone who did not comprehend the situation in which the Egyptian army was deployed on Israel's border. Begin had no choice but to give up the campaign for returning Ben-Gurion to power.

Begin’s attempt to return Ben-Gurion to power was in sharp contrast to the vow he made following Ben-Gurion’s Sinai retreat of 1957, in which he promised that they would remain opponents until Judgment Day. It is even more noteworthy in light of the way Ben-Gurion treated Begin only four years earlier, when he compared him to

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407 Dayan, 1976, p. 335; Silver, 1984, p. 128

408 Silver, 1984, p. 128

409 Temko, 1987, p. 389
Hitler. Ben-Gurion regularly refused to speak with Begin and when Begin rose to address the Knesset, Ben-Gurion would demonstratively walk out. Also, instead of referring to him by name, he would say “that man sitting next to Knesset member Bader.”\footnote{Hurwitz, 1994, p. 62} Begin's concerted effort to bring Ben-Gurion back was all the more astonishing because of the fact that everyone knew that Ben-Gurion, at this time 81 years old, was not the same Ben-Gurion of the past. “No one who had spoken to him or had watched his public appearances could believe that he had the power of objective analysis which had distinguished him in the past,” said one of the ministers who knew him well (Abba Eban). Another of Begin’s comrades said, “Begin did not even check out Ben-Gurion’s position, so blind was his admiration for the old man!” And still another comrade said that he was embarrassed for Begin and added, “The visit to Ben-Gurion was foolish.”\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 389}

Was Begin fighting to unite the Jewish family? Was Ben-Gurion a father image whom he had to respect, especially when he was old, regardless of their past? It seems that no matter what Ben-Gurion had done to him (including trying to murder him in the \textit{Altalena} episode), Begin felt obliged to remain his faithful admirer and was incapable of separating from him.

In late May 1967, the tension and apprehension of Israel’s citizens only increased when Eshkol gave a radio speech intended to rally the people around him. He stammered, sounded confused and raised the anxiety level of Israel’s citizens even higher. The need for unity also grew stronger and Israelis felt they had to fight for their lives. Now Begin said he was ready to participate in a national-unity
government, as long as Moshe Dayan became the defense minister. Dayan, one-eyed and wearing the black eye patch that later became his trademark, had been Chief of General Staff in the 1956 Sinai war. His reputation as an excellent commander was already well-established by this time. Begin, who first met him in 1943 during the Underground years (when they did not agree about which stance to take toward Britain) had always appreciated Dayan's proactive approach.

Here, too, we might wonder about Begin’s keen need to search for unity, this time without Ben-Gurion but with another Israeli symbol of power, to the point that his aides were again surprised by his move. This time Eshkol agreed. He appointed Dayan as defense minister and Begin as a minister without portfolio in his newly proclaimed national-unity government. Begin asked three of his most faithful comrades to accompany him to his inaugural session of the first cabinet meeting. There, at the door, he embraced them, shook their hands and then entered. One of them, Meridor, had tears in his eyes. It was another important step in Begin’s and Herut’s rehabilitation. Eshkol greeted everyone and then Begin asked for the floor. He gave a biblically-flavored speech of admiration for Israel’s unity. A good-humored Eshkol chuckled and said “Amen! Amen!” Then Begin led a group of his people to Jabotinsky’s grave on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem where he declared: “Sir, we have come to inform you that one of our followers is now serving in the government of Israel.”

On June 5, 1967, the Six-Day War began between Israel and a coalition comprised of Egypt, Jordan and Syria. A message sent to King Hussein of Jordan, with which

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412 Temko, 1987, p. 170
413 Haber, 1978, p. 267-268
414 ibid, p. 268

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Begin agreed, said that if the king did not attack Israel, there would be no attempt by Israel to invade the West Bank.\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 171} Back in 1947, Begin had stated that his greatest fear was that the Arabs would accept the partition plan. Now he was ready to offer it to Jordan and by doing so was actually prepared to give up his dream of “Greater Israel.” But Jordan did not accept this offer and attacked Israel.

In a surprise attack in the first hours of the war, the Israel Air Force demolished most of Egypt’s, Jordan’s and Syria’s airplanes still on the ground and secured Israel’s superiority in the air, which was crucial for Israel’s quick victory. Some would say that “Begin’s joy in this triumph and his excitement at being one of the inner circle let into the secret was almost boyish.”\footnote{Silver, 1984, p. 130} He was bursting with the news, hugging the people around him and running to tell the people who should know but did not know as yet, such as Golda Meir and Ben-Gurion. Now, after the Jordanian attack, he opened his campaign of pressing Eshkol and the cabinet to capture East Jerusalem (the Arab part of the city). When Jordanian shells fell on the lawn of the parliament house in West Jerusalem, the cabinet gave the order to encircle East Jerusalem.

Early on the morning of the third day of the war, Begin was listening to the BBC and heard of UN attempts to secure a cease-fire. Remembering the 1948 UN cease-fire that had prevented Israel from capturing East Jerusalem, Begin phoned Dayan and urged him to persuade Eshkol to convene a quick cabinet meeting for the purpose of ordering the capture of East Jerusalem. By the end of that day, East Jerusalem and its holy places were in Israeli hands. The next day, Begin came to see the Old City and
the Western Wall. At the wall, Begin recited a few psalms and a prayer he had composed especially for this occasion:

O God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Lord of Hosts, be Thou our help. Our enemies encompassed us about, yea they encompassed us about and arose to destroy us as a people. Yet has their counsel been destroyed and their schemes will not be accomplished. For there has arisen in our Homeland a new generation, the generation of liberty, a generation of warriors and heroes. And when they went forth to engage the enemy there burst forth from their hearts the call which echoes throughout the generations, the call from the father of the Prophets, the redeemer of Israel from the bondage of Egypt...

Today we stand before the Western Wall, the relic of the House of our Glory, in Jerusalem, the Redeemed, the City that is now all compact together, and from the depths of our hearts there arises the prayer that the Temple may be rebuilt speedily in our days.

He concluded his prayer by quoting from Jeremiah (chapter 3) – no words could better express Begin’s relationship with his mother:

A voice is heard in Ramah, wailing and bitter lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children, she refuseth to be comforted for her children, for they are not. Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears, for there is a reward for thy labour, saith the Lord, and they shall return from the land of the enemy. And there is hope for thy latter end, and thy children shall return to their border.  

“I cried; I suppose everyone had tears in their eyes... Nobody was ashamed. They were men’s tears,” he said.

The result of the Six-Day War was Israel’s occupation of the entire Sinai Peninsula up to the Suez Canal in the south, including the Gaza Strip; in the east, Israel occupied Arab East Jerusalem and the entire West Bank of the Jordan River, including its

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417 Translation: Hurwitz, 1977, p. 89-91
418 Hirschler, 1979, p. 241; Temko, 1987, p. 172
Jewish holy places such as Hebron (where the Cave of the Patriarchs is located), Rachel’s Tomb, Jericho, etc; in the north, Israel occupied Syria’s Golan Heights.

Israel’s victory and occupation of its biblical holy sites sparked a wave of religious revival. Many Israeli Jews streamed to the West Bank, excited by the old-new landscape they had heard about but had never dreamed they would visit. Even Eshkol was caught up in it and approved the establishment of several Jewish settlements in the West Bank (such as Kiryat Arba) and the resettlement of Jews in some of the Old City of Jerusalem. As early as three weeks after the war, Israel extended its laws to East Jerusalem. It was actually annexation. In this atmosphere of spiritual elation, Begin’s legitimization grew still greater. He became the prophet who foresaw the future. While he had largely stopped mentioning the East Bank of the Jordan River some time ago and his rhetoric on the subject had grown milder over the years, he now declared that those territories were not occupied but liberated, and that they would not be given up. On the one hand, Begin sat in the government and fought for certain semantic changes in any possible agreement, but on the other hand he did not veto Israeli diplomacy as practiced by Abba Eban, Israel’s foreign minister at this time. He also did not say no to Israeli attempts to negotiate with Hussein, and gave a little laugh when he was told of Hussein’s reply of “total rejection.”

In August 1967, two months after the war, the leaders of the Arab states, meeting in Khartoum, declared: “No negotiations with Israel; no peace with Israel; no recognition of Israel.”

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419 Silver, 1984, p. 132
420 Silver, 1984, p. 134
421 Hirschler, 1979, p. 243
On November, 22, 1967, the United Nations accepted Resolution 242, stating that Israel must withdraw from ‘territories’ -- not ‘the territories,’ i.e., not necessarily all the territories -- occupied in the Six-Day War in return for peace within secure and recognized borders.

The Labor Party suggested different partition maps of the West Bank for making peace. From today's perspective, it is easy to say that it was a narcissistic exercise of negotiating with oneself. Begin thought along different lines. He was not ready to reveal his intentions and thus weaken his position before knowing what others' intentions were. His sensitivity to the situation and to others, his collective- rather than individual-oriented personality, prevented him from falling into this trap.

Unlike Ben-Gurion, Eshkol respected Begin and related to him as a full partner, and shared information with him. In return, Begin never criticized Eshkol or the government in public, and even praised Eshkol on some occasions. He loved his work in the cabinet and was dedicated to it. The contrast between Begin, wearing a jacket and tie and addressing his colleagues as “Sir,” with the informality of the Labor Party’s unbuttoned style was striking. Before long, the Labor Party members started calling him “Mr. Begin” without irony. He used to kiss the hands of the women secretaries in the various offices. It did not matter to him that most of the secretaries were sabras who cringed when he did so. Paula, Ben-Gurion’s wife, said about him:

I think Begin is a nice man. In all his years of opposing my husband, there was never a time when if he saw me, he was not quick to greet me and shake my hand warmly.

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422 Silver, 1984, p. 135
423 Temko, 1987, p. 173
424 Haber, 1978, p. 266
But the ultimate legitimation for Begin came from Ben-Gurion himself. In a letter he sent to Begin (February, 6, 1969) while a member of the cabinet he wrote:

My Paula [Mrs. Ben-Gurion] somehow was always your admirer. I was the rival, sometimes in an acute way, to your way before and after the establishment of the state… I strongly rejected some of your stances and actions also after the establishment of the state and I am not sorry about it. I think I was right (everyone can make a mistake without noticing it). But on the personal level, I never had any resentment toward you. And as much as I have known you in the last years I have appreciated you more, and my Paula was happy for it.

In respect and appreciation
David Ben-Gurion

In his later years, Ben-Gurion was quite isolated politically and also personally. But Begin, as we saw, was among the few who continued to look up to him. Ben-Gurion, who had harshly rejected Begin before the establishment of the State and in the early years of Israel's independence, gradually became closer to him. This is what became of Ben-Gurion's youthful, hot-headed hatred over the years. Did Begin’s family love win out in the end? The answer is probably, yes.

In February 1969, Eshkol died of a heart attack and was replaced by Golda Meir. She proposed that Begin remain in the national-unity government and he accepted. Golda appreciated Begin's key qualities and his excellent way with words. She knew that, for him, the declaration – or clarification – of issues was just as important as the issues themselves, so she appointed him, and Galili from the Labor, as the two ministers who, after every cabinet meeting, would meet to formulate the communiqué

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425 Dolev, June, 10, 1977, Ma’ariv; Hirschler, 1979, 270-271
relating the government's decisions. This gave Begin satisfaction and much pleasure being a very intimate partner in the government's decisions.\footnote{Dinitz, 2002}

In the spring of 1969, the Israel's southern border with Egypt heated up again. Egypt received massive military aid from Russia, including planes, and used them to attack Israel and hold the eastern side of the Suez Canal. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip started to rebel by throwing stones at Israeli soldiers. In the US, the new Nixon administration launched its Middle East diplomacy. The October 1969 election passed relatively quietly. Begin was cautious in his criticism of the government he had been a part of for the past two and a half years. Gahal retained its power with 26 seats while the Labor Party in its re-formed coalition got 56 seats, seven less than the sum of its parts prior to the election.

When Golda asked Begin to stay in the new national-unity government she was trying to put together, Begin surprisingly was not enthusiastic about it. There had been some previous signs of uneasiness, but now he started pressing for two domestic issues. One was compulsory arbitration in case of strikes, which were very frequent at this time. It was Jabotinsky's idea as to how the workers could get what they deserved without harming the economy of the fledging state. Begin also wanted to establish national health insurance. The first request went against the basic socialist principles of the Labor Party which mandated the right of workers to strike, and Begin’s second request was intended to break the Histadrut's monopoly in this area. Begin had not appeared so committed to these issues in the past to be suggesting such changes and many believed he was using this as an excuse to leave the government. Golda exercised flexibility: She offered him more ministers, more influence within the government and agreed to drop specific mentioning of returning the West Bank for
peace. Some argued that Begin felt he had lost his hold on his party inside the coalition and believed that outside the coalition, his party would be more united. Most Herut and Liberal members wanted to stay in the government.

On the morning of December 10, 1969, the chances for a Labor-Gahal coalition looked slim. On that day, US Secretary of State William Rogers made public an agreement with Moscow for Middle East peace in which the US would pressure Israel and Russia would pressure the Arabs for a deal that involved exchanging land for peace. Rogers did not demand face-to-face negotiations between the adversaries. Minutes after the cabinet meeting during which Begin heard this information, he called his Liberal leader partner (Sapir) and told him they should drop their domestic demands, fight from within and stay in the government. By that evening the coalition was a fact thanks to Begin's loyalty.

Begin still enjoyed being involved in cabinet affairs. He saw his role as being the guardian of Israel's territories. He continued to treat Golda with respect, calling her “our senior sister” or “proud Jewess,” something she was not very fond of. He used to stop Labor members whenever he felt they were implying even the slightest bigger concession to the Arabs than they had before, telling them: “You did not say at all the same thing in the past,” said one of the Labor members. It was checked and found that “He was invariably right. He had a photographic memory for such things!”

Yehiel Kadishai, Begin's loyal aide since 1964, said it took Begin half a minute to read a

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427 Temko, 1987, p. 175
428 Hirschler, 1979, p. 253
429 Haber, 1978, p. 277
430 Temko, 1987, p. 176-177
letter and then he could answer it without resorting to the page again, that he always remembered the order of the questions, etc.

In his conversations with foreign politicians, Begin would emphasize Israel's right rather than its power as the source and reason for its existence. He never tired of repeating said that everything emanates from our right. When told by journalists that they'd heard this already, he used to smile and say, "Then I have nothing to add."\(^{431}\)

The war of attrition escalated in the beginning of 1970. In June, Rogers suggested that Israel and Egypt adopt a three-month cease-fire and enter peace negotiations with the aim of implementing UN resolution 242, which called for exchanging land for peace and for Israeli withdrawal from most if not all of the occupied territories. Again, Rogers did not mention direct negotiations between the parties.\(^{432}\) Surprisingly, Nasser agreed. Begin accepted the cease-fire but rejected the UN resolution that had been accepted by the first national-unity government that he was part of. Begin argued that there had been no debate or vote at the time of its acceptance. He insisted that Nasser sign a peace treaty with Israel before there could be any talks about withdrawal. Begin's principle was that without a peace treaty there will be no withdrawal.\(^{433}\) Another principle of Begin's that Eskol had respected was not to use the word 'withdrawal.' At that time, 'withdrawal' was like a magic word that many politicians wanted to extract from Israel. Supporting Begin's stance, Eshkol had argued that if we use the word 'withdrawal' we will immediately be asked "Where

\(^{431}\) Kadishai, 2002

\(^{432}\) Hirschler, 1979, p. 254

\(^{433}\) Kadishai, 2002
to?" And then Israel will have to answer – otherwise, the word would be meaningless.\textsuperscript{434}

Now Golda tried to persuade Begin to be more flexible. She told him that she also had problems with the Rogers Plan. “But we won’t have any cease-fire unless we also accept some of the less favorable conditions. And what’s more, we won’t get any arms from America.”

Begin replied: “What do you mean we won’t get arms? We’ll demand them from the Americans.”

Golda wrote:

I could not get it through to him that although the American commitment to Israel’s survival was certainly great, we needed Mr. Nixon and Mr. Rogers much more than they needed us… Gahal, intoxicated by its own rhetoric, had convinced itself that all we had to do was to go on telling the United States that we wouldn’t give in to any pressure whatsoever and if we did this long enough and loud enough, one day that pressure would just vanish. I can only describe this belief as mystical because it certainly wasn’t based on reality as I knew it”\textsuperscript{435}

Begin declared: “I will cut off my right hand if I sign such a document” (in a paraphrase of the line from Psalms, 137, 5: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.") and called it “a Middle Eastern Munich”\textsuperscript{436}

The difference between the two ways of thinking is clear. Golda thought in logical terms of negotiations. We have to give up something to get a cease-fire. We need America more than she needs us, so we should be flexible. But Begin could also appreciate the value of the emotional-psychological position and use it to great effect.

\textsuperscript{434} ibid

\textsuperscript{435} Meir, 1975, p. 385

\textsuperscript{436} Silver, 1984, p. 138
For him, negotiation was more than an intellectual exercise; it was also a kind of relationship. Begin was addressing the way it was done, concerned more with the form than the content. In the Knesset, he said:

Today we are the passive object of the policy of the Great Powers. They do not ask even us or consult us. They give us a letter to sign -- the government may refuse at first and insert some changes or reservations, but it is not our document that serves as the basis [for negotiations] but rather the one that was dictated at the outset.  

Begin spoke about the process that took place in which Israel was pressured and humiliated by the larger powers. But for Golda, such concepts were incomprehensible, even mystical. In her mind, logic was the basis for negotiations and issues of honor did not play any part. For Begin, the basis for peace was, first and foremost, honor. Furthermore, for Begin, peace was not just a theoretical exercise to be made alone. It was all about relations. By making a demand that seemed ridiculous to Golda and her Labor party members – that Nasser first sign a peace treaty before we talk about withdrawal, he invited Nasser to do something that would prove his honest intentions. (This principle will be implemented successfully in Begin's later negotiations with Sadat)

In August, the Knesset accepted the Rogers Plan. Gahal voted against it. Golda did not make an issue out of it, but Begin declared he was leaving the government. Golda proposed that he stay in the government and oppose her on the Rogers Plan from within, but Begin was determined to quit, saying it was too important an issue. Begin's partners from the Liberal Party also suggested that he only leave the government in the event of a real withdrawal and not at a time of vague articulations,

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437 Aizakson, 2003, p. 91; August, 12, 1970

438 Meir, 1975, p. 386

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but he rejected the idea. At a meeting of Herut and the Liberals, Begin said: “You cannot ask a man to deny his lifelong credo!” and finally persuaded his colleagues and won the vote by a slim majority. At the beginning of August 1970, Gahal left the government and 1,100 days of national-unity government came to an end.\textsuperscript{439}

Eban described how Begin’s departure of the government changed the atmosphere:

The spice and zest of intellectual combat were reduced. Begin’s talent flourished more on large parliamentary occasions than in more intimate cabinet encounters. I had the feeling that he exchanged the cabinet table for the Knesset rostrum with a measure of relief.\textsuperscript{440}

Begin later acknowledged that it was a question of preserving Herut’s identity and keeping it from being subsumed into Labor’s identity. If we stayed in the government, he explained, those people who today shout Begin! Begin! would probably vote tomorrow for the Labor peace agreement.\textsuperscript{441}

Within hours of the cease-fire declaration, Nasser moved his Soviet surface-to-air missiles toward the Suez Canal. Golda insisted upon restoring the situation to what it had been before negotiations could continue. That was the end of Rogers’s plan.\textsuperscript{442} In the Knesset, Begin demanded action, arguing that if Nasser attacked Israel, Israel would pay a steep price because its air force would be constrained by those missiles. But people in Israel were quite gratified by the fact that Israeli soldiers were no longer being killed every day and most Israelis, only three years after the Six-Day War, believed in the Israeli army’s omnipotence and its ability to handle any attack. (Just

\textsuperscript{439} Temko, 1987, p. 177

\textsuperscript{440} 1977, p. 468

\textsuperscript{441} Temko, 1987, p. 178

\textsuperscript{442} Haber, 1978, p. 286

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three years later, during the Yom Kippur War, Israel paid dearly for not having done anything about those missiles). Amid this euphoric mood, only a few people contemplated the possibility of withdrawing from the occupied territories and ceding them to the Arabs.\textsuperscript{443} In September 1970, Nasser died and was replaced by his vice-president, Anwar el-Sadat.

Begin argued that annexation of liberated Judea and Samaria (for him it was not the occupied territories or the West Bank) would advance peace because it would impel the Arabs to recognize Israel’s determination and rights. This was exactly the opposite of the Labor Party approach which advocated concessions for peace. Begin also called the Palestinians’ demand for the self-determination the biggest hoax of the 20th century, since they were already an integral part of the Arab nation.\textsuperscript{444} “Listen to them. Listen to what they say. Why don’t you believe them? They do not hide their intentions,” he said time and again concerning the Arab desire to destroy Israel.\textsuperscript{445} It appears that Begin’s stance was in some ways a reflection of the Arab stance: annexation and refusal to compromise about land versus a threat of extermination from the Arab countries; denial of the existence of the Palestinians’ national identity versus denial of Israel’s existence by the Palestinians. Labor, in contrast, simply ignored the Arab declarations and sought a meeting point. Begin kept on telling the Laborites that they were refusing to listen to the Arabs’ ‘No!’ That they were deluding themselves due to what he called the ‘illusion illness.’ According to Begin, the Labor Party members were too self-absorbed in their small, narcissistic circle, speaking and listening to themselves more than to others, building grandiose false hopes and then

\textsuperscript{443} Haber, 1978, 286-287

\textsuperscript{444} Haber, 1978, p. 288

\textsuperscript{445} ibid, p. 289

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plunging into despair when these hopes collapsed. Begin's position was relational and determined in part by his rival's stance. Labor's position was determined mostly by a disregard for the other side's intentions and a reliance on its individual beliefs. Begin's demands reflected and mirrored to the other side the absurdity of its demands. Labor's stance gave the other side hope that it could achieve what it wanted in the long run.

Addressing the Knesset on August 25, 1970, Begin accused the United States of having misled Israel in regard to the Egyptian missiles that were advanced under the cease-fire umbrella, and warned President Nixon that he would be go down in history as “a man who traded the blood of Jewish children for material deals with the Arabs.” “Nixon,” he told the Knesset, was “playing chess with the fate of Israel.” And when Rogers said that he was impressed by Sadat, Begin answered: “We remember Hitler and Stalin speaking of peace and meanwhile preparing their tanks for conquests.”

It seems that leaving the government released the inhibitions that had held sway for three years. But this was not the same Begin of the past. Whether due to his age -- he was now in his late 50s -- or his increasing acceptance by the Israeli people after three years as a minister, or both, Begin's style became calmer. He was more ironic than inflammatory and spoke more about peace. Still, his ability to make the abstract concrete and to appeal to the senses of the people he spoke with was remarkable. He used to invite American statesmen to a meal in the Knesset restaurant and seat them by the wide window. He showed them the hills from where the Knesset was fired upon before the war and asked them: “Would you agree to have Soviet guns

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446 Temko, 1987, p. 179; Hirschler, 1979, p. 256, 259
447 Haber, 1978, p. 286

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stationed only a few kilometers away from your Capitol Hill in Washington?" In another incident, speaking in New York before an American audience, he compared Israel's narrow neck, between the eastern border and the sea, to the length of Broadway. One of his aides described how the people there really started to grasp his meaning.

Begin's mode of rule within ‘Gahal’ was clear. Haim Korfu (Likud member and later a minister in Begin’s government) described how it was accomplished:

What characterized Begin was his ability to listen to others. I do not remember anyone like him in committees or other meetings who would listen to all who spoke. You could see it in the way his answers related to each and every one of us, to what each person had said. He even mentioned the speaker by name. It was characteristic of him and this is where his strength lay. He did not dismiss alternate suggestions, but made them melt away. When someone expressed an objection, Begin explained his position with such patience that the objector himself might say: 'I am sorry for my remark.'

The challenge to Begin’s sole leadership and the need for change in the party came up again in the “fighting family,” this time from Ezer Weizman (later Israel's President). Ezer was a sabra, a nephew of the first president of Israel, Chaim Weizmann. He was the chief and architect of the modern Israeli air force and credited with much of the glory for the Israeli air force’s success in the Six-Day War. Already identifying with Herut's ideology, when he realized that he was not going to be made the Chief of General Staff, he resigned from the army and was promoted very rapidly by Begin to be a minister in the national-unity government. After Gahal left the government, Weizman was appointed chairman of the Herut executive. Begin admired generals all his life, respected family ties and also believed that Ezer was an

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448 Hirschler, 1979, p. 244

449 Azriel Nevo, Aizakson, 2003, p. 74

450 Aizakson, 2003, p. 74
electoral asset to the movement. Weizman, possessing the lack of formality traditionally associated with sabras, was the opposite of Begin’s Polish dignity and formality. He was known for his impulsiveness and for his tendency to shoot from the hip and often regret his words later. He entered politics to get things done. He did not come to bask in Jabotinsky’s ideas but to fight and win over the Labor Party. He wanted to inject new blood and revive the party. Begin was willing to compromise with his “admired naughty boy” and to forgive him up to a point. But when the threat to his rule of the party became too great, he stopped him.

“If you want to breathe fresh air you cannot make it there,” Weizman complained. “Everything revolves around Menachem Begin. People vie with each other to guess what he is thinking and how he will react.”451

"Here and there was the illusion that Begin was looking for advice," he wrote. "But usually the aim was to tie the consultant to Begin's decision and make him obliged to it. When it comes to such political maneuvers, Begin does not have many competitors in Israel."452 Another member of the “fighting family” admitted, “We were not used to the idea of anything less than deference to Menachem Begin.”453 Begin’s response to Weizman’s ambition for change was: “We have never been mistaken; we have always judged things correctly, so we have never changed, for we have never needed to change.”454 It was easier for Begin to stop Weizman than to stop Tamir because Weizman was not as deeply rooted in the party as Tamir had been and this time Begin did not suffer a depression. Weizman resigned from his chairmanship when the election got closer.

451 Haber, 1978, p. 289
452 Weizman, 1981, p. 170, Hebrew
453 Temko, 1987, p. 182
454 Silver, 1984, p. 143

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It was clear that the party was Begin and Begin was the party, but still there was an illusion within the “fighting family” of freedom of thought and speech, probably created by ties of love. Begin’s comrades did not agree with him as much as they identified with him and his position.

Following is an example of how Begin encouraged this process of identification through love, as told by a Liberal aide who was present at a Herut assembly:

Likud was deciding whether to propose holding municipal elections on the same day as national balloting. Begin invited discussion. One by one, the others backed holding simultaneous elections. But when a junior member suggested the opposite, Begin quickly “summarized” by agreeing with him. The rest dutifully switched sides, and Begin declared the point agreed on. Suddenly, a cry of protest came from another Likud newcomer: ‘What do you mean: ‘agreed,’ Mr. Begin? You have just heard everyone at the table say the elections should be held together, and now you simply decide the opposite! On what basis?’ Begin smiled. He told the youngster that since it was a democracy, there would be a vote. When hands went up – some with alacrity and some with caution, but all for Begin – the dissenter turned on the others. ‘What are you afraid of?’ he shouted. ‘You have just voted against yourselves… against your own positions!’ There was silence. He glared at Begin and asked: ‘How do you do it?’ Begin answered softly, ‘Well, my friend, we seem to be in general agreement here. Your view is a minority opinion. But we are a democratic group, and value the rights and dignity of the minority as we do those of the majority.’ He added, however, that he preferred unanimity. ‘Let me ask you, on behalf of our colleagues here, to reconsider your vote.’ The dissenter raised a finger in assent, to shouts of approval from the rest. 455

The opinion of the people was less important for them than their relationship with Begin. They wanted to grant him this power over them; they wanted to keep the family together and they were probably afraid to be left alone in case of disagreement.

455 Temko, 1987, p. 190-191
Begin achieved this not with threats but by granting his people the benevolent experience they simply needed and did not want to lose.

Yehiel Kadishai’s relationship with Begin is indicative of some of the non-individualized aspects of Begin’s personality and how this appeared in a close relationship. Kadishai described himself as not “the kind of person who evaluates.” It was hard for him to express his political opinion, he said. Below is how Kadishai and another Likud official perceived the Begin-Kadishai relationship:

With the others, said the Likud official, every word he [Begin] uttered was a political statement. With Kadishai, he could say what he wanted: It would not be challenged, repeated, perhaps not even understood. Kadishai had the quality of an ideal butler: He sensed, anticipated Begin’s mood. He laughed at Begin’s occasional Yiddish jokes, applauded his repetitive anecdotes and parables from the underground days or earlier. He even collected shtetl humor of his own, for use when Begin seemed down.

Begin, recalled Kadishai, almost always knew the punchlines before I got there!…

[Begin] called him Yehiel. Yehiel was the one person with whom Begin had a completely relaxed relationship. He was the only one who could visit when Begin was in his pajamas, said the Likud official who knew them both.

Most of the time Mr. Begin and I understood each other without speaking, said Kadishai. On political issues there was no need to speak. He made his own decisions. He did not consult – with me, or with anyone. Others consulted him. Sometimes, when he sensed opposition, Begin would ask for advice. But this was a formality – it was a process of his sharing his views with the others, convincing people of the correctness of his opinion.456

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456 Temko, 1987, p. 191-192
The fact that Kadishai did not have political ambitions helped the Begin-Kadishai relationship and Begin once told a comrade that Yehiel was his alter ego.\[457\] Yona Klimovitzki, Begin’s secretary, added that while Begin called Kadishai by his first name, Yehiel, Kadishai “usually dodged the issue by not using any title of address at all”. And, she added, “Yehiel has a mind of his own; he just doesn’t have a will of his own.”\[458\]

There is no need to add to such a precise description of a primary relationship prior to any separation-individuation process: There was mutual understanding without words between them as Begin had with his wife. Yehiel did not use Begin’s name, thus the relationship was mainly with an experience and not with an identity; for Yehiel, the complete coordination with and anticipation of Begin’s needs was the essence, and he was attuned to him in a reciprocal way as a mother is attuned to her child. Put simply, Begin was not an individual in the Western Labor sense.

Another example of Begin’s tendency to create family relationships is Eliyahu Ben-Elissar (Irgun member; press aide to Begin in the opposition years; director of the Prime Minister’s Office from 1977; chief Israeli delegate to the Israel-Egypt peace talks in 1977 and Israel’s first ambassador to Egypt). “He was like a child around Begin!” said a friend and Ben-Elissar explained:

Begin was a man who played a very great part in my formation – a heroic figure – and only afterward the man whom I worked for in Herut. As a Holocaust orphan pasting up Irgun posters, he said he had looked on Begin as an otherworldly figure – the commander of the Irgun underground, a man whose name we never mentioned out loud, until the British left the country! I guess I did have a sort of son-father complex toward him.\[459\]

\[457\] ibid, p. 193
\[458\] ibid, pp. 399-400
\[459\] Temko, 1987, p. 192
Begin's personal and intimate touch never left him. Penina Kirshenbaum, whose brother Abraham had died trying to mount a solo defense of Yemin Moshe (a neighborhood on the border of east and west Jerusalem) against Arab rioters, recalled how she had not known for years who wrote the touching article "From Tel Hai to Yemin Moshe" comparing her brother's fight to that of Yosef Trumpeldor. Eventually, the author was discovered to be Begin. In 1972, a memorial was to be installed in the neighborhood. Pnina Kirshenbaum called Kadishai in order to invite Begin to the ceremony. Kadishai told her that Begin could not come because he had an executive meeting of Herut party. She inserted a letter of invitation in Menachem's mail box anyway. When she arrived at the ceremony, she suddenly saw Begin coming there by himself. She went up to him and said, "I thought you had an executive meeting of Herut." Begin replied simply: "So, I canceled it."\footnote{Kirshenbaum, 2004}

The continual oppression of Russian Jewry, and especially Russia's refusal to let Jews leave the country, inspired demonstrations all over the world under the banner of “Let my people go”. There was debate over the best way to help get the Jews out. One side advocated quiet diplomacy, in which the attempt to persuade Soviet leaders to change their policy would be conducted away from the glare of the media. The other side urged a major public outcry as the way to pressure the Soviets. Begin supported the latter approach. He used to say: "We have great influence in the United States and we must use it. If only our people had used that power in 1939, we might have
prevented the Shoah. This time we must not fail.”\textsuperscript{461} He also argued that “the present generation had already had on its conscience the effects of its silence and inaction in the days of the Nazi Holocaust.”\textsuperscript{462} Once again, it was Begin who refused to accept the rules set by others (in this case the Russians), who were ostensibly saying ‘Be careful not to make us angry.’ Again it was Begin who was exempted by his personality from the tendency to try to appease or please the other. And we know that, at the end of the day, the media exposure and demonstrations tipped the balance and the Jews were allowed to leave Russia.

Then Ariel Sharon (the present Prime Minister of Israel) appeared on the political map. He was also a war hero who had led the famous 101 commando unit during the 1950s, which altered the perception of the Israeli infantry. This unit carried out reprisal raids deep in Arab territory, elevating morale within the Israeli army and presenting new standards of combat for soldiers and commanders. Sharon was a commander in Sinai and the Six-Day War and was known as the one who succeeded in bringing order to the refugee camps of the Gaza Strip by his “iron fist” policy. As a major general of the Southern Command, he demolished houses in the Gaza Strip in order to convert the narrow alleyways into wide roads along which soldiers could move freely. He was already a controversial figure. He was admired for being a "bulldozer” who got things done, yet he had a reputation of sometimes bulldozing ahead regardless of the cost in terms of lives and property. Begin supported Sharon’s aggressive approach, adding that the Arabs only understood and respected force. Sharon’s grandfather was the one who invited Ze’ev Dov Begin back in Brisk to take part in his militant Zionism and Sharon’s grandmother was the midwife of Menachem

\textsuperscript{461} Hurwitz, 1977, p. 99-100

\textsuperscript{462} Hirschler, 1979, p. 266
Begin. In sum, “Sharon was Judah Maccabee [an ancient Jewish hero who fought against the Greeks] for Begin,” said Begin’s secretary.463

When Sharon also realized that he was not going to be the Chief of General Staff of the Israeli army, he resigned. He entered politics like a whirlwind with an ambitious plan to unite all the right-wing parties and challenge Labor’s hegemony. Begin was somewhat ambivalent toward certain changes, such as having to sit in the same party with Tamir (the first to rebel against Begin’s authority, he now headed a small party), but he understood the chance that he had to lead this bloc of united parties. Begin was also quite happy to accept final legitimacy from authority through unification with a party of Ben-Gurion’s followers’ called RAFI. “We shall wed the followers of Ben-Gurion and the followers of Jabotinsky,” he cheered. Ben-Gurion said to one of his followers: “Begin did, after all, offer me the prime-ministership in 1967. Maybe there is room for a second opinion!”464 In forty stormy days of negotiations, Sharon managed to accomplish his goal. On September 12, 1973, six weeks before Election Day, there was a new body in the Israeli parliament; its name was “Likud” which means "Unity" or "Consolidation."

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463 Channel 8, Israeli TV, Sept/Oct 2003, program about Begin

464 Temko, 1987, p. 186
Triumph of Love

Sadat had different plans. On October 6, 1973, on Yom Kippur, the holiest day for Jews when most of the people of Israel were in synagogue, the Syrian and Egyptian armies attacked Israel simultaneously on the Golan Heights and at the Suez Canal. Israel was caught by surprise and for the first time since 1948 fought for its survival. The Egyptian army crossed the canal into Sinai and the Syrian army occupied the Golan Heights and was not far from Israeli kibbutzim. During the two and a half weeks of the war, Israel recovered from the shock and succeeded in reoccupying the Golan Heights and then pushed further into Syria, coming within 30 kilometers from Damascus. In the south, Sharon led a division that crossed the Suez Canal into Africa and encircled the Egyptian Third Army that had crossed the canal to the eastern side. The bubble of the 1967 war, of Israel’s inflated self-assurance, was burst, never to recover. Israel won the war but at a price she could hardly afford - more than 2,000 dead and thousands of wounded soldiers as well as a devastated economy. During the war, Nixon sent an airlift of weapons and ammunition that was highly needed to Israel.

On Yom Kippur, Golda updated Begin and he promised her his support. He did not criticize the government while combat was still ongoing. But soon after, in the run-up to the postponed election of December 1973, he ruthlessly attacked the government. Addressing Golda Meir, he called on her to resign:

You knew well in advance of the massive Egyptian and Syrian preparations for an imminent attack, and yet you did not even admit this to your own government, and you overruled your own
chief of staff when he wanted to stage a preemptive attack. What moral authority do you have after this failure?\textsuperscript{465}

I am compelled to say not as a member of a party, and not as an active politician, but as a father and grandfather, that I can no longer depend on the Government as at present constituted to ensure the future of my children and grandchildren.\textsuperscript{466}

Prime Minister Meir was convinced that preemptive action by Israel would have alienated world public opinion and the United States and therefore she opposed it.\textsuperscript{467}

On December 1, 1973, a few weeks before the election and not long after the war, David Ben-Gurion died on his kibbutz, Sde Boker, in the Negev. Begin attended the funeral.

In later years, Begin refrained from giving interviews concerning Ben-Gurion, explaining that since there was not much good he could say about him, it was better to say nothing at all. To his friends, Begin said that Ben-Gurion was an evil man who spilled the blood of innocent people. But he also acknowledged gave Ben-Gurion credit for two significant accomplishments: the declaration of the establishment of the State of Israel and the huge wave of immigration to Israel in 1949.\textsuperscript{468}

In the election, the Likud won 39 seats -- seven more than it had before. Labor won 51, a loss of five compared to the previous election. Still, Likud members were very disappointed. They felt that if they hadn't won the election this time, they would probably never win it. Begin reassured them:

\textsuperscript{465} November 13, 1973, Knesset records

\textsuperscript{466} Hirshler, 1979, p. 270

\textsuperscript{467} ibid, p. 267

\textsuperscript{468} Kadishai, 1993
Even if Labor has won these elections, after something like the Yom Kippur War happens to a country, and to a government, they must lose power. They will lose power. It is only a matter of time.\textsuperscript{469}

Starting in late 1973 and throughout 1974, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger performed “shuttle diplomacy” between Israel and the Arab states in an attempt to promote peace. In the Knesset, Begin spoke as if directly to Kissinger:

You are a Jew. You are not the first to achieve high office in the country of your residence. Remember the past. There have been such Jews, who, out of a complex of concern that they might be accused of acting for the benefit of their people because they were Jews, did the contrary... Let Dr. Kissinger beware of this distortion of what he calls “being objective.”\textsuperscript{470}

While Labor leaders and U.S officials mainly ignored the fact that Kissinger was a Jew because religious affiliation was not so important to them, for Begin it was an emotionally loaded fact of central importance. Begin was effectively saying to Kissinger: “I am not able to be objective about you because you are a Jew. For me, you can be either for us or against us.”

Begin rejected the disengagement agreement obtained by Kissinger in which Israel withdrew in Sinai to the Gidi and Mitla Passes and in the Golan Heights a few kilometers west to the Six-Day War cease-fire line. He argued that Israel shouldn’t have withdrawn for less than a peace agreement because in this way Israel remained defenseless. Begin drew an analogy:

In 1973, as in 1938, a small nation was told by well-meaning friends that it must make concessions to its enemy for the sake

\textsuperscript{469} Temko, 1987, p. 187

\textsuperscript{470} Knesset record, November 13, 1973, No. 44, p. 4586
of world peace. In the case of Czechoslovakia, the result was that the small nation lost its independence not as a result of defeat by the enemy but due to coercion from its friends. It must be remembered that the disengagement agreement at Munich was not achieved by Hitler or Mussolini, it was prepared by Runciman and imposed by Chamberlain and Daladier, Czechoslovakia’s great friends who surely stood for its security.471

Did Begin’s historical analogy prove true? A few years later, Begin himself signed a peace agreement with Sadat and a second Munich did not happen. On the Golan Heights, though there is no peace, the border has been calm for 30 years since this agreement. But still the logic of Begin's collective thinking should be understood. As a person traumatized by the Holocaust who perceived himself as the embodiment of the Jewish people, Begin thought in terms of existence and not of partial agreements. For him, as for many collective-minded cultures and people, existence could not be taken for granted, nor could it be divided. There is no such a thing as partial existence. Begin thought in holistic terms of honor and existence while the Left did not articulate the issue this way and resorted to reasoning in which all kinds of creative solutions could be contemplated. For Begin, the complex formulas and ideas of the negotiation process were just different ways of disguising the main problem – the absence of recognition. His way of thinking probably made more sense to the Arab side, which clearly thinks in collective terms.

It appears that Begin’s dramatic behavior and rhetoric in those years was also context-dependent. During the post-Yom Kippur War years, the Labor Party was in very bad shape and Begin's longing for power was more palpable than ever. In the Knesset, Begin started calling the government a “transitional administration” – and

471 Hirschler, 1979, p. 273
that feeling prompted him to attack it more vigorously. He also did not trust Sadat’s intentions and criticized Dayan, who argued that the post-war Sadat really wanted peace. Time and again he challenged Dayan from the rostrum: “Who told you that, that you so mislead this nation?”\textsuperscript{472}

Clearly, there was cause to criticize a government that was responsible for the euphoric, omnipotent mood that led Israel to be unprepared for the Yom Kippur War on the one hand, and which did not make any serious attempt in those years - 1967-1973 - to make peace through territorial concessions on the other. It was ready neither for war nor for peace. This was a government that also believed the Palestinians would accept the erasing of their national identity. But Begin, according to Golda, did not show an appropriately sorrowful attitude for a bereaved country and instead spoke with “roars of triumph”:

\textit{[Their opposition speeches] tore me apart. They were so full of rhetoric and theatricality that I could not stand it… If only they had stammered or hesitated occasionally… Begin and Tamir were talking about a near catastrophe, about men who had been killed or crippled, about terrible things, but they spoke smoothly, without as much as a pause, and I was disgusted.}\textsuperscript{473}

In May 1974, after an agreement was achieved with Syria for the separation of forces, Prime Minister Golda Meir and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan resigned. Although the Agranat Commission that was appointed to investigate the Yom Kippur fiasco did not place the blame upon them but upon the army commanders, public opinion was clear about their responsibility. Yitzhak Rabin, the Chief of General Staff

\textsuperscript{472} Silver, 1984, p. 149

\textsuperscript{473} Temko, 1987, p. 396-397; Jerusalem Post, Nov. 4, 1973
during the Six-Day War, was chosen by the Labor Party to be the next prime minister and Shimon Peres was made defense minister.

Begin kept on challenging the new government. He led hundreds of unauthorized settlers into the hills of the West Bank to establish a hold there. Rabin had to order them out and Begin continued his fight in the parliament for Jewish settlements in those areas.

But the Labor Party still could not believe that a major change was in the offing. They could not imagine something that had never happened – Begin as prime minister and the Likud in power. It was more than that: The Labor Party was the Western democratic party of individuals while the Likud was a party mainly of oriental and religious Jews – in short, a more collective one. The parties’ names are also indicative of their nature. Likud means "union" or "holding tightly together," while the Labor Party was also called Emet which means "truth." Truth is an individual observation that one can share with others – often more intellectually than emotionally. The coming turnabout was so inconceivable to them that at the end of 1974, Rabin ridiculed Begin as “an archeological exhibit in our political life. Begin,” he said, “was in fact an asset to the Labor Alignment, for under his leadership it was certain that the Likud would never be more than an opposition bloc.”

In the Knesset, Begin continued to sharply criticize the government but his tone remained one of loving family relations. He invited his audiences to react in any way but not to remain indifferent.

‘Begin at his best’ – every time this call was heard in the Knesset corridors, the members of parliament and journalists hurried to the plenum where Begin was standing and speaking.

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474 Hirschler, 1979, p. 273
at the podium. Begin did not just give a speech. He held a conversation with the Knesset… Who does not remember Menachem Begin on the Knesset podium? Focused and brilliant. Pleased with how all ears are attuned to him as he addresses the members of parliament. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he is speaking with the Knesset, playing with it, spinning it on his finger, toying with it sometimes and courting it at other times, mocking it, admiring it, flattering it. He loved the Knesset and it loved him.  

In January 1975, Begin opened the Likud convention in the West Bank settlement of Kiryat Arba, outside Hebron. He welcomed the people to “the city of our fathers” and unfolded his campaign program. He objected to any further withdrawal without a final peace agreement. He called for three years of cease-fire in which negotiations would take place. “We extend to you the hand not only of peace but of brotherhood. We shall give you equal rights in our land, with cultural autonomy.” Under a Likud government, Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza who wished to have Israeli citizenship would be able to vote as well as to be elected to public office. Those who did not wish to be Israelis would still get the full rights and privileges of citizenship except for the rights to vote and to run for elected office. But Begin - gesturing to Sharon and Dayan who were in the audience - also warned them:

Beware of the Fighting Jew - he who commands the few against the many. He is a human being – the son of a Jewish mother, who most marvelous of all God’s creatures, with all the softness of her love and the heavy burden of her concern. The fighting Jew loves all children – Arab children too. He loves books, loves liberty. And if you ever raise a hand against this people, know this: The Fighting Jew is fearless, his heart is [made] of steel, his hands are trained for war and his fingers for battle.  

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475 Arie Han, Aizakson, 2003, p. 87

476 Temko, 1987, p. 189
Then Begin went on and promised to confront American pressure with Israeli pressure, with the aid of American Jews and Israeli supporters. And finally he spoke about social peace and social justice saying, “Ever since we joined Ze’ev Jabotinsky’s banner, we have represented the poor in possessions and the rich in faith.” He called for modesty, stopping the wave of strikes and using arbitration instead, and for throwing out the corrupt Labor government.  

This speech - made only two years before his election to power - exemplified Begin’s different way of thinking. Begin wanted complete peace in one final agreement and not a process. Probably, it came out of his understanding that a qualitative and not quantitative change was needed. Against the PLO declaration of its intent to destroy Israel and the three famous "No"s of Khartoum accepted by the heads of Arab states (in August, 1967) -- no recognition, no negotiations and no peace, Begin laid down his three conditions: Any negotiations must be direct, without prior conditions and free of any imposed solution from outside. Like his Arab counterparts, Begin placed more importance on the form of the relations than on their content. In his mind, the necessary first step was to meet one’s enemy face to face as equals, without prior humiliations. In contrast, Labor was willing to negotiate about everything, disregarding issues of honor, without first meeting with rival leaders, or to meet with them only at the end of the process, if this was not possible earlier. The Labor Party and Kissinger suggested an individualized model of an agreement or steps for peace. But Begin strongly disagreed, saying: “Withdrawals without peace

477 Hirschler, 1979, p. 274-275

478 Haber, 1978, p. 305-306
are the ruin of the very chance of peace\textsuperscript{479} -- because this detracts from one’s honor and obscures the need for genuine change.

Begin offered brotherhood and threats simultaneously. The Labor Party would offer neither the first nor the second. Begin also suggested Israeli citizenship for the Palestinians in the occupied territories. By 1975, it was already clear that Israel had a demographic problem, but Begin chose to ignore it at this convention as at others. If such a proposal were to be implemented today, when the number of Palestinians west of the Jordan River more or less equals the number of Jews, Israel would not be a Jewish country any more. But Begin wanted both democracy and a Jewish state on the entire area west of the Jordan River, which is not possible. When asked about this contradiction between laws of arithmetic applied to population growth and his commitment to a Jewish-democratic state, Begin's answer was a religious one that relied on God's help.

Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy ended with the U.S. blaming Israel for its failure and in September 1975, America pressed Israel to give up the Abu Rodeis oil fields and the strategic passes of Mitla and Gidi in Sinai. On November 10, 1975, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution condemning Zionism as a form of racism. In November 1976, Jimmy Carter was elected U.S. president.

Against this backdrop, Begin met with Zbignew Brzezinski, Carter’s national security adviser, and asked him to draw Carter’s attention to some well-intentioned phraseology used by Israel’s friends that actually caused harm. “The Arabs should acknowledge Israel’s right to exist” was the first example. “The U.S. should regard itself as committed to Israel’s survival,” was the second.\textsuperscript{480}

\textsuperscript{479} Silver, 1984, p. 150
\textsuperscript{480} Hirschler, 1979, p. 279-280
Begin put it very simply: “I am not going to negotiate my existence and I do not need anybody’s affirmation for it.” He found it deeply insulting to ask for recognition of one's existence, while this was a goal that the Labor Party sought to achieve. In other words, Begin, in contrast to the Labor Party, could also articulate what was not negotiable – existence. In a Western world in which the sky is the limit, people tend to start from the maximum and then give things up gradually, in salami fashion, usually by stating what they are willing to negotiate. But in a world of collective cultures in which basic needs are not self-evident, people tend to start from below, to state what they are not ready to negotiate in order to secure their existence.\(^{481}\) Begin’s approach says that we have to invest just as much energy in defining what we are not going to negotiate – simply because this limitation is true.

Begin's second objection was to Israel being a protégé of the US. He wanted a kind of equality in which Israel was regarded as a strong country that also contributes to America's security and not as an entity which has to live by the grace and pity of others. For Begin, to lose face was the beginning of the end.

In July 1976, Palestinian gunmen hijacked Air France’s Tel Aviv-Paris flight. It finally landed in Entebbe, Uganda, then under Idi Amin’s rule. The Palestinians tried to force Israel to exchange the Jewish hostages for their comrades who were imprisoned in Israel. Rabin called Begin and told him about the situation and about possible concessions to the terrorists. After consultation with his colleagues, Begin replied: “This is not a matter for debate between the coalition and the opposition. It is a national issue of the first order. We support the government’s position, and we’ll

\(^{481}\)Cohen, 1999, p. 119
make our views known.” “To tell the truth,” wrote Rabin, “I was moved by Begin’s support… this backing from the opposition provided me with a certain measure of relief.”482 When informed about a plan for rescue mission, Begin also expressed his admiration to Rabin. Finally, when the operation succeeded and the hostages were released, Begin praised the government and especially Rabin and added that Rabin, as the prime minister, would have had to bear the responsibility more than anyone else if something had gone wrong. He suggested that a special unit be created for such rescue missions and already had a name for it, “an honor unit,” because its role was to bring honor to Israel among the nations.483

As the 1977 election approached, most of the Israeli political map (except for the extreme Left) rejected complete withdrawal to the lines prior to the Six-Day War, rejected recognition of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and also rejected the establishment of a Palestinian state. But Begin was still considered the hawk not so much because of the content of his words as because of the effect he conveyed.

At the time, Labor Party members were found to be involved in all kinds of financial scandals and Rabin, because of coalition problems as well, had to resign and bring forward the election to May 1977. Then it was discovered that Rabin’s wife had an unauthorized account in a Washington bank. As a consequence, Rabin stepped down and was succeeded by Peres. When Herut had some financial difficulties because of mismanagement, Begin declared that it was his responsibility, even though he had absolutely no involvement in those matters. He started making visits to various

482 Rabin, 1979, p. 285
483 Aizakson, 2003, p. 130
countries in order to raise money. Then, two months before the elections, Begin had a heart attack.

It may be the case that leaders who are seriously ill or see their death approaching have more of a tendency to make concessions for peace. It's conceivable that a leader’s personal acknowledgement of his physical weakness as a human being might help him accept his nation’s limitations and come to terms with the idea that not everything is possible. Added to this was the gradual process in which Begin grew stockier, shaved off his moustache, began to have thinning hair and stopped smoking his habitual cigarettes – This was not the same old underground fighter any more.

On April 14, 1977, Begin gave Kadishai his will, in which he asked that he and his wife be buried on the Mount of Olives near the graves of Barazani and Feinstein, the Lehi and Irgun comrades who committed suicide with a hand grenade shortly before they were scheduled to hang.

Dear Yehiel,

When the day comes, please read my request to my dearest friends and acquaintances: I ask you to bury me on the Mount of Olives, next to Meir Feinstein and Moshe Barazani. I thank you and everybody who makes this wish come true.

Yours, with love
Menachem Begin

484 Post, 2003, p. 75, 79

485 Aizakson, 2003, p. 4

484a Chapter 2
Ezer Weizman spearheaded the campaign and presented Begin in the mildest possible way, trying to bypass ideological minefields that might raise objections. He emphasized Begin’s modesty in contrast to Labor’s corruption. Begin recovered only in May when he started taking part in the campaign. On May 17, 1977, Begin won the election and delivered his victory speech that night at Ze’ev Fortress - the Likud’s national headquarters in Tel Aviv.

He joined the crowd in singing “Am Yisrael Hai” (The people of Israel lives), clapping his hands to the rhythm. He then donned a skullcap and recited Psalms. Then he quoted from Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address:

With malice towards none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds…

Then he quoted to his wife from Jeremiah484a, with some slight modifications, as he noted humorously:

My first thanks are to my wife, to whom more than any other person on earth apply the eternal words: ‘I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wenteth after me in the wilderness,’ to which I add, ‘in a land that was sown with mines and thorns.’486

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486Haber, 1978, p. 8; Silver, 1984, p. 156
Almost more stunning than the Likud victory was the extent of the Labor Party's defeat. Likud won 43 seats, four more than in the previous election. But Labor lost 22 seats, most of them to a new protest party called the Democratic Movement for Change (Dash), which had supported roughly the same foreign policy as Labor but advocated clean government.

“Menachem Begin,” writes the journalist Silver, “must be the only party leader in the democratic world to have lost eight consecutive elections and lived to win the ninth and tenth.” This raises some questions about Israeli society, the Herut party and Begin himself. After being headed by Begin for 29 years, Herut was more a family with an unchanging parent than a party. Such a long period of rule is more common in totalitarian systems, but in this case it was part of a “Loving Family” model of democracy. It was what the Israeli Right needed in those formative years—a benevolent authority figure rather than the option of choosing a new leader. (After Begin’s resignation in 1983, the Likud chairmanship changed hands a few times, making it more a party in the pattern of the democratic West).

The nature of this turnabout was described by Limor Livnat (the present educational minister):

Menachem Begin tore down the walls that separated the different parts of Israeli society... It was built from blocks of insult covered with the mortar of condescension and wrapped in the barbed wire of ethnicity and anger… [He stood for] true honor and equality, without any pandering or pretending.

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487 1984, p. 110

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This phenomenon deserves study. Menachem Begin was not what you would call ‘one of the people.’ He did not start using slang and slapping backs in the open-air market. On the contrary, Begin had the manners of a Polish aristocrat. He spoke in a sophisticated language… far from that of the street.

Moreover, Begin did not bring about any drastic economic change... However, the sense of walls coming down was immediately felt when he came to power…

For this reason, the word ‘turnabout’ still reverberates when people speak about his first victory in the 1977 election. It was not only a political turnabout. It was also a social turnabout. You could say that Begin's victory was the victory of democracy over aristocracy.488

It was not only a victory of public image as is often the case with leaders who attain power in a relatively short time. It was a victory of modesty, of someone who raised his family of three children in two and a half rooms; a victory for his twenty nine years of answering every letter he received in his own handwriting. He once said that not answering a letter is like not shaking a hand that is extended towards you.489 It was a victory of respecting every service person who ever worked with him. He used to tell the women secretaries who worked with him to go home at noon on Friday while he remained in his office because they had family to take care of and had to prepare the Shabbat dinner.490 It was the victory of the one who was mocked for his rituals that were so different from those of the average 'Sabra' – such as kissing ladies' hands, addressing people by their title or always wearing a tie - but stuck to them anyway.

Reporters from all over the world came to his home on Rosenbaum Street in Tel Aviv. They suggested that he talk to them in his office. The house had only two rooms and the three children were in one of them. But Begin told them that this second room

488 Limor Livnat, Aizakson, 2003, p. 145
489 Channel 8, October/November 2003, Israeli TV, series about Begin
490 Nevo Azriel, 2000

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was his office, as well as the dining room and master bedroom, and suggested that they conduct the interview there.\textsuperscript{491}

His election victory caused a panicky reaction around the world, and within Israel. Begin - probably instinctively - counteracted it. \textit{Within the first 48 hours after the election, he traveled with a group of reporters to the hills of Nablus.} To the settlers of Eilon Moreh, which had been established there in defiance of the Labor government, he declared: “In a few weeks or months there will be many Eilon Morehs.” A reporter asked Begin if his government would annex the territories. Begin replied: “We don’t use the word ‘annexation.’ You annex foreign land, not your own country.”

“Would Israeli law be extended to the West Bank?” asked another reporter.

“You used the words ‘West Bank.’ Say Judea and Samaria. Use them always,” Begin reproached him. Then he added: “It is a matter for consideration. When the government is formed we shall come before the Knesset and seek a vote of confidence, and then we shall consider what steps to take.”\textsuperscript{492} Throughout the years, Begin insisted upon using his terminology and not referring to the "occupied territories" or the "West Bank," as was the custom in the Israeli media.

Begin moved into the Prime Minister’s Office. To the portraits of previous prime ministers (David Ben Gurion, Moshe Sharett, Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir) adorning the wall, he added pictures of his predecessor Yitzhak Rabin and of Theodore Herzl and Vladimir Jabotinsky.\textsuperscript{493} In this way the family was reunited.

\textsuperscript{491} Doron, 2001

\textsuperscript{492} Silver, 1984, p. 160

\textsuperscript{493} Hurwitz, 1977, p. 148
Then Begin surprised everyone by appointing Moshe Dayan as his foreign minister. Dayan, of the Labor Party, was a fallen hero after the Yom Kippur War. He had resigned together with Golda, and while the Agranat Commission had not found him directly responsible for the Yom Kippur fiasco, as defense minister during that period he remained responsible in the eyes of many Israelis. He held hawkish positions relative to his party. But Begin chose him mainly because he was a symbol. The man with the eye-patch was still “Mr. Israel” and known to have a common language with the Arabs. Begin told his aide Yehiel Kadishai:

Dayan has lost standing as a leader here in Israel since the Yom Kippur war. But in the world – both to our friends and our enemies – he remains a symbol. He is the man with the eye-patch! He stands for staunch Zionism. He stands for strength – he is the military man, the commander, for years chief of staff, minister of defense, a man no foreign dignitary would dare meet without checking to make sure his pants were pressed!... To the outside world, Dayan is like de Gaulle!

Four years later, Sadat would confide to Sharon at his Abadin palace that he had been worried when Begin formed his first government. "It had seemed to him a government that would move Israel toward war" because of its collection well-known generals like Dayan, Weizman and Sharon, added to the familiar image of Begin.

Begin did not think the gap between Likud and Labor was an impediment to achieving peace. As we have seen, Begin did not view the peace process as negotiating land for peace. He conceived of it as a symbolic process whose essence was existence and recognition. For Begin, Dayan the symbol – what he represented – was more important than whatever he was going to say. For the same reason, after his

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494 Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 234
495 Temko, 1987, p. 199
496 Sharon, 1989, p. 394
election he kept on a number of senior staff members (the spokesman, the Diaspora relations adviser and English speechwriter, the military secretary and head of bureau) who were identified with his Labor predecessor. The British system of civil service was on Begin's mind when he objected to politicizing the system. To some astonished Labor officials who were expecting to be fired and reminded Begin of their party ties and roles, Begin remarked that they'd actually pointed out some good reasons for them to remain in their jobs. Some religious officials reported how their ingrained defenses suddenly seemed unnecessary and how they felt freer with their belief when Begin came to power.\footnote{Avner, 2003}

In an interview, Simha Dinitz, then Israel's ambassador to the U.S., relates: "I called Begin and said: 'Mr. Prime Minister, Congratulations on your election. You know that I don't share your Revisionist philosophy, so if you feel the need to replace me, that's alright, just give me two weeks notice and I'll pack my bags.' And then came the somewhat amazing reply: 'How can you say that? You're the glory of our representatives. You and your wonderful wife, Bat-Zion\footnote{Bat-Zion – Zion's daughter} Hameshuhreret, Bat-Zion the liberated.' For a long time I didn't understand what he meant by Bat-Zion the liberated. What was she liberated from? My wife was born in the United States, so I guess he meant that she was liberated from the burden of the American Diaspora when she moved to Israel and received Israeli citizenship. Maybe that was the liberation. In any case, he said, 'You've done a wonderful job and I would like you to stay on and continue doing this job.' I told him: 'Okay, sir. I'll stay for as long as you
want.' When Yitzhak Rabin and Golda Meir heard that Begin had asked me to stay on, they were quite astonished."

Begin's election brought vigorous attacks from the American press, which described him as a terrorist. The Israeli Embassy fought back to change his image. Dinitz got a phone call from Benny Begin, Menachem's son, who was studying geology in Colorado at the time. Benny told Dinitz that he had a specific plan as to what to do about it. Dinitz replied that as Israel was not a monarchy but a democracy he could not simply take orders from him, but that he would be pleased to bring his suggestions before the right people. Benny, who was naturally bothered by the hostile media, accepted Dinitz's position. Menachem later said that, indeed Benny, should not be involved in such a way but that he could send him his ideas. In this case the exception proves the rule. Begin's family did not exploit his position in any way – another reminder of Begin's attitude that he was the embodiment of the Jewish family and so his biological family did not have any privileges in this regard.

Begin ran his government with a stern hand. Cabinet sessions were short and smoking was forbidden. The leaks that had been prevalent in Rabin’s time ceased, and the ministers’ many advisers now found themselves banished from the meeting room and were only called in if their opinion was required. Meetings had a clear agenda, and ministers spoke more to the point. Ministers also stopped being interviewed on matters that did not pertain to their office and the political gossip in the press dried up noticeably.\footnote{\textit{Dinitz, 2002}}

\footnote{\textit{Golan & Nakdimon, 1978, p. 234}}
In the new government's program, it was written that Israel accepts UN Resolution 242 as well as all international agreements signed by previous Israeli governments. This provoked laughter from the opposition benches in the Knesset. It was Begin, they called out, who rejected Resolution 242 (in the form of the Rogers plan) in 1970 and it was also Begin who criticized so many of the previous government agreements that he was now willing to accept in his new position.\footnote{Naor, 1993, p. 96} Probably the best explanation is that the burden of responsibility brought about this change.\footnote{Dayan, 1981, p. 20} But it was also hard for the Left to understand that it was not the details of the different agreements that counted for Begin but more the way it was presented—in an honorable way now.

Begin’s first action as prime minister was also a symbolic one. At the end of June, he ordered an Israeli freighter that had rescued 66 Vietnamese refugees, including children, to bring them to Israel for resettlement. They were saved off the coast of Vietnam after being found adrift in a small boat, having been refused help by other passing ships. On June 20, 1977, Begin spoke to the Knesset about the idea of appointing an international committee to deal with the issue:

> As a Jew, I cannot forget the conferences in Evian and Bermuda, whose only result was that they did not save even one Jewish child out of a million and a half Jewish children, who were dragged away to a monstrous death. Among the Vietnamese refugees are also many children, who could lose their lives waiting for the international conference to convene, hold its discussions and finally arrive at its conclusions.\footnote{Aizakson, 2003, p. 15-16}
When President Carter commended Begin for his humane action in admitting the refugees to Israel, Begin replied: “We have not forgotten the sufferings of our own people.”

Begin’s different way of thinking became clear as soon as he presented his cabinet to the Knesset on June 20, 1977. Israel would not ask any nation to recognize its right to exist!, he exclaimed. He was not going to negotiate over Israel’s right to exist as Labor had.

We were granted our right to exist by the God of our fathers, at the glimmer of the dawn of human civilization nearly 4,000 years ago. For that right, sanctified with Jewish blood from generation to generation, we have paid a price unequalled in the annals of nations. Certainly, this fact does not diminish or enfeeble our right; on the contrary. Therefore, I reemphasize: We do not expect anyone to request, on our behalf, that our right to exist in the land of our fathers be recognized. A different recognition is required between ourselves and our neighbors: a recognition of sovereignty and of our common need for a life of peace and understanding. It is this mutual recognition that we look forward to. For it we shall make every possible effort.

Invited to Washington by Carter, Begin prepared for the meeting by thoroughly studying the transcripts of the Rabin-Carter talks. He was ready to participate in the Geneva peace conference and to offer partial Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and the Golan Heights. He was also ready to offer Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza – but in a strikingly different way than Labor had: on a take it or leave it

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503 Hirschler, 1979, p. 294
504 Silver, 1984, p. 167
505 Dayan, 1981, p. 20
basis. There would be no other proposals, he told his aides, which his reading of the Rabin-Carter transcripts led him to believe only invited U.S. pressure.  

Indeed, it seemed that the Carter-Rabin relationship had not been that successful. Carter wrote in his diary about his meeting with Rabin:

I found him very timid, very stubborn and also somewhat ill-at-ease.  

Begin argued that Rabin’s stance of seeking total agreement with the U.S. had led to the opposite. Rabin himself also noted that Begin had “instituted a departure” from his way of handling relations with America.

I had always believed – as did Labor prime ministers before me – that prior to embarking on any political initiative it was imperative for our two governments to reach an understanding, even though in order to do so we might be called upon to make certain compromises… [but] Begin proclaimed… that Israel and the United States had “agreed to disagree.”

Begin was also more aware of the danger of wishful thinking; Israel had to keep U.S. oil interests in mind and not be tempted into over-reliance on its status as a protégé of the U.S. He therefore did not want to be as dependent on American good will as Rabin had been. Begin’s perception of reality in this case was confirmed by President Carter’s admission that he was not sure the U.S. would always be able and willing to secure Israel needs in this changing world and all of its pressures. It soon

506 Temko, 1989, p. 201

507 Carter, 1982, p. 279-280

508 Rabin, 1979, p. 317


510 Carter, 1982, p. 278
became clear that Begin’s relations with the Americans as well as the Arabs invited a different attitude than Rabin’s approach.

Before Begin left Israel, a ceremony was held for him at the airport.

Flags and banners were flying, Israeli air force jets were flying over, all the dignitaries were there to see him off. After shaking hands with the group that had assembled there, Mr. Begin walked along the line of flags and banners until he came to the national flag, and there he paused and bowed his head.  

Ariel Sharon, then the minister of agriculture, heard the touch of sarcasm and mockery in the reporters’ voices as they described the ceremony and Begin’s bowing to the flag. It was this sort of national feeling that empowered Begin and his supporters throughout the years and which the left, with its individualistic approach, could not fathom.

On July 19, 1977, Carter welcomed Begin on the lawn of the White House. He said he had read Begin’s books and learned that throughout his life Begin had been ready to suffer for his principles. He described him as a courageous man who had stood firm in the face of many disappointments, and also praised his religious stance.  

Begin chose to utter his first sentence in Hebrew, probably to emphasize Israel's separate identity and independence. “Mr. President, I have come from the Land of Zion and Jerusalem as the spokesman for an ancient people and a young nation.” Then he went on in his good English, using symbolic, lofty language:

Mr. President, we in Israel see in you not only as the first citizen of your great, mighty country, but also the leader and the defender of the Free

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511 Sharon, 1989, p. 534-535

512 Golan & Nakdiom, 1978, p. 235
World. However, the Free World has shrunk, indeed has been shrinking. It can be likened in our time to an island battered by winds, by stormy seas, by high waves. Therefore, all free women and men should stand together to persevere in the struggle for human rights, to preserve human liberty, to make sure that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

I share your view that we stand together for human liberty and dignity. We may have differences of opinion, but we shall never disagree; we may only agree to differ.\textsuperscript{513}

People used to think that someone wrote Begin's speeches, said Begin's bureau chief, Yehiel Kadishai. They could not imagine a prime minister who did not have a ghostwriter. "This prime minister -- Not only did nobody write a speech for him, nobody ever put a sentence into one of his speeches, either in Hebrew or English. Nobody ever wrote a letter for him. He dictated it."\textsuperscript{514}

Behind the declarations, both leaders prepared themselves for the worst: Begin for disagreement and pressure, while Carter had been frightened by Begin’s “adamant position” in interviews.\textsuperscript{515} Bending over a map of Israel, Begin explained to Carter the country's already unthinkably narrow dimensions. "Mr. President, between Haifa in the north and Ashkelon in south, there live more than two million Jews [Begin never used the word 'Israelis']. There was a period in our history when our men could not protect their wives and children. They had to deliver them to the slaughterers, we were trisiated…” Jimmy Carter looked at him and asked: What was that word? Begin told the president that it means one of three, a third of the Jewish people were exterminated. Starting to pound the map, an emotional Begin exclaimed, "I swear -- It will never happen again!" Then he choked up and could not go on. There was silence in the room. It seemed to go on and on, and the President could not look Begin in the

\textsuperscript{513}Hurwitz, 1977, p. 132

\textsuperscript{514}Kadishai, 2002

\textsuperscript{515}Carter, 1982, p. 288

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eye. Begin struggled to get a grip on his emotions and then apologized. But the impression this roaring silence made was immense. As was its political significance – Begin was not going to give up Judea and Samaria.\footnote{Avner, 2003; Quandt, 1986, p. 79}

Carter's description of their conversation in his diary was less dramatic. When Carter requested a halt to Jewish settlement activity in the West Bank, Begin “listened very closely, but did not respond.” Carter would later say that Begin's silence conveyed an impression of flexibility.\footnote{Quandt, 1986, p. 323} Then Begin launched into a long lecture on Jewish history that Carter may have found tiresome.\footnote{Carter, 1982, p. 291} He also offered his non-specific concessions concerning the Geneva Conference in Sinai and the Golan Heights. Carter assured Begin that any “differences that may occur from time to time” should not be allowed to obscure America's commitment to Israel's security and well-being.\footnote{Medzini, 1977-79, p. 32} After their meeting, Carter recalled the talks as a “pleasant surprise… [Begin] was much more moderate in words, and much more moderate in concept” than he'd anticipated.\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 210} When Begin came out of the meeting, he told his aide: “There was no confrontation.”\footnote{ibid, p. 202}

White House correspondent Trude B. Feldman reported:

After 15 years of covering White House state functions, I would rank Begin's visit as the most emotion-laden and drama-packed. That evening, the atmosphere in the State Dining Room was rivetting during the exchange of after-dinner toasts. The 53 'working dinner' guests found themselves captivated as Premier Begin – in a low-toned voice – spoke about the moral greatness of America, about 'little' Israel, about his
own childhood and about the Holocaust. He seemed to transcend mere
diplomatic polish and reached a level of heart-to-heart communication,
seldom displayed in the usual performance of a Head of State.
At one point his words must have struck President Carter as particularly
poignant. One could observe a mist appear in the president's eyes, as he
listened with rapt attention to Begin's touching, even painful description of
the Holocaust. 522

Ambassador Dinitz 521a was present during the conversation. He recounted how Begin
slapped him on the knee after they got into the car and that they had the following
exchange:

Begin: Nu, it was an excellent conversation.
Dinitz: Mr. Prime Minister, it was a difficult conversation.
Begin: Difficult? How so?
Dinitz: There was no agreement.
Begin: Agreement or no agreement – what does it matter? For the first time, an
American president heard an Israeli prime minister tell it like it is.

While Dinitz had grown accustomed to the style of searching for agreement and
common ground with America, Begin staked out what was a novel approach: directly
stating what he believed in.

Nevo Azriel 521b, who became Begin's military secretary in 1981, recalled what
happened when Begin decided he had to stay on in the States a little longer. His wife
asked if someone could buy two additional shirts for him because he had run out of
shirts. A shirt was brought to him and she wanted to pay for it. An official from the
embassy said the cost would be recorded as part of the visit's expenses. Begin refused,
saying the item was a personal need which the prime minister should pay for himself.

522Hurwitz, 1977, p. 158
521a 2002
521b 2000

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On personal trips abroad, when Begin could not eat in a strictly kosher restaurant, he did not make an issue of it. But on official visits, everything had to be perfectly kosher in accordance with Orthodox law. Begin argued that Gentiles should know that the Jews keep their tradition and he behaved this way primarily for this reason. He stopped Israel’s national airline, El Al, from flying on Saturday, ignoring the financial aspect while insisting that the Gentiles should know that Jewish airplanes do not fly on that day. Yet Begin also reproached Orthodox Jews who went to Yeshiva (religious high education) instead of enlisting in the army, telling them that they should know how to hold a rifle in order to protect their families.523 And in stark contrast to Labor politicians, Begin was not afraid to use the words "God" or "providence" in his speeches.524

When Begin arrived back in Israel he was in high spirits, and told the waiting reporters:

I had the privilege of being in close proximity to Ze’ev Jabotinsky for eight years, so I am not easily impressed by people. I wish to say, upon my return home, that I was profoundly impressed by the extraordinary personality of President Carter.525

Yitzhak Shamir (Begin’s successor as prime minister) said Begin only made this comparison once, and probably was aware that he had exaggerated.526 Relations between the two leaders were not quite as smooth as all that. Carter did not use Begin’s superlatives to describe the success of the talks, though he wrote that he was:

523 Kadishai, 1993
524 Avner, 2003
525 Medzini, 1977-79, p. 51
526 Aizakson, 2003, p. 68
“pleased with our discussions and inspired by his apparent eagerness to work with me…”\textsuperscript{527}

According to Carter, Rabin - unlike Begin - did not believe in the possibility of peace.

On March 7, 1977, Carter wrote in his diary:

\begin{quote}
I asked him [Rabin] to tell me what Israel wanted me to do when I met with the Arab leaders and if there were something specific, for instance, that I could propose to Sadat. He did not unbend at all, nor did he respond. It seems to me that the Israelis, at least Rabin, don’t trust our government or any of their neighbors… His strange reticence caused me to think again about whether we should launch another major effort for peace.”\textsuperscript{528}
\end{quote}

The first signs of change had come on April 4, 1977 - when Rabin was still Israel's prime minister. In talks with Carter in Washington, Sadat presented a significant shift from past Arab positions, including a willingness on his part to consider full peace with Israel. The perception of Begin as a strong leader was significant to both Carter and Sadat and encouraged the initiation of a different process. Carter noted positively about Begin: “[He is] a strong leader, quite different from Rabin.”\textsuperscript{529} And Sadat asked Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu two questions about Begin -- “Is he honest?” and “Is he a strong man?” -- and was told that the answer to both was yes.\textsuperscript{530} Carter also liked Sadat's strength and courage.\textsuperscript{531} The three leaders were united in their appreciation of strength, courage and faith (all three were devout believers) – concepts that are somehow not associated with the image of Labor's leaders.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{527}Carter, 1982, p. 291
\item \textsuperscript{528}ibid, p. 280
\item \textsuperscript{529}ibid, p. 290
\item \textsuperscript{530}ibid, pp. 284-285
\item \textsuperscript{531}ibid, p. 282
\end{itemize}

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Then Begin took a gamble in order to test their “agreement to disagree,” said one of his aides. The day after returning to Israel, he legalized three settlements close to Arab population centers (something Labor had never done), knowing it would anger the U.S. but predicting that this anger would subside after few months.\textsuperscript{532} At the same time, however, he assured the U.S. that this conferment of legal status would have no bearing on the final political status of the West Bank.\textsuperscript{533}

Carter, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Adviser Zbignew Brzezinski felt that the legalization of settlements was a provocation by Begin.\textsuperscript{534} But Carter's public reaction was surprisingly empathetic, since he understood Begin’s motives. He said that the settlements did not, of course, help the peace process, but added:

I think it is not fair to overly criticize Prime Minister Begin. The fact is that under the previous Mapai coalition, the Labor Government, that settlements have been built there, a fairly large number… I think he is in a position now of great strength in Israel. I think that his voice would be honored by the Israeli people. But he, like myself, has run on campaign commitments and I think he is trying to accommodate the interest of peace as best as he can. That does not mean that the settlements are right, but I think it would not be proper to castigate him unnecessarily about it.\textsuperscript{535}

William B. Quandt, an adviser to Brzezinski who was on the staff of the National Security Council and responsible for dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict, wrote in his book, "Camp David," which is the most detailed account of the Egypt-Israel peace process:

\textsuperscript{532}Silver, 1984, p. 168

\textsuperscript{533}Hirschler, 1979, p. 300

\textsuperscript{534}Brzezinski, 1983, p. 105-106

\textsuperscript{535}Medzini, 1977-79, p. 69
Begin honestly told his listeners what he believed and what he meant to do. It was not his fault if they did not always listen.
Carter and his associates took longer to realize that Begin was also a superb politician, carefully calculating his moves, with a masterly sense of timing and a remarkable capacity for brinkmanship. They took even longer to recognize that Begin’s views on Judea and Samaria were rock hard, not subject to the normal bargaining expected of most politicians… The Americans were not used to dealing with men of deep ideological convictions. *\(^{536}\)*

The first Arab leader Begin tried to approach was King Hussein of Jordan. Israeli ministers such as Abba Eban, Moshe Dayan, Shimon Peres, Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin and others had already met Hussein, some of them more than 10 times. The meetings had been open and warm, but produced no results. *\(^{537}\)* However, when Begin asked to meet with Hussein the answer was a blunt no. This angered Begin. On August 22, 1977 he sent Dayan to a secret meeting with Hussein in London. Begin let Dayan offer the king territorial concessions in the West Bank, *\(^{538}\)* but gloated when Hussein rejected the proposal. *\(^{539}\)* Hussein explained that since the Arab nations had proclaimed the Palestinian Liberation Organization the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, he would not touch the issue. *\(^{540}\)* Dayan also confirmed Begin’s willingness – when they sat together in the National Unity Government - to negotiate territorial compromise in the West Bank. “We would not reject such a solution [of territorial compromise in the West Bank] if it were proposed by the Arabs,” he wrote concerning himself and Begin. *\(^{541}\)* Dayan mentioned in this regard

*\(^{536}\) Quandt, 1986, p. 78, 84

*\(^{537}\) Silver, 1984, p. 168

*\(^{538}\) Dayan, 1981, p. 36

*\(^{539}\) Temko, 1987, p. 206

*\(^{540}\) Dayan, 1981, p. 37

*\(^{541}\) ibid, p. 3
that Begin was willing to compromise more than Labor was in Sinai and the Golan Heights.

Begin's negotiating style had some wisdom to it. His declared position was that he was not going to make any concessions in the West Bank and Gaza, but he was still ready to repeatedly check Hussein's position on it. That was the logic behind his long-held stance that he would not declare his concessions before negotiations. He wanted to know the Arab stance first. In this way, he avoided giving something without getting anything in return.

As previously noted, one difference between western and eastern civilizations is that in the former, the existence of an individual or nation is mostly secured; while in the latter, this is often not the case. Thus westerners tend to start negotiations from a maximal position and make gradual concessions that do not threaten their existence. But Begin started from the bottom by declaring what he was not going to negotiate – his existence. When Begin said: First we shall meet, and every side has the right to present its position -- to many people it sounded like an empty slogan. What was new about it? But for Begin, an honorable meeting conducted in the proper way and accompanied by the appropriate national symbols was the essence because it, more than the specific content, implied recognition. No wonder he tried to negotiate directly with Hussein and to leave Carter, the mediator, outside the picture for as long as possible. For Begin, resorting to any mediation contained an element of humiliation.

Begin told Cyrus Vance that the PLO Covenant, which called for the destruction of the “Zionist State,” was an Arab-style Mein Kampf. Events of the recent past, he said, had taught that threats to destroy the Jewish state and the Jewish people should not be dismissed as idle rhetoric.\(^\text{542}\) Vance described Begin as “a combination of Old

\(^\text{542}\)Hirschler, 1979, p. 301
Testament prophet and courtly European. He can be harsh and acerbic at one moment and warm and gracious the next... An odd mixture of iron will and emotionalism.”

Begin announced an “equalization of services” in the West Bank that would attempt to connect Jews and Arabs equally to the Israeli water and electricity systems and later to the Israeli government. But it was only a symbolic declaration. Later he would tell an aide who complained about Arab policemen getting lower salaries, “But you know we don’t have the money for equalization.” The aide also said that Begin would often make a public declaration without any real intention of carrying it out.

Begin’s second trip abroad was to Marjayoun, the Christian militia’s hilltop stronghold in south Lebanon. Rabin had armed them as a force against the PLO and the Syrians to protect Israel’s northern border. Back home, Begin said:

Theirs is not the lot of the Jewish people – we have suffered more – but the fact is that they, too, are a minority in Lebanon, a minority in the Middle East facing an overwhelming Muslim majority, which has tried time and again to wipe them out, and they have suffered 10 massacres in 100 years.… Without our military help, the Christian minority would have long ago been wiped out totally… We cannot acquiesce in the attempts to destroy them.

It was probably Begin's perception of the situation in Holocaust-like terms that compelled him to reveal to the whole world – to the astonishment of his aides – something that was considered a secret: Israel’s arming of the Lebanese Christians. Later, in September 1977, he declared: “I regard Israel as the protector of the

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543 Vance, 1983, p. 181

544 Temko, 1987, p. 206, 408

545 Medzini 1977-79, p. 76-77

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minorities in the Middle East.” Begin also stated time and again: "We know what it means to be a minority."  

When satellite photos proved that Israel had handed over U.S. armored personnel carriers to the Christian militia and Carter (in a letter dated September 24, 1977) threatened to tell Congress, Begin retreated, adding an admiring gesture to the president. He opened a cabinet, took out a bottle of whiskey, poured two glasses, one for Carter's envoy and one for him, and raised his glass as if to acknowledge that the United States had won this round. This admiration, an American official added, was due mainly to the fact that he had been caught. Cheating, in this case as in a few others, was perceived by Begin as an act of survival and therefore not guilt or shame-inducing.

Begin sent Dayan to meet with Morocco’s King Hassan, who said the Egyptians were ready to talk and had suggested two options: Either Dayan could meet the Egyptian Deputy Premier Hassan Tuhami or Begin could meet Anwar Sadat. Begin and Dayan were for a summit between the leaders. But Sadat changed his mind and refused to meet Begin. He sent his envoy, Tuhami, to meet Dayan in Rabat. Tuhami and Morocco's foreign minister expressed their admiration for Begin and Dayan's strength and informed Dayan of their belief that only a strong and brave leader could make peace. Dayan returned from Morocco with Sadat’s two conditions for

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546 Temko, 1987, p. 409
547 Avner, 2003
548 Quandt, 1986, p. 103-104
549 Temko, 1987, p. 221
550 Naor, 1993, p. 116, 132
meeting Begin: 1. The Americans were not to know anything about this meeting; 2. Israel had to accept the principle of total withdrawal from the Sinai.\textsuperscript{551}

Begin rejected both conditions. This was not his way of making peace. He was not going to pay for a meeting that implied recognition. As for the Americans, Begin also apparently preferred to meet Sadat without U.S. involvement – but not as an imposed condition.

Begin sent the West German chancellor his congratulations after German commandos successfully freed hostages from a hijacked Lufthansa airliner in Mogadishu, Somalia on October 18, 1977. Was he changed since his solemn oath in the early fifties always to condemn and never to forgive Germany? Throughout the years, Begin and his party comrades had urged the public not to buy German goods, but the demand was tempered over time. In 1965, when the Israeli government planned to establish diplomatic relations with West Germany, Begin’s opposition surfaced again, but this time he was much more moderate. When Begin was elected prime minister in May 1977, the Bonn government expressed fears about a possible deterioration in relations between the two countries. But Begin did not refuse to meet with the German ambassador or the German foreign minister.\textsuperscript{552} He related to the Germans officially as he had to as prime minister – but did not hold private meetings with them or speak German, which he knew, or travel to Germany.

Meanwhile, the Americans were quite angry about the settlements in the West Bank and planned to declare, together with Moscow, recognition of “the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.” The U.S. also attempted to convene a Geneva conference, while Arab leaders disagreed over whether and how to attend the

\textsuperscript{551}Dayan, 1981, p. 42-52

\textsuperscript{552}Haber, 1978, p. 238
conference, and Arafat was reluctant to accept an indirect role in it for the PLO. It was with all this going on, and Begin still awaiting the Egyptian reply regarding a possible additional meeting with Sadat’s envoy in Morocco, that the surprise came. On November 9, 1977, in his opening address to the winter session of the Egyptian parliament, the People’s Assembly, Sadat announced his willingness to participate in the Geneva peace conference and denounced Israel for what he called her arguing over every word. Then he said:

I state in all seriousness that I am prepared to go to the end of the world - and Israel will be surprised to hear me tell you that I am ready to go to their home, to the Knesset itself, to argue with them, in order to prevent one Egyptian soldier from being wounded. Members of the People’s Assembly, we have no time to waste.\(^{553}\)

In his autobiography, "In Search of Identity," Sadat described how his audience could not believe their ears.\(^ {554} \) And Ismail Fahmy, the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Egypt who resigned in wake of Sadat’s initiative, recalled how Sadat acted on his own without consulting any one besides Fahmy himself.\(^ {555} \)

A reporter called Eliahu Ben-Elissar, director of the Prime Minister’s Office, that evening and told him about Sadat’s declaration:

Ben-Elissar: ‘Are you sure that this is what Sadat declared? I do not believe it.’
The reporter: ‘Yes, this is what I heard with my own ears over Cairo Radio.’
Ben-Elissar: ‘Are you sure that this is what you heard?’
The reporter: absolutely sure.

\(^ {553} \) Medzini, 1977-79, p. 162
\(^ {554} \) 1978, p. 308
\(^ {555} \) Fahmy, 1983, p. 276
Ben-Elissar: do you have any agency cables in writing?
The reporter: not yet.

Ben-Elissar: ‘Look, please check, and if it is true that this is what Sadat declared, you may write that he will be most welcome in Jerusalem’

Ben-Elissar did not disturb Begin’s evening with this news but waited until the next morning. Nor did the reporter’s newspaper, The Jerusalem Post, lead with this news on its front page. Surprise in Israel was great because there was no precedent for such an offer. All of the meetings between Israeli leaders and their Arab counterparts had been clandestine. An open meeting signified recognition. It was a symbol for the people of the region as well as for the entire world. This was exactly what Begin wanted more than any detailed agreement. For him, recognition was the antithesis of the Holocaust and extermination.

The next morning, Israel Radio broadcast a statement in English from the prime minister welcoming Sadat with honor to Jerusalem. Begin also broadcast an oath to the Egyptian people for the two nations: “No more wars, no more bloodshed, and no more threats.” He described some historical aspects of the conflict, mentioning Israel’s strength and desire for peace, and said:

…It will be a pleasure to welcome and receive your President with the traditional hospitality you and we have inherited from our common father, Abraham.

Then he went on to quote a passage (Surah 5) from the Koran, which speaks about the right of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel:

Recall when Moses said to his people: Oh my people, remember the goodness of Allah towards you when he appointed prophets amongst you... Oh my people, enter the Holy Land which Allah hath written down as yours…

Silver, 1984, p. 171
Begin concluded his address to the Egyptian people with “sulh and shalom” – the Arabic and Hebrew terms for peace.  

Sadat, who had made his move without consulting the Americans – probably because he conceived of peace along Begin’s lines – also asked for an official, written invitation. Begin sent him one, again emphasizing the respect, honor and cordiality with which the president would be received in Jerusalem. Begin invited Sadat to visit Jerusalem on the anniversary of Ben-Gurion’s death. Sensitive to the significance of such symbols, Begin drew the Knesset's attention to this special date.

Sadat explained his view of the visit to a delegation from the U.S. House of Representatives:

We must do the impossible to break the vicious circle in which Arabs and Israelis have been moving for 30 years. This is for the sake of future generations. Hence the holiness of the mission. If I do not try to break this vicious circle, God will bring me to account, and so will future generations. For me the Arab-Israeli conflict consists of 70 percent psychological problems and 30 percent substance. Let us overcome the psychological problems and go to the substance. For that I am going to the Knesset, and if need be I shall open a discussion with its 120 deputies to give them the real facts in the area here – the other point of view – so that they can decide for themselves.

Thus far, Sadat and Begin seemed to be speaking the same symbolic language, with Sadat using western terminology in referring to “psychological problems.” Labor leaders would also have been delighted to accept the Sadat visit, but the impact would have been limited.
not have been the same because, for them, recognition and Holocaust were not central. Begin’s behavior invited more respect from the other side than Labor’s stance did. He did not hide the real issue – recognition of existence – as it had already been resolved. And he also was not willing to give Sadat any promises before Israel’s existence was recognized. He held rigidly to the position that he was not going to negotiate Israel’s existence, and Sadat respected this. It was a totally different approach from Labor’s.

Sadat and Begin were similar in one key way: Begin experienced himself as the embodiment of the Jewish people while Sadat experienced himself as the embodiment of the Egyptian people. In the epilogue to his autobiography, *In Search of Identity*, Sadat writes:

> It is the story of a search for identity – my own and that of Egypt. They are one and the same thing, because since childhood I have identified myself with my country – the land and the people.\(^560\)

To evaluate Sadat's move, we must see through his eyes just what he had to overcome:

> What was it, then, that I needed to change? We had been accustomed (and a whole generation had been brought up) to regard Israel as taboo – as an entity whose emotional associations simply prevented anyone from approaching it.\(^561\)

For Begin, Sadat's overture was a substantial vindication of his decades-long stance and he exclaimed to an Irgun comrade: “After all the years of my being slandered and vilified as a warmonger and terrorist, I am the one Sadat has decided to visit. In spite of all their efforts, he did not come to them.”\(^562\)

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\(^560\) Sadat, 1978, p. 314

\(^561\) Sadat, 1978, p. 303

\(^562\) Katz, 1981, p. 183
Sadat was welcomed to Israel on Saturday evening, November 19, 1977. Prior to Sadat's visit, Chief of General Staff Motta Gur said that the Egyptian president was probably laying a trap for Israel. Some security personnel reported imagining scenarios such as: Instead of Sadat emerging from his airplane, a group of terrorists would burst out and cut down all the Israeli dignitaries. When Sadat descended from his plane and was shaking Gur's hand, he commented, "You thought it is a trick, General." Golda shook Sadat's hand warmly and said (perhaps with some jealousy): "We have been waiting for you for a long time."  

And to Ariel Sharon, Sadat said: "If you attempt to cross the West Bank again I'll put you in jail!" According to Sadat, Sharon replied: "Oh, no! I'm Minister of Culture now!"  

Sadat was received with the utmost respect. Flags, anthems and official ceremonies filled his short visit. People in Israel were mesmerized. It was like a dream come true, and the whole country watched Sadat’s speech to the Knesset on TV. When Sadat finished his speech – he spoke in Arabic – all 120 Knesset members from the different parties applauded. Sadat offered Israel recognition, but demanded that Israel withdraw from all Arab territories occupied in the Six-Day War. He also demanded the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Like Begin, he wanted neither stages of partial peace nor indirect talks and set no preconditions for his visit:

You want to live with us in this part of the world. In all sincerity, I tell you, we welcome you among us, with full security and safety. This, in

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563 Avner, 2003

564 Sadat, 1978, p. 309
itself, is a tremendous turning point; one of the landmarks of a decisive historical change.

We used to reject you. We had our reasons and our claims, yes. We used to brand you as ‘so-called’ Israel, yes …

It is also true that we used to set, as a precondition for any negotiations with you, a mediator who would meet separately with each party …

Yet today I tell you, and declare it to the whole world, that we accept to live with you in permanent peace based on justice …

Yet, there remained another wall. This wall constitutes a psychological barrier between us. A barrier of suspicion. A barrier of rejection. A barrier of fear of deception. A barrier of hallucinations around any action, deed or decision. A barrier of cautious and erroneous interpretations of all and every event or statement. It is this psychological barrier which I described in official statements as representing 70 percent of the whole problem.

Then Sadat said:

If you have found the legal and moral justification to set up a national home on a land that did not all belong to you, it is incumbent upon you to show understanding of the insistence of the People of Palestine on establishing, once again a state on their land.  

Sadat’s speech included many citations from the book of Proverbs, the Psalms, the Prophet Zechariah and the Koran, from which he cited the Muslim belief in the biblical patriarchs and in the revelations granted to Moses and Jesus. Begin replied to Sadat in Hebrew without a prepared text. He opened his speech by mentioning Id Al-Adha, the Feast of the Sacrifice Muslims were observing that day. He went on:

The duration of the flight from Cairo and Jerusalem is short but, until last night, the distance between them was infinite. President Sadat showed courage in crossing this distance. We Jews can appreciate courage, as exhibited by our guest, because it is with courage that we arose, and with it we shall continue to exist.

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565 Medzini, 1977-1979, p. 185-188
Then Begin refuted Sadat’s argument that the Balfour Declaration was the “legal and moral justification” for a Jewish homeland in a land that “did not at all belong” to Israel.

In this Land we established our civilization; here our prophets spoke those holy words you cited this very day; here the Kings of Judea and Israel prostrated themselves; here we became a nation…

If Sadat spoke about results (how he viewed the final peace), Begin put the process center-stage and did not relate specifically to Sadat’s demands. He said:

President Sadat knows, as he knew from us before he came to Jerusalem, that our position concerning permanent borders between us and our neighbors differs from his. However, I call upon the President of Egypt and upon all our neighbors: Do not rule out negotiations on any subject whatsoever. I propose, in the name of the overwhelming majority of this Parliament, that everything will be negotiable… No side shall say to the contrary. No side shall present prior conditions. We will conduct the negotiations with respect. If there are differences of opinion between us, that is not exceptional… We shall conduct the negotiations as equals. There are no vanquished and there are no victors… In this spirit of openness, of readiness of each to listen to the other – to facts, reasons, explanations - with every reasonable attempt at mutual persuasion – let us conduct the negotiations… until we succeed, in good time, in signing a peace treaty between us.566

There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of Begin's intentions. He could offer far less than what Sadat wanted. Moreover, the Labor Party had never agreed to such concessions. He could offer only a process and his belief. Also, behind his seemingly rigid defensive position, he was longing for recognition and relations and spoke not in terms of 'we' and 'them' but of togetherness. At this point, Begin himself probably did not know his longing for peace and his national-religious outlook would manage to coexist amid a difficult peace process. Meanwhile, some people in Israel noticed that

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566 Medzini, 1977-79, p. 191-195
Begin hugged Sadat more than Sadat hugged Begin. After his short meeting with Sadat, he gave this positive assessment:

I had a personal, warm talk with President Sadat and I may say that we like each other. He has a sense of humor and I, too, sometimes have a sense of humor. We exchanged views. I think a fitting personal tie has been established between us.\textsuperscript{567}

In return for his recognition of Israel, Sadat demanded Israel’s recognition of Egyptian sovereignty over Sinai, Syrian sovereignty over the Golan Heights, and the Palestinians’ right of self-determination. Sadat said he would not sign a separate peace agreement that did not include other Arab states. On his side, Begin emphasized not the Balfour Declaration but the Bible as the source of the Jewish right to the Land of Israel and demanded recognition through engagement in a mutual process. This was not another version of the Labor party's Allon plan to divide the West Bank between Jordan and Israel. Both leaders were taking a holistic perspective, not seeking to deal with partial concessions but with recognition of sovereignty and existence.

Sadat wanted peace with Israel but this doesn't mean that he really understood Zionism or the depth of Jewish history and fate. He was unable to connect the Jews to their biblical past and when he visited Yad Vashem (The Israeli Holocaust Museum), in Jerusalem he wrote in the visitors’ book: “May God guide our steps toward peace. Let us end all suffering for mankind.”\textsuperscript{568} Sadat could not write anything more personal to the Jewish people or to Begin as a survivor of the Holocaust. At a joint press conference at the end of the visit, Begin declared: "We have made a solemn pledge in

\textsuperscript{567}Hirschler, 1979, p. 310

\textsuperscript{568}Hirschler, 1979, p. 311
Jerusalem. There will be no more wars between us." Sadat's response was: "We agreed that the War of October 1973 will be the last war between us." Sadat's mention of the October War at a moment of hope for peace was not accidental. He needed the Egyptian triumph of that war and the restoration of Egyptian honor in order to make peace. Even after his visit to Jerusalem, he continued to attend an annual military parade celebrating the October War. Begin, however, preferred to forget the Yom Kippur War and to look to the future. For both leaders, with their different styles, a strong country was a necessary condition for peace.

Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem, going as it did against the view of the whole Arab world, required that he be tough with Israel lest it be perceived as surrender. But within Israel, he became a hero to many. Carter, for his part, was somewhat disappointed with Begin. “The president rather strongly felt that Begin should have made some conciliatory statement publicly and that he was completely unyielding,” said Carter’s National Security Adviser. Vance said: "[Begin] did not greet Sadat's initiative with great optimism; it was exactly the kind of unpredictable act that caused Israel to worry whether it was in control of its own future." Dayan's impression was that "Sadat radiated sincerity, and was at one with his audience, as though speaking personally to each individual from the heart." He "believed the Knesset would be persuaded by his words and accept his proposal." When Israel did not accept it

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567a Hurwitz, 2004, p. 136
569 Brzezinski, 1983, p. 111
570 Vance, 1983, p. 195
571 Dayan, 1981, p. 82
572 ibid, p. 81

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straightforwardly and replied with procedures and details for a continuation of the talks, he was disappointed and felt that Israel had rejected his peace proposal.\footnote{ibid, p. 84}

From the rostrum of the Knesset, Begin warned well-meaning West European governments, especially Germany, not to press Israel to make risky concessions that might lead her to another Holocaust.

I remind the German people that it should be the last to give advice… which would endanger the security of our wives and children.\footnote{Hirschler, 1979, p. 316}

Begin took the initiative by sketching out his peace plan. In it he offered almost total withdrawal from Sinai except for an Israeli civilian presence at some strategic spots such as the military airfield close to Eilat, Sharm al Sheikh port and airfield, El Arish airfield, and a police force to defend the few Israeli settlements that were inside Sinai.\footnote{Dayan, 1981, p. 92-94} Begin also offered Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza. It was an old plan originated by Jabotinsky to grant minorities inside Israel autonomy. Begin had elaborated on it throughout the years and was now offering the Palestinians an opportunity to run their own lives independently without having national rights. Israel would also retain security control and the right to settle in those territories. Again, Begin - without saying so explicitly - suggested a line of development going from absence of recognition to autonomy (partial recognition) to the final stage of independent Palestinian State, which he rejected but nevertheless implied as part of this overall scheme. Labor's line of development, in contrast, was to give up more land in response to more pressure during negotiations. Begin was an existential
negotiator and not in it to haggle over land. In fact, he had never bargained over land and rejected the "Land for Peace" formula.

We need to consider Begin’s ideas against the background of his era in order to understand the significance of his concessions. At this time, as noted, the Labor Party was not contemplating total withdrawal from the West Bank and Sinai; not even the supporters of the Peace Now movement were ready to go that far. Only a small minority on the extreme Left of the Israeli political map thought that way. A Palestinian state was also not an option for Labor, with Golda having declared a few years earlier that there was no such a thing as a Palestinian people. Labor had all kinds of partition plans in which they, unrealistically, hoped to cede part of the West Bank to King Hussein of Jordan, something he was not interested in.

Some American Jews, public relations professionals, mobilized to help Begin improve his media image. Sadat stood proud and spoke British English while Begin looked more like a Shtetl Jew. They came to his home, looked at his clothes and suggested that he makes some changes in his wardrobe. While they were explaining the issue – and Begin was listening like a good student - Aliza went ballistic: “Forty years I have dressed you and you became the prime minister, why do you need all this?!” she shouted. Begin looked at her patiently and said: “Alize'nka, if it is good for the Jewish people what do you care?”

In early December 1977, a circle was closed when Begin was invited by Prime Minister James Callaghan to visit England. It was during Hanukkah and the British prime minister lit the holiday candles. The dinner was kosher. These were the things that Begin cared about most. He was accepted warmly as the leader of a peace process

576 Channel 8, October/November 2003, Israeli TV, series about Begin
while the British overcame their memories of his terrorist past. The British wanted to emphasize their Zionist past and Begin was shown Lord Balfour’s Foreign Office and the place where he composed his declaration about a national home for the Jews in Palestine.

Begin was also invited to Paris. He agreed to come only for an official visit and not for a working visit. Being sensitive to such issues, he told his aide Kadishai that at the end of such a visit, there would be an announcement about the creation of a Palestinian State – which he did not wish to support, even if only by his presence.\(^{577}\)

Then Begin flew to Washington and presented his plan to Carter. He was ready to allow the return to the West Bank and Gaza of Palestinians who had fled in 1948 and 1967, in “reasonable numbers” to be discussed with the Palestinian council he had suggested forming.\(^{578}\) This was a change in Begin’s longstanding opposition to their return. “He also agreed that whatever rights to settle in the West Bank area the Jews might claim, the Palestinian Arabs could claim the same rights to buy property and settle inside Israel.” Begin, it seems, tried to be as fair as he could. But shortly after, Carter said, he reneged, saying that his cabinet “would not accept the promise he had given me.”\(^{579}\) In this case, the cabinet was probably being more realistic than Begin by not denying the demographic situation. Begin also suggested to Carter that the whole agreement could be reviewed in five years. But when he was pressed concerning the sovereignty issue, Begin proposed this correction:

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\text{Israel stands by its right and claim of sovereignty to Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District. But in the knowledge that other claims exist, it proposes,}
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\(^{577}\) Kadishai, 1993

\(^{578}\) Temko, 1987, p. 215; Brzezinski, 1985, p. 118

\(^{579}\) Carter, 1982, p. 300
for the sake of the agreement and the peace, that the question of sovereignty in these areas be left open.  

It was characteristic of Begin that when pressed often he tended to offer less. In this instance, he omitted his obligation to review the agreement in five years. Carter was skeptical about Begin’s “home rule arrangement” under Israeli control but was impressed by Begin’s generosity concerning Sinai:

> We were impressed by his [Begin] plan for the Sinai region, which was far more forthcoming than any previous proposal. In dealing with Egyptian territory, Begin had gone much further than any of his Labor party predecessors, expressing a willingness to return that portion of the Sinai from Sharm el Sheikh up the coast to Eilat, and to withdraw Israeli forces if Sadat would demilitarize the Sinai east of the Gidi and Mitla passes.  

It seems that the Americans sensed somehow that they had to speak to Begin in a different “language.” Carter, following Brzezinski’s suggestion, invoked Jabotinsky and told Begin that he agreed with Jabotinsky’s “view that one should always define the end objective first and then focus on details, rather than start first with details” and that Sadat, like Jabotinsky, was “bold, and striving for a final conclusion without incremental negotiations” in his initiative. According to Carter, Begin was responsive to that. Unlike Kissinger, who advocated a step by step approach, Carter aspired to reach a comprehensive settlement. Brzezinski’s colleagues also suggested that he speak with Begin separately because “I had good rapport with him and tended

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580 Temko, 1987, p. 215


582 Carter, 1982, p. 299

583 Brzezinski, 1983, p. 116-117

584 Carter, 1982, p. 299

585 Dinitz, 2002

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to think the way he does, not in legalistic terms the way his advisers tend to think and the way, to some extent, Cy [Vance] tends to think, but more in terms of broad historical attitudes, perhaps reinforced by a bit of East European empathy.” Brzezinksy also suggested to the President that he employ as much personal force and drama as possible.\(^586\) But according to the American Ambassador in Israel, Brezezinski always pushed for a very tough line saying the U.S. should "let Begin know who’s boss," while Vance was much more diplomatic in the way he wanted to approach Begin.\(^587\)

Begin's negotiating style was not familiar to the Americans. “It is very difficult in talking to Begin to tell whether he in fact is willing to be flexible, because he tends to repeat himself and subsequently uses exactly the same words or sentences,” said Brzezinski.\(^588\) Most likely, Begin repeated his ideas instead of saying “no” as a way of avoiding confrontation. Other techniques Begin used that we have already seen were to listen carefully but without any comment or even to give the impression of an agreement without stating it in words. His repertoire during negotiations was not limited only to words, as in the western style; he used also non-verbal communication which strengthened his ability as a negotiator and confused the Americans.

Carter persuaded Sadat to invite Begin to present his plan. Asked by CBS’s *Face the Nation* how he felt about a Palestinian state, Begin answered, “There can always be a review” of the autonomy proposal.\(^589\) He also said “that the Israeli government

\(^{586}\)Brzezinski, 1983, p. 117  

\(^{587}\)Samuel Lewis, 2002  

\(^{588}\)1983, p. 119-120  

\(^{589}\)Medzini, 1977-79, p. 255
would think not in terms of geography, history or ideology when it came to Judea, Samaria and Gaza Strip but in terms of the ‘individuals, the human beings’ who were living there." Begin had traversed quite a distance -- having started off advocating annexation of the West Bank and Gaza to Israel when he was in the opposition, he was now proposing an autonomy plan that included recognition of the Palestinians’ “right of return” to the West Bank and Gaza, and he'd also expressed his willingness to leave the sovereignty issue open to revision in the future. To Begin's way of thinking, the change was more qualitative than quantitative.

At this point in time, Carter and Begin seemed highly optimistic, if not euphoric. Carter praised Begin’s proposal as a “fair basis for negotiation.” He also wrote: “I feel protective of Sadat, and in a strange way so does Begin.” And Begin declared before millions of Americans:

I have a suggestion to make to President Sadat… If President Carter should invite President Sadat and myself to come to Washington, then we shall be in a circle of friendship and faith – a Christian President, a Moslem leader and a Jewish prime minister - and we can announce to the world: Pax vobiscum, Shalom Aleichem, SalEm aleicum - all of which mean “Peace unto you.” I think it will be quite an event in the annals of Mankind, in our generation.

On his way back, Begin stopped in England to update Prime Minister Callaghan on the talks and, in a gesture of respect, was invited to his rural private home. Begin declined a similar invitation from France, a way of expressing his years-long dissatisfaction with France's pro-Arab stance. France was forced to send an envoy to

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590 Hirschler, 1979, p. 317
591 Medzini, 1977-79, p. 254
592 1982, p. 300
593 *Face the Nation*, December, 18, 1977, Medzini 1977-79, p.255

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England to be updated about the talks Begin conducted in Washington. Some officials commented that this was a humiliating position for France to be put in.\footnote{Avner, 2003}

Begin, Dayan and Weizman (now defense minister) met their Egyptian counterparts on Christmas Day in the Suez Canal town of Ismailiya. Sadat was still not ready to let Begin visit him in Cairo. Begin was not at all distressed by Sadat’s low-profile invitation, even in Ismailiya, where there were no signs of welcome whatsoever in the street, and was elated to be the first Israeli leader to visit Egypt. Begin congratulated Sadat on his birthday: “Our heartfelt wishes on your fifty-ninth birthday. We know that you were born in a small village, in poverty, and that you attained your present position by your own efforts and sacrifices.” Sadat was quite pleased by these words.\footnote{Weizman, 1981, p. 128} But soon after the greetings the battle started. Sadat demanded an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied lands, while Begin annoyed him by reading out the details of his plan.\footnote{ibid, pp. 128-131} To the reporters present, Sadat said glumly that as far as the crux – the Palestinian issue – was concerned, no agreement had been achieved. He also said that he was “outraged by the arrogant attitude which Begin had adopted with him.”\footnote{Brzezinski, 1983, p. 242} Begin repeated the phrase he had uttered in Washington: “I have come here a hopeful prime minister, and I am leaving a happy man.”\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 216} But according to Vance, Begin was in a defensive position -- proclaiming his acceptance
of UN resolution 242 but excluding from it the necessary withdrawal from the West Bank. 599

Back home, Begin declared Ismailiya a success. He bragged that within five minutes, follow-up committees had been established and the pressure taken off Israel. Begin said to the Knesset:

For the first time, there is an Israeli peace plan. The whole world is arguing about the Israeli peace plan… We used to be isolated in America and Europe, and now we isolate someone else. This is a most important development... 600

The government-controlled Egyptian press wrote that Begin behaved like a Shylock, insisting on his pound of flesh, and declared that he should be grateful he had not been murdered in Ismailiya. 601 It all reminded Begin of Nazi propaganda during the Thirties and he threatened that if it continued he would bring the negotiations to a halt.

When a group of Herut veterans came out in opposition to Begin’s autonomy plan he forced a vote in the Knesset and won. The Labor members abstained. They rejected the autonomy plan but did not want to be the spoilers. Begin promised his comrades that no more concessions would be made – and especially that Israeli sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza would be maintained and that the Sinai settlements would not be evacuated. Begin warned that if Sadat rejected the Israeli plan, he would

599 Vance, 1983, p. 200, 206

600 Medzini, 1977-79, p. 278

reserve ‘the right to declare that the proposal is no longer valid’...602 As previously seen – as with his omission of an earlier promise to revisit the issue of sovereignty in the West Bank after five years - this kind of "punishment" or retaliation was part of Begin's negotiating style, a way of encouraging his partner to hurry and grab the opportunity before it is lost. Not surprisingly, it was also part of Sadat's negotiating style to increase the price for every Israeli refusal and to subsequently withdraw generous proposals.603 Begin's opponents argued that by leaving the issue of sovereignty open, Israel was inviting future pressure.

In January 1978, Begin voluntarily assumed the role of host - instead of Dayan - at the Political Committee's gala dinner for the Egyptian foreign minister Kamal Ibrahim in Jerusalem. In his speech, Begin mentioned that Kamal was too young to remember what had happened in 1939 and how the Second World War had started when the Germans annexed the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia. Kamel was deeply insulted by Begin's implication that he was inexperienced and unaware of history.604 (Also, in Arab culture, youth is not as respected as maturity and more advanced age). When a gloomy Sadat later halted the work of the Egyptian-Israeli Political Committee, Begin called it a “chutzpah!”605

What Carter had initially considered Begin’s generous plan for Palestinian autonomy now looked more like manipulation:

602 Temko, 1987, p. 217
603 Weizman, 1981, p. 266
604 Quandt, 1986, p. 164-165; also, in Arab culture, youth is not as respected as maturity and more advanced age
605 Temko, 1987, p. 217; meaning: arrogant behavior, often against authority
Begin sounded much more flexible than I had expected, but I was to discover that his good words had multiple meanings, which my advisers and I did not understand at the time.\textsuperscript{606}

Carter felt that Begin was not protective enough of Sadat and not as mindful of the risk the Egyptian leader was taking as he was previously. He felt Sadat wanted peace, while Begin wanted territories.

Whenever we seemed to be having some success with the Arabs, Begin would proclaim the establishment of another group of settlements, or make other provocative statements. This behavior was not only very irritating, but it seriously endangered the prospects for peace and Sadat’s status both in Egypt and within the Arab world.\textsuperscript{607}

Clearly it was easier for all three leaders to be more optimistic at the beginning of the peace process when all that was required were abstract and general declarations in support of peace. Their conflicting positions were waiting down the road and hiding in the details. Also, it was easier for Carter to be more empathetic to Sadat’s struggle for a Palestinian state than to Begin’s biblical oath not to give up Judea and Samaria. Carter declared the Sinai settlements illegal, and when Israel asked for new fighter jets, the U.S. also armed Egypt and Saudi Arabia with planes as a gesture to Sadat and a reproach to Begin.\textsuperscript{608} While Begin had earlier claimed to have won the warm support of Carter and Vance for his plan,\textsuperscript{609} he now found himself isolated. Brzezinski described how a secret coalition of Egypt and America was formed in order to press

\textsuperscript{606}Carter, 1982, p. 300

\textsuperscript{607}Carter, 1982, p. 304

\textsuperscript{608}Brzezinski, 1983, p. 248

\textsuperscript{609}Medzini, 1977-79, p. 254
Israel for greater concessions.\textsuperscript{610} And Dayan, who probably sensed this, told the Americans they were "anti-Israel and no longer could be honest brokers."\textsuperscript{611} Begin asked why the Americans had changed their minds. Was it only because Sadat had rejected his plan?! He was also critical of Sadat’s dismissal of details, and argued that details were important now. “He so wanted Carter to like him,” said an American official, “and he realized that it was Sadat whom Carter admired.”\textsuperscript{612}

In March 1978, a PLO commando group hijacked a bus north of Tel Aviv. Dozens of Israelis were killed and injured. Begin ordered the army to invade Lebanon in retaliation (Operation Litani), and in the Knesset, he declared: “Gone forever are the days when Jewish blood could be shed with impunity.”\textsuperscript{613} Then he left for Washington by American invitation.

Carter felt the invasion of Lebanon was “a terrible overreaction”\textsuperscript{614} and asked Begin to make more concessions.

He [Begin] said that he was ‘wounded in the heart’ when his December plan [offering to withdraw from the Sinai] had first received words of praise which had later faded away. That Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem was only a grand gesture; that Egypt wanted an independent Palestinian State and total withdrawal. I told him this was absolutely not true. I knew for a fact.”\textsuperscript{615}

\textsuperscript{610}Brzezinski, 1983, p. 252

\textsuperscript{611}Carter, 1982, p. 308

\textsuperscript{612}Temko, 1987, p. 218

\textsuperscript{613}Medzini, 1977-79, p. 362

\textsuperscript{614}Carter, 1982, p. 310

\textsuperscript{615}ibid, p. 311

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Begin refused to make additional concessions and said it was now Sadat’s turn.\textsuperscript{616} On the next day of meetings, Carter became tougher. He blamed Begin for not giving up the settlements in the West Bank and Sinai, and for Israel’s retaining sovereignty in the West Bank. Carter said he planned to tell congressional leaders the same thing. Begin was shocked into silence. In a weak voice he protested that it wasn’t fair, that Sadat had made just one concession by his trip to Jerusalem and given only promises while Israel had had to give real things. Then, according to Dayan, who was there: “Begin sat stunned, his face drawn and ashen… leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes, weakened physically by the psychological effort.”\textsuperscript{617}

Begin returned home to find a mostly left-leaning media that didn’t miss an opportunity to be very critical of him and his government. There was also intra-cabinet fighting, and leaks. He attempted to appoint, for the first time in Israel, a Sephardic president after the former president completed his tenure, and was met with ridicule. This candidate, a talented professor of physics, was put forward by Begin as a symbol but was not interested in politics. Finally, Labor candidate Yitzhak Navon, also of Sephardic origin, was chosen.

Begin found Sharon immersed in extensive plans to settle Jews in the West Bank while Weizman, fearing for the peace process, demanded a halt. Sharon declared a Jewish “archaeological” camp near the biblical Shiloh, but a reporter’s visit exposed the bluff to the Israeli public and to the Americans. Then Sharon suggested that Begin erect dummy settlements in the Sinai and agree in the negotiations to evacuate only those. Begin went along, retreating only when it became evident to him that the ploy wouldn’t fool anyone. It was clear that a part of Begin admired Sharon’s fighting

\textsuperscript{616}ibid, pp. 310-312

\textsuperscript{617}1981, p. 126; Brzezinski, 1983, p. 246
spirit and his drive to settle Jews in the biblical Judea and Samaria, but this time another part of him felt compelled to halt Sharon.

Begin rejected Carter’s suggestion that UN peacekeepers be introduced in place of the Israeli forces withdrawn from southern Lebanon. Consistent with his long-held stand that Israel’s security would not be guarded by others, Begin gave over the Israeli positions to the Christian militia, Israeli allies trained and armed by Israel. On May 1, Begin came to the United States to join in the American celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the State of Israel. Carter told him:

that peace in the Middle East was in his hands, that he had a unique opportunity to either bring it into being or kill it, and that he understood that the Arabs genuinely wanted peace, particularly Sadat... My guess is that he will not take the necessary steps to bring peace to Israel – an opportunity that may never come again.

Carter, understanding Israel's needs and hoping to influence Begin in that way, arranged a fancy White House reception with many people, and emotional speeches and gestures in celebration of Israel's anniversary. “It turned out to be a very positive and heartwarming experience, but had very little effect either in the Middle East or within our country.”

Begin's encounter with Diaspora Jewry was different than Labor's had been. He did not feel superior to them. He was first and foremost a Jew, a fellow brother, and

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619 Sharon, 1989, p. 368-371

620 Temko, 1987, p. 220

621 Carter, 1982, p. 313

622 ibid, p. 313

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only afterwards an Israeli. Labor Party leaders - like their supporters - tried to repress their old Jewish identity, with its unpleasant connotations of weakness, absence of independence and the Holocaust and therefore often, even if unintentionally, snubbed Diaspora Jewry. In contrast, within days of taking office, Begin invited Rabbi Alexander Schindler, the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, to Jerusalem for an exchange of views. And it was not long before Rabbi Schindler declared: "The Jewish leadership sees in Begin what he truly is – the leader of the Jewish nation."\cite{623} It was hard for Diaspora Jews to reject Begin's positions even if they didn't agree with him," noted the government's secretary, "because, as they often said, he was like their father."\cite{624}

In June 1978, Begin was pressed by Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to agree to make a final sovereignty decision concerning the Palestinians five years after the signing of a treaty with Sadat. The Americans agreed to postpone the decision for five years, thinking that in five years Begin would not be in charge any more.\cite{625}

Weizman described Begin's brief depressive mood at this time:

> During our deliberations, the prime minister seemed indifferent to what was going on around him, taking no part in the cabinet discussions or even maintaining order among those who did. He presided over the meetings, withdrawn within himself, his glassy eyes focused on some remote spot. Rumor had it that his medication was getting the better of him…. [Then] it came to my ears that Begin was extremely depressed and liable to tender his resignation. 'Don't you dare resign over our answers to the Americans!' I almost shouted at him. 'Don't be down. Go out and meet the people. The people are waiting for you! I took you on a tour to our aircraft industry; you saw what our people do. Did you see what we invent and manufactured? You really enjoyed that! Now tell Arik Sharon to take you to see our wonderful farms, and Hurwitz will take you on a tour of industry. Sir, the people will replenish your strength!'

\cite{623} Hurwitz, 1977, p. 155-156

\cite{624} Naor, 1993, p. 127

\cite{625} Quandt, 1986, p. 210

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Begin replied emotionally: "You said great things today. Wonderful things…” and agreed to some kind of flexibility in which after five years “a different status” other than "permanent status” would be discussed. In this way, Begin refrained from promising anything final to the Palestinians. According to Weizman, Begin stuck to his dream, while it was clear to most of the ministers that after five years there would be no chance of obtaining Israeli sovereignty over these territories. "The atmosphere that Begin created throughout the peace process was of sadness and pain," said Weizman and he described how Begin's mood improved when he adopted tougher positions in the negotiations. Was this another independent wave of depression emanating from within or just a reaction to outside pressure and his understanding that there was no chance for Israel to retain the biblical lands in the long run? Both explanations are probably true to some extent.

In June 1978, the 'Evening Standard' and 'The Times' wrote that Begin was having mood swings that included depression and that he was not able to function as a prime minister. Shamir admitted that Begin had mood swings. "When there was good news he tended to feel elated more than other people and bad news made his mood plummet. But I would not say that he rushed into hasty decisions because of it." On June 29, Begin met with German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher who was making his first visit to Israel. Begin had one condition for the Israeli side -- that not a single word be spoken in German. Begin spoke in Hebrew, Genscher spoke German and Hecht – Begin's adviser - spoke English, although he said he could explain himself much better in German and they had a translator.

626 Weizman, 1981, p. 310-311
627 ibid, pp. 285-286, 306
628 Shamir, 1995
At one meeting, Sadat confided to Weizman about his expectations:

You Israelis must do something for me. No, not for me – for Egypt. When I came to Jerusalem in 1977, if you had only made some gesture in response – if you had only withdrawn to the El Arish-Ras Mohammed line! You would have taken the wind out of my sails. I was expecting you to do something like that. But you were silent! You thought you were smart and wise. Whatever became of Israel's smartness and wisdom?... I propose that Israel declare that she is immediately restoring El Arish and Jabel Musa [Mount Sinai] to Egypt. Even before the peace treaty is signed, we shall make them into Egyptian-administered enclaves. We don't need any road – we will fly in by air.”

Actually it was Arik Sharon –the Agriculture Minister at this time - who proposed that Israel hand over El Arish to Sadat as a show of appreciation for his momentous step. But Begin rejected his proposal, saying: "Policy-making is not a question of gestures. It is a serious matter. Israel's quid pro quo for Sadat's visit to Jerusalem was the hospitality that we accorded him." Now Weizman recommended that Begin respond favorably to Sadat's request, explaining the difficulty of the Egyptian president's predicament in the Arab world. Begin wrote to Sadat:

Dear President
My friend and colleague, Weizman, has conveyed a message... [in which] you proposed that we take a unilateral step by transferring El Arish and the Mount of Moses [Mount Sinai] to Egyptian sovereign territory. You will certainly agree, Mr. President, that no state takes unilateral steps. However contacts on a bilateral basis are feasible. I propose a meeting between our representatives in Jerusalem, Cairo, Alexandría, or Haifa.

Soon after, a message came from Cairo:

Regret to inform you that the National Security Council has decided today that there is no need to keep the Israeli military group in Egypt (the common military committee Sadat agreed to establish in Ismailia at Begin's request).

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630 Hurwitz, 2004, p. 139
We have made arrangements to send the group back home tomorrow, July 27, in an Egyptian civilian Boeing 737 to Lod.
Hearty wishes
General Gamasy (Egyptian War Minister)

Sadat would later say:

The official side is not the important one. Peace does not depend only upon the peace treaty. It depends on the relationship that unfolds. There are things that should be developed not necessarily on the official plane.  

In July, Vance convened a meeting of the Israeli and Egyptian foreign ministers near London (at Leeds castle) and told Dayan that a promise to deal with the sovereignty issue five years after the signing of a treaty was the minimum Sadat needed to counter Arab charges that Israel would not give the Palestinians anything beyond autonomy. Only then did Dayan write on a sheet of paper:

Israel will be prepared… to discuss after five years the question of sovereignty (or permanent status) of the areas. Although these provisions do not call for a decision on the subject, it is the personal view of the Foreign Minister that an agreement on this question is possible.  

Back home, Begin accused Dayan of having exceeded his authority. Dayan answered that he had written down only what he'd understood to be Israel’s intentions. And in any case, he was not ready to be reduced to being no more than Begin's messenger or to give up his own independent and creative thinking. But he was still willing to accept the government's rejection of his suggestions. According to

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632 Weizman, 1981, Hebrew, p. 332

633 Dayan, 1981, p. 146
Dayan, Begin reluctantly agreed ‘to swallow this frog’ of Dayan taking an active role.\footnote{Dayan, 1981, p. 147}

Then Begin convened the cabinet and, to Dayan’s astonishment, suggested that the cabinet and Knesset approve Dayan’s concession. When the cabinet members berated Dayan, Begin stopped them, saying in a hushed voice:

> Look, gentlemen -- The Foreign Minister represents the government of Israel, and through that government, he represents the State of Israel. As such, there is no such thing as a ‘personal opinion’ for a foreign minister in an international forum. Therefore, we have no choice but to approve what Mr. Dayan offered as his ‘personal opinion.’ Turning to Dayan, Begin said, Usually – and I am confident that in the future this will be the case – the Foreign Minister would consult his cabinet before delivering an opinion in an international forum or to representatives of foreign governments. But what was done, was done; and we must approve it. Then he went on: I want to tell you one other thing. In May, when this issue arose, I thought of proposing to the cabinet precisely the reply the Foreign Minister has given. But at the time I was ill, and did not have the energy to struggle with my friends who were not willing to give such an answer. I think that this is the proper reply to the Americans.\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 222}

Begin’s ability to use other people to do what he knew he should do but could not do alone is epitomized by his choice of Dayan, whose positions were very different than his own, to be Israel’s foreign minister. This was Begin at his best -- giving ‘the other’ power over him in a group process which he knew might lead him to unexpected places. Begin relied on others, did not think he had a monopoly on all wisdom and was also able to understand that the decisions he makes today might be changed within five years. He also had to satisfy his comrades from the right – which was no easy task.
At the Leeds Castle meeting, the Americans also asked Dayan if inviting Israel to become a member of NATO would encourage Israel to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders. Dayan's answer - which is probably just what Begin would have said - was that although he would welcome such an invitation, there was no security substitute for Israel's presence in those territories.

Begin was also pleased with how Dayan explored the Egyptians' readiness to accept territorial compromise, as Labor had suggested with its Allon plan for the West Bank. To Dayan and Begin's satisfaction, the Egyptians rejected this idea. On this occasion, Begin agreed – albeit reluctantly - with another clause in Dayan’s proposal concerning the West Bank:

Should a proposal for a peace treaty based upon a concrete territorial compromise be submitted, Israel, in accordance with previous statements, would be ready to consider it.636

Again we see evidence of Begin's willingness to consider withdrawal in the West Bank, although he clearly preferred to think along the lines of recognition of identity and existence rather than of bargaining over land.

Shamir, Begin's comrade and his successor as prime minister, attested that both Begin and Sadat hold the deep belief that what looked then unbridgeable rift between them with the passage of time and with much more talks would necessarily turn into an agreement.635a
Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty

Feeling that the process had gotten stuck between Sadat’s demand for total withdrawal and Begin’s rejection of it, Carter took a gamble and offered a summit in which Sadat, Begin and himself with their respective delegations would convene in September at Camp David in Maryland in order to try to negotiate an agreement.

When Carter made the offer, the overall mood in Washington was pessimistic. “No one, including me, could think of a specific route to success, but everyone could describe a dozen logical scenarios for failure.”

Vance wrote:

Not since Theodore Roosevelt mediated the treaty negotiated in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, that ended the Russo-Japanese War had an American president even approached what Jimmy Carter was about to attempt. And when we investigated the parallel, we found it dissimilar, for Roosevelt…had not participated directly in the Portsmouth talks himself.  

637 Carter, 1982, p. 317

638 Vance, 1983, p. 218
But for some reason that probably was not totally clear even to Carter, he became determined to stubbornly persevere in the mission. Carter decided upon a few important facilitating steps to create the right emotional environment for the summit.

[We will] not put a time limit on how long we stay there. We will have no press contact… We will hold down expectations of success between now and the meeting at Camp David… They both [Begin and Sadat] agreed not to have negative statements issued between now and the convening of the meeting…

Vance traveled to Israel carrying a letter from President Carter to Begin, inviting him to the Camp David summit. He begged Begin not to leak anything about the invitation before that afternoon when Vance would arrive in Cairo, because Sadat might refuse to come to Camp David out of considerations of honor if he was unable to accept the invitation in parallel with Begin. When Begin and Vance exited the building, they met reporters. One of them, Barry Schweld, the senior reporter for the Associated Press (then the largest information agency in the world), asked Begin if he had been invited by President Carter to come to Washington. Embarrassed, Begin murmured "No, no I did not receive an invitation." Later, Begin told Dan Patir (his communications adviser) "I simply lied in front of the cameras. In a few hours it will be known that we had received an invitation. What shall we do?" Patir advised him to write a letter of explanation. It read as follows:

Dear Mr. Schweld:

…as regards your question -- The Secretary of State and I met privately and he asked me to read the letter which President Carter had addressed to me. I was obliged to keep the matter of a tripartite meeting in complete confidence.

639 Carter, 1982, p. 317
I could not, therefore, in all good conscience answer your question in any different way... When I met the press, it was still a hypothetical question, as long as President Sadat had not given his consent.

At a subsequent press conference after the positive response by the President of Egypt to President Carter's invitation was published, I apologized to all the newsmen explaining that I could not have divulged to them several days earlier the secret which I had totally honored as I was committed to do.

With every good wish

Sincerely,

Menachem Begin

Years later, Schweld told Patir that this was the only time a politician had ever apologized to him for not telling the truth and he proudly carried Begin's letter in his pocket\textsuperscript{638a}.

Sadat declared that this was the “last chance for peace”\textsuperscript{640} while Begin tried to maintain a sense of balance concerning the importance of this summit. In a televised address before leaving for the summit, Begin told the nation:

If any one tells us that this is a fateful meeting, we shall not agree: our people’s fate does not depend on this or that meeting. Our people lived thousands of years before Camp David, and will live thousands of years after Camp David. If we are told that this is the last chance to arrive at peace, we shall not agree: there are no ‘last chances’ in life, there is always a new opportunity. But the simple truth is that this is a very important meeting.
- We shall go to the meeting with maximum good will, to attain an agreement which will allow continuation of the fundamental serious negotiations... \textsuperscript{641}

\textsuperscript{638a} Begin Heritage Center Archive

\textsuperscript{640} Hirschler, 1979, p. 331

\textsuperscript{641} September 2, 1978, Medzini, 1977-79, p. 511
Begin's perception of this summit was the opposite of Sadat's – He saw it as a process and not as the last chance, as a beginning and not as an end. He did not know how the gap between the parties could be bridged but he allowed himself to embark on a process that he knew might also surprise him in the end. Begin said that he had 'forgotten' the 'insults and condemnations' against him in the Egyptian press and stated that "at Camp David the United States should continue to play an intermediary role and should not offer any proposals of its own."

The summit began on September 5, 1978 at the president’s official Camp David retreat in the picturesque hills of western Maryland, 75 miles northwest of Washington, and ended 13 days later. The site, surrounded by electronic security fences, was guarded by the Marines and was isolated from the outside world and the press throughout the entire conference. Carter planned a summit with informal, close contact among leaders that would benefit the peace process. The leaders and their respective teams lived there in a private world of cabins and hiking trails, with bowling alleys, tennis courts, a swimming pool, billiard hall and cinema.

Each of the three leaders came to Camp David with a different mindset. Carter was putting U.S. prestige on the line, and failure might cause the Middle East situation to deteriorate even further. He had planned for a three-day summit with an option for another four days in the event of good progress, but said later that he never dreamt it would turn into 13 intense and discouraging days with success achieved only in the last hours.

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642 ibid
643 Vance, 1983, p. 217
644 Carter, 1982, p. 322
Begin, to his advantage, was the only leader ready to consider failure as a possible option. For him it would mean disappointing many people on the Israeli Left while gaining massive support from his party for not giving in to pressure. And "there is always a new opportunity…"

Sadat had already said that this was the last chance for peace. He was not ready to make peace at any price, but the failure of the summit would also mean the failure of his personal mission to Jerusalem – and a major blow to his prestige.

As soon as the helicopter carrying Begin’s delegation landed, he asked Carter when the first meeting would take place and whether there would be a written record. When Carter commented that Sadat was worried the talks would get bogged down in the details instead of dealing with the big, major issues, Begin shot back: “I can handle both.”

Carter wanted "to put the summit on a high plane" and Rosalynn Carter suggested an interfaith prayer including Christian, Muslim and Jewish blessings. Begin – unlike Dayan who sniggered at the idea and Weizman who ignored it – took it seriously and checked the text line by line.

Carter suggested casual dress, but Begin told the Israeli delegation: “When you go to see the president you should always be properly dressed.” Carter wore jeans and Sadat often wore a jogging suit, but Begin preferred to wear coat and tie. Sadat and Carter called each other by their first names; Begin insisted on addressing them by their titles. Begin was “always reminding President Sadat and me that he was not a head of state and therefore did not

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645 ibid. p. 322
646 Vance, 1983, p. 220
648 Weizman, 1981, p. 344
rank as an equal with us.” Begin also insisted that Sadat precede him through doorways. But when Dayan returned from a reconnaissance mission and described the formidable security fences that surrounded the retreat, Begin - not unexpectedly - dubbed it “a concentration camp deluxe,” an observation he would later repeat half-jokingly to Vance, thus revealing the depth of his feelings and his need to be protected.

Sadat opened the second day by reading out his peace proposal. It demanded an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories; the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza; and full compensation to be paid for what he said was the damage resulting from the Israeli army’s operations against civilian populations and installations, as well as from its exploitation of Sinai oil wells. Carter called it an “extremely harsh” peace plan filled with “all the unacceptable Arab rhetoric.” Begin called the compensation demand in particular “chutzpah!” and proposed an immediate reply, but then accepted the suggestion of others in his delegation to refrain.

It was a manipulation Sadat’s part. He had told Carter ahead of time that he was going to make those demands at the outset and that he would afterwards be willing to compromise. He asked Carter not to weaken his position by revealing it to Begin. But

649 Carter, 1981, p. 331
650 Hirschler, 1979, p. 335
651 Silver, 1984, p. 191
652 Vance, 1983, p. 223
655 Weizman, 1981, p. 325 Hebrew
Begin was hurt and it was hard for him to dismiss the issue even when Carter hinted to him that it was only an opening demand. He kept on asking how a respectable man could behave this way – to declare his demands and then change them as if nothing had happened. Begin insisted on analyzing and rejecting Sadat's proposal clause by clause.\footnote{Carter, 1982, p. 340-346}

Carter asked Begin to concentrate on core issues such as a freeze on West Bank settlements. Begin refused to contemplate a freeze. Carter said okay, but what was his next best concession? Begin replied by attacking the Sadat proposal. Carter asked Begin to be specific: For example, how many refugees and what kind of refugees could come back to the West Bank and Gaza? How did he plan to monitor the borders etc’? And then he added:

If I know the facts, then I can take them to Sadat and try to satisfy both you and him… [But] I must have your frank assessment. My greatest strength here is your confidence – but I do not feel I have your trust.\footnote{ibid, p. 349}

Begin did not refute Carter’s assessment. Then the discussion became heated and angry with Carter accusing Begin of preferring land to peace and trying to disguise this with a fake proposal for Palestinian self-rule.\footnote{ibid, pp. 347-350}

After their harsh discussion, Begin and Carter went to meet Sadat for their first and last three-way meeting at the Camp David summit. Begin dissected Sadat’s proposal line by line. Sadat replied, “Premier Begin, you want land!... Security, yes! Land, no!” Carter remembered a three-hour meeting of yelling, accusations and anger:
All restraint was now gone. Their faces were flushed, and the niceties of diplomatic language and protocol were stripped away. They had almost forgotten that I was there.\textsuperscript{659}

Sadat complained that the warm feelings he had after his visit to Jerusalem had been destroyed because “Premier Begin has acted in bad faith.”\textsuperscript{660} At the end, Begin said he retained complete confidence in Sadat, and Carter noted that “it was quite conspicuous that Sadat did not make a similar statement in response.”\textsuperscript{661} Begin came out of this meeting well pleased, said Dayan. "'We broke the ice," he told us."\textsuperscript{662} It was Begin's need for a personal relationship that had surfaced. The ice was not really broken because this was the first and last meeting between Begin and Sadat in Camp David. Carter decided to change his style of mediation. He thought it might be better if he acted as a go-between instead of putting Begin and Sadat together face to face.\textsuperscript{663}

Begin was the top authority in the Israeli delegation and the toughest among them in his positions. But Brezezinski got the impression that every member in the Israeli delegation felt like a "prima donna."\textsuperscript{664} He was surprised to see Dayan and Weizman criticizing Begin's rigidity in front of the Americans.\textsuperscript{665} "On those occasions when I disagreed with him [Begin] and questioned his proposals," said Dayan, "he got angry

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{659}ibid, p. 351
\item \textsuperscript{660}ibid, p. 353
\item \textsuperscript{661}ibid, p. 355
\item \textsuperscript{662}Dayan, 1981, p. 163
\item \textsuperscript{663}Carter, 1982, p. 356
\item \textsuperscript{664}Brezezinski, 1983, p. 237
\item \textsuperscript{665}ibid, p. 258
\end{itemize}

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and would dismiss any suggestion that did not appeal to him as likely to cause inestimable harm to Israel." When Begin cut off some opinions of the Israeli delegation members, Dayan protested about a possible threat to freedom of thought and Begin made an effort to adjust his behavior.\textsuperscript{666} This readiness to challenge authority was typical of the freewheeling Israeli (Sabra) style and contrasted sharply with the proper and elegantly dressed Egyptian delegation. Dinitz described how the Israeli delegation would confer in the evenings, discussing the events of the day and the progress that had or hadn't been achieved. They tried hard to persuade Begin to be more flexible on minor issues and by midnight they often succeeded -- only to discover at breakfast the next day that he had readopted his previous positions. Once, Aliza also remarked to Dinitz's wife that Begin needed to guard against adopting Labor's softer positions. No doubt this reflects the struggle that took place within Begin.

Sadat, in contrast to Begin, was the least rigid in his positions within his delegation. His aides said quite openly that if his suggestions were taken up, he might be killed.\textsuperscript{667} They tried to stop him the whole time, but still his authority was unchallenged. The American delegation wore casual dress and clearly deferred to Carter's authority.\textsuperscript{668}

Sadat trusted Carter and revealed to him the minimum on which he would not yield and gave Carter a free hand to negotiate for him with flexibility on all the other issues. If Begin had an absolute minimum or precise red line he would not cross, he

\textsuperscript{666}Dayan, 1981, p. 153-154

\textsuperscript{667}Samuel Lewis, 2002

\textsuperscript{668}Brezezinski, 1983, p. 238
concealed it from Carter. Consequently, Sadat left the haggling to his aides and remained more flexible and relaxed while Begin was the most intransigent of the Israelis, and dealt personally with every detail. The Americans had no choice but to build their proposal around Begin and try to amend it in order to look after Sadat and his politically risky future. They took Begin’s autonomy proposal as their basis and tried to effect slight changes in it to retain the faint possibility of it developing into more. Carter described his working style:

> I would draft a proposal I considered reasonable, take it to Sadat for quick approval or slight modification, and then spend hours or days working on the same point [with Begin]… Sometimes, in the end, the change of a word or phrase would satisfy Begin, and I would merely inform Sadat.\(^{669}\)

Dinitz recounts that, on Friday, Begin insisted that the Israeli delegation hold a kabbalat Shabbat Sabbath eve dinner to show the Americans that the Jews also had culture. "We called Washington and asked them to prepare a package of challah and wine and gefilte fish and prayer-books and skullcaps, and it was all brought to Camp David. And when Friday came, there was a white tablecloth on the table and we did a kabbalat Shabbat. The Americans were invited. We also invited the Egyptians but they weren't ready to come at that stage. Among the Americans were Carter, Brzezinski and Vance, who wore skullcaps on their heads, and, of course, the Israeli delegation did as well. We started with 'Lekha Dodi' and then we sang 'Shalom Aleikhem' and then Begin recited the Kiddush and after the meal we sang Shabbat songs and Israeli folksongs, including some songs of the Palmach. At one point, Begin said: 'What's this? No songs of the Revisionists? Doesn't anybody know them?'

The only one who really knew was Kadishai and he started singing 'Shtei Gadot

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\(^{669}\)Carter, 1982, p. 356
Layarden’(‘Two Banks has the Jordan - This is ours and, that is as well.’), but no one knew it to join in with him. I was glad that Vance, who was sitting next to me, didn't know Hebrew. He asked me what the song meant and I told him that it talked about 'the beauty on both sides of the river.'

Begin played chess with Brzezinski and told him that the last time he had played chess was when the NKVD interrupted his game with Yisrael Eldad prior to his arrest 38 years earlier. But Aliza blew her husband’s cover. She came out of the cabin exclaiming, “Menachem just loves to play chess!” Brzezinski wrote that Begin's remarks were probably “a psychological ploy.” He described Begin’s style of play as “a very good systematic, somewhat aggressive, but strategically very deliberate game.” Dayan, who was watching the game, wrote that it was “very competitive, and the game proved less a form of peaceful relaxation than a battlefield confrontation, with each one trying desperately to defeat the other.” Begin's childish bluff of trying to pretend that if he had been more trained he would have played much better probably reflected his insecure feelings during the summit.

In a tough five-hour session, Begin rejected most of Carter’s suggestions. When Carter suggested a concession on settlements, Begin replied that he would never sell the birthright of the children of the Holocaust. Later, he would also tell Carter that European and American governments had not prevented Hitler's extermination of the Jews and therefore Israel would not count on them to secure her existence. In response to Carter’s suggestion that the Palestinians be granted “self-government,”

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670 Dinitz, 2002

671 Brzezinski, 1985, p. 259

672 Dayan, 1981, p. 157

673 ibid, p. 153

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Begin demanded an Israeli right to veto its decisions and rejected the idea of a plebiscite to determine the final status of the West Bank and Gaza. Raising his voice, he adamantly rejected clause after clause, insisting that the term "Palestinian people" be changed to "Palestinian Arabs" and that autonomy does not mean sovereignty. Then Carter suggest the phrase -- “national rights of the Palestinians,” to which Begin replied, “Out of the question!” and accused the Americans of copying the Egyptians' plan. Carter wanted to insert the clause from UN Resolution 242 stating “the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war.” Begin argued that the Americans had taken it out of context and that it was not aimed at a defensive war such as Israel had fought, not to mention the fact that the West Bank had never been recognized as a legitimate part of Jordan. Carter said that if Begin did not accept what the Israeli government had accepted 11 years before, UN Resolution 242, the summit was a waste of time. “What you say convinces me that Sadat was right – what you want is land!...You will have to accept it!,” Carter shouted finally, crumpling up his papers and throwing his pencil. His face was red and he bit his lips in anger.  

Begin replied: “Mr. President, no threats, please.”

Begin's situation was far from easy. He felt deeply that it was his historical role to guard the Jewish holy places and the right of the children of the Holocaust to their biblical land. He struggled with the possibility of autonomy becoming a process through which a Palestinian State would gradually emerge. He wanted peace very much and appointed Dayan and Weizman, both more moderate than he, in order to

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674Weizman, 1981, Hebrew, p. 337

support the peace process. It would have been much easier for him to come to Camp David with some of his more extreme comrades. But he chose to bear the entire responsibility for safeguarding the Land of Israel and to be portrayed as the extreme and isolated "bad guy" among all the participants in Camp David.

"Carter was always torn about how to handle Begin."676 The mixture of toughness and softness in Begin's personality seems to have flustered Carter. At this point, he told Dayan that Begin was "an obstacle to progress"677 and that "Premier Begin's immediate response to anything we propose is 'No, No, No.' Later in your internal consultations, he softens his stand and agrees."678 Carter also told his wife: "Begin is a psycho"679 and felt that negotiating with Begin verged on the impossible. Then he made his second change in tactics (the first was not letting Begin and Sadat negotiate face to face). The Americans started working more with Dayan, Weizman and especially Aharon Barak, Israel’s attorney general. Carter established a working group which included himself, Vance, Barak and the Egyptian undersecretary for foreign affairs, Osama el-Baz. Carter negotiated the details with the two technical experts, who later had to go and sell the agreed-upon clauses to their masters. It was unusual for Carter, as a head of state, to get so much into the technical details, but it worked.

One American diplomat described their way of working:

The President got Barak to come up with ways to express concepts in legal language which were ambiguous, but which Barak could then justify to Begin in legal terms and convince Begin that there was legitimate legal interpretation which would protect Begin’s position, despite the ambiguity. There are a number of places in the text where it was Barak’s ability to explain to Begin how this could be interpreted to

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676 Samuel Lewis, 2002
677 Carter, 1982, p. 378
678 Dayan, 1981, p. 173
679 Brzezinski, 1985, p. 262
mean x when on the surface you might think it meant y that gave Begin the rationalization to permit him to make these concessions, when he decided to make them rather than lose the agreement. Nobody else could have done that. Meanwhile Dayan was arguing the diplomatic or the political reasons for accepting things, but Begin had to have a legal rationalization to satisfy himself and his own peculiar view of legal principles.  

Barak's contribution to the final agreement was decisive and Carter described him as a real hero in the Camp David discussions. The final status of the areas would “also recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.” Barak’s addition of the word “also” enabled him to persuade Begin that other rights mattered as well – such as Israel's security needs, etc. Where “self-governing authority” was written, Barak added in parentheses “administrative council.” And “full autonomy” was modified to apply to the “inhabitants” of the West Bank and Gaza; in this way the land could stay in Israeli hands forever. Other issues were whether to refer to "the West Bank" or "Judea and Samaria," to the "Palestinian people" or, as Begin wanted, the "Palestinian Arabs." No wonder Carter adopted the Egyptian terminology, while Israel adhered to its proposed text in the Hebrew version, with a few words explaining the differences. The English version is the legitimate one, but in the Hebrew version the Palestinian People appear as Israeli Arabs and the West Bank appears as Judea and Samaria.

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680 Silver, 1984, p. 195  
681 Carter, 1982, p. 382  
682 Carter, 1982, p. 387-388  
681a Diniz, 2002
Boutros Ghali (Egyptian's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs) described how it worked out:

Barak succeeded in creating an atmosphere of legal confidence as Weizman had created an atmosphere of human confidence. We trusted Barak when he said: I want this word in Article Four for such and such reason.\(^{683}\)

From time to time, Carter put pressure on Begin by reminding him that a failure of the summit would harm U.S. prestige and be “catastrophic” for American-Israeli relations.\(^{684}\) During the second week, Begin sought ways to get out of the process and go home. He asked to speak with Carter, calling it “the most serious talk I’ve ever had in my life, except once when I discussed the future of Israel with Jabotinsky.” He told Carter he could not sign the agreement Carter wanted and suggested ending the summit with an announcement of failure. Carter was fairly tempted to agree, but with repeated encouragement from Barak and Dayan, he carried on.\(^{685}\)

Carter described Sadat as very different from Begin:

[Sadat] was always punctual, calm, and self-assured; he was brief and to the point in all his discussions. He tried not to tell others anything he thought they already knew. Rarely dwelling on details or semantics, he spelled out his positions in broad terms with emphasis on the strategic implications of decisions, and was very interested in other countries of the Middle East area and the impact of our deliberations on them.\(^{686}\)

Carter and Brezezinski felt that Begin was in a defensive position. He was trying to get into details instead of dealing with principles, focusing on procedural issues and postponing other decisions by transferring them to advisers as a way of gaining time,

\(^{683}\) Silver, 1984, p. 196
\(^{684}\) Dayan, 1981, p. 173
\(^{685}\) Carter, 1982, p. 385-387
\(^{686}\) ibid, p. 338
and doing everything possible to give the Palestinians their rights without Israel giving up any land -- to the point that Carter accused Begin of subterfuge. Begin was deeply insulted by this. At a certain point, Carter felt very disappointed with the Israeli position, only to realize afterwards that the differences in their positions were not actually all that big. “I suppose the fatigue and the tedious arguments with Begin had painted the whole picture gloomier than it actually was,” he later surmised.687

With Sadat, Carter created a whole different relationship than he did with Begin. Brezezinski felt that Sadat was Carter's "favorite person… It was love at first sight and quite genuine, I think, on both sides" despite the contrast of personalities between the "expansive, impetuous, and bold Egyptian" and the "highly controlled, precise Georgian with the computer-like mind."688 Carter used to tell Sadat: "I will represent your interests as if they were my own. You are my brother." Sadat's reply was: "My people admire you. I shall always be proud of our friendship, of our brotherhood.689 When they were in disagreement, Carter spoke to him in a regretful tone and very respectfully asked for his help in overcoming their differences. Carter could and really did disagree with Sadat on some points, but basically the American president was clear about his position supporting the evacuation of Sinai settlements, and granting the Palestinians a state. The asymmetry in Carter's attitude was almost shocking considering his role as a mediator.

Sadat seemed to trust me too much and Begin not enough.690 I would not even try to deny that I was pro-Sadat. He was completely open,


688 Brzezinski, 1983, p. 24

689 Brzezinski, 1983, p. 284

690 Carter 1982, p. 322
courageous, generous, far-sighted. He was willing to ignore details to reach an ultimate goal of peace that was beneficial to him and to Egypt. 691

The fact that Begin could bear it was also crucial to the final success.

Sadat did not have a positive opinion about Begin. He said:

The man is obsessed and keeps citing old European precedents. Begin haggles over every word, and is making his withdrawal conditional on keeping land. Begin is not ready for peace. 692

Sadat told Carter that "...the Prime Minister [Begin] was a very formal man, difficult to approach or to understand. He [Sadat] believed Begin was bitter, inclined to look back into ancient history rather than to deal with the present and the future. He promised to go to extremes in being flexible, in order to uncover the full meaning of Begin’s positions. 693

From the beginning, Begin, Dayan and Weizman adopted separate but complementary roles. Weizman, with his openness and easy contacts, was very popular in Egypt, and Sadat liked him. He kept the human side alive. An American official described his working style:

Weizman’s contribution was to keep the Egyptians’, particularly Sadat’s, frustration with Begin’s diplomacy, the style of Israeli diplomacy, from boiling over so much that it would destroy the process. Over and over again he succeeded with crucial timing in keeping personal relations going between the Israeli leaders and the Egyptians, and giving them hope to keep on at it. Even when they had lost hope. 694

691 Silver, 1984, p. 192

692 Carter, 1982, p. 360

693 ibid, p. 338

694 Silver, 1984, p. 183-184
Boutros Ghali described how Weizman would say:

‘Dayan is depressed. How about giving him dinner, or a phone call?’ He would say things like: ‘I’m in a difficult position. Sadat has seen me four times. Dayan is shy, but he has not seen Sadat…’  

But Begin said that every time there was tension and Weizman went to calm down Sadat, we got Sadat in a better mood but one less airfield.  

Boutros Ghali also described Begin’s negotiating style:

Begin negotiates like a lawyer, a mixture of a lawyer and a good parliamentarian. He can mix legal argumentation, demagogic argumentation, plus ideological argumentation, and move from one plane to another according to his own strategy. When he finds himself weak on the legal argument, he will jump to the demagogic or ideological approach. He was used to this kind of parliamentary debate, he is a good debater, and would use the same techniques in private as he used on the rostrum.  

Dayan is described as more reserved than Ezer Weizman. According to Boutrous Ghali:

He negotiated with imagination. He was precise as a negotiator. He never promised something he could not deliver. He wanted to pinpoint what he meant and what we meant.  

An American official added that Dayan was reliable and made important, positive input into the negotiations because of his ability to see things in their stark reality. However, the issue of the Israeli settlements in Sinai could not be resolved by lawyers’ word games. Sadat insisted on the dismantling of all the settlements there.

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695 Silver, 1984, p. 184

696 Dinitz, 2002

697 Silver, 1984, p. 181

698 Silver, 1984, p. 184
Begin told Brzezinski: “My right eye will fall out, my right hand will fall off before I ever agree to the dismantling of a single Jewish settlement.” Carter sought out Barak, who told him that where the settlements were concerned, the address was Begin. But Begin resisted any concession. Sadat, informed of Begin’s position concerning the settlements, started packing, while Carter began formulating a statement that would limit the damage as much as possible.

Dayan and Weizman urged Begin to make concessions, but what brought about the change was a phone call from Ariel Sharon, back in Israel, who had been informed about the situation. He called Begin and “authorized” him to dismantle the settlements.

A few hours later, a deeply moved Begin was telling the Israeli delegation that Arik Sharon had phoned him. To his surprise, Sharon was in favor of evacuating the settlements if they were the last remaining obstacle to a peace agreement. ‘I see no military objection to their evacuation,’ Sharon had told the Prime Minister.

Begin still resisted the evacuation. Carter pressed him, saying the summit would definitely be over on Sunday, in two more days, even if no agreement was reached. Begin proposed that he and Sadat conduct three months of intensive negotiations. Then, if they resolved all the difficulties, Begin would bring the settlement issue before the Knesset. Carter rejected this, saying Sadat would not accept it and that they could not leave the settlement issue open to chance. “It was obviously very painful for Prime Minister Begin,” wrote Carter, "who was shouting words like 'ultimatum',

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699 Brzezinski, 1985, p. 263
700 Carter, 1982, p. 388-393
701 Weizman, 1981, p. 370
'excessive demands' and 'political suicide.'” In the end Begin agreed to put this question before the Knesset within two weeks: “If agreement is reached on all other Sinai issues, will the settlers be withdrawn?” and let his party members vote their consciences.

On the matter of Jerusalem, Carter told Begin that he didn't understand him – Why couldn't he say that the issue of Jerusalem would be left to discuss in the future? When Carter pressed him, Begin told him the story of Rabbi Amnon of Magence – the classic story that appears in all the High Holiday prayerbooks, a story from the Middle Ages – about Rabbi Amnon, who was very well-liked by the ruler and among the elite of a certain duchy or town in Germany, and whenever they tried to get him to convert, he always rejected this demand. One day, when the ruler pressed him, he said: I'll give you an answer in three days. As soon as he left the palace, he thought: What have I done? How could I have said that I would give an answer in three days? It's as if I denied God, as if I questioned my faith in God. And three days later, he did not return to see the ruler.

Begin told this story to Carter, including the part about Rabbi Amnon's tragic end – when he was brought to the palace by gendarmes and said to the ruler: I accept the punishment of having my tongue cut out for having said that I would come back in three days with an answer. And then the ruler said: Not your tongue, for your tongue has spoken well. But your legs, which did not bring you back here – they shall be cut off. And they cut off his legs. On Yom Kippur Eve, he asked them to bring him to the synagogue and there he composed the famous Unetaneh Tokef prayer, with its deeply stirring melody and its talk about who shall live and who shall die and so on.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{702}Carter, 1982, p. 396}\]
Begin told Carter this story. And then Carter told it to Sadat. And at one point, Vance also asked about it. After this story, they didn't press Begin about Jerusalem anymore.  

Searching for symbols that would make the abstract concrete and relevant, Begin used to say that the Americans have Washington D.C. while the Jews have Jerusalem D.C. The former stands for District of Columbia while the latter stands for David's City.

Begin, still not satisfied, made a last attempt to modify the settlement agreement. Taking Barak with him he set out for Sadat's cabin, to see the Egyptian president for the first time since their initial confrontation to try to rephrase the issue. On their way back they met Carter. Begin happily told him that everything was now fine as far as the language of the Knesset vote. Carter “knew it could not be true” and asked Barak what precisely Sadat had agreed to. But Begin jumped in and stopped Barak from replying, time and again. “I finally asked the Prime Minister point-blank to let Barak answer my question.” Carter understood that Begin had exaggerated his description

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703 Kadishai, 2002  
704 Hurwitz, 2004, p. 143  
705 Carter, 1982, p. 400-401
of what Sadat had agreed upon and refused Begin’s rewriting of the settlement agreement. Begin, having no choice, finally accepted it.

Part of Begin’s difficulty in agreeing to the dismantling of the settlements was not just the security issue – the settlements acting as a buffer between the Egyptians, who would get Sinai back, and the Palestinians in Gaza – but the Israeli ethos in which settlements had never before been evacuated; settlements having been, throughout the years, what finally determined Israel’s borders. This principle of evacuating settlements, Begin knew, would later also be applicable to the West Bank and Golan Heights. Finally, he knew that many of his comrades would not like it; which was what happened.

Samuel Lewis, the American Ambassador in Israel, commenting on Begin's limitations, said:

Dayan in my view was a crucial player. Without Dayan I don’t think there would have been a peace treaty, because Begin was not able personally to wrap himself around options and alternatives and possibilities and subtleties. It just wasn’t the way he thought. At least about these diplomatic issues. On the subject of peace with Egypt or the Palestinians, he was almost impossible to persuade of anything, except maybe by Carter and occasionally by others on his own staff. He really was his own man. He drafted his own autonomy plan. He accepted some changes in it which Carter persuaded him to buy when he went to Washington, because he wanted Carter’s help in selling it to Sadat, and Carter got some stuff in it which we thought was quite helpful. But he was one of the more inter-directed people I’ve run into.706

But Quandt said that Begin was without a doubt the most able negotiator at Camp David.707 And Vance concluded that Begin was “one of the finest poker players” he had ever seen”:

706 Lewis, 2002
707 Quandt, 1986, p. 255
"He could exhibit a wounded heart in a very effective fashion: ‘How could you possibly expect me to accept that kind of position?’ He would show all the anguish and disbelief. He would sit there without his face registering anything. He would try and sit his opponent out. He was a feller who could outsit almost anybody else on the other side of the table if necessary. All the qualities of a very skillful negotiator or poker player.

Begin was very clear in his objectives, very precise in his thinking. He put in some demands that he was willing to sacrifice. I can think of a number of times when he said this is something on which we will never compromise, and later that same day, having pounded the table, he changed his mind. Fairly early I found that out, and so I never accepted his statements of ‘I will never yield on that point.’ I came to the conclusion that it was part of his style, and he did not mean it.708

Weizman went to Sadat's cabin after the final agreement had been reached to ask for a larger Israeli force inside the Israeli demilitarized zone.

Sadat: How many battalions do you want?
Weizman: Three battalions of our border guard.
Sadat: All right Ezer. For you four battalions. Ever since the October war, I have no complexes.709

Weizman also wondered whether Begin's rigidity had invited more rigidity on Sadat's part, believing that Sadat was more flexible concerning the Israeli settlements in Sinai at the beginning of the negotiations and that there had been still chance to save them then.710

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708 Silver, 1984, p. 196
709 Weizman, 1981, p. 373-374
710 Weizman, 1981, p. 349, Hebrew
At this point, Carter and Begin seemed euphoric, but not Sadat. He had not achieved any of his main goals – full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, a Palestinian state and a peace treaty that included other Arab countries.

Sadat, who had aspired for many years to lead the Arab world, only succeeded in making a separate peace with Israel. This hurt his pride. At this final stage, Carter told his aides that he had been afraid to ask Sadat directly if they had reached an agreement, even though it was clear that they had.

At the signing ceremony, Sadat, brief and formal, read from his prepared text. Praising Carter, he said that the achievement was due to America’s commitment to being a “full partner in the peace process… The continuation of Carter’s active role in the peacemaking process was indispensable.” Sadat did not say a word about Begin or the State of Israel.

Begin was elated. Speaking without notes he suggested renaming the Camp David Summit the Jimmy Carter Summit. He said that his tension with Sadat was a thing of the past and they were now friends. He drew laughter and applause from the audience when he said that the president had worked harder at Camp David than the Children of Israel had in building the Pyramids. One wonders how Sadat felt about this joke. To an old friend who met him there, Begin said: “I have just signed the greatest document in Jewish history!”

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711 Vance, 1981, p. 226
712 Quandt, 1986, p. 253
713 Hirschler, 1979, p. 342
714 Hirschler, 1979, p. 343
715 Temko, 1987, p. 231
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Begin sacrificed Sinai for Judea and Samaria, or for Eretz Israel, while Sadat sacrificed the Palestinians and the rest of the Arab countries by not making common cause with them in order to get Sinai back. But Begin negotiated differently from all the rest. He negotiated as the embodiment of the Jewish people and thus was not in a hurry due to his historical perspective and long-term strategic outlook. From this position, it was easier for him to avoid attempts at pleasing anyone. He had clear red lines when it came to Eretz Israel. He was actually playing a different game known only to him. Sadat tended to be unstable and impulsive with his new ideas, showing a flair for drama and a disregard for details. Though he surprised the Americans from time to time, he mainly sought to please Carter. Begin did not try to form an alliance with Carter. He could bear the feeling of being alone, of being the "bad guy." Sadat quietly let Carter in on his opening positions as well as his final ones, while Begin did not feel he owed the Americans anything. Begin was a lone wolf and Carter had no other way but to demand from his friend Sadat compromises he could not obtain from Begin. Sadat believed that his friendship with Carter would benefit him, but the opposite occurred since, because of this friendship, Carter felt he could press him more. So the collusion Sadat and Carter once contemplated against Begin turned against Sadat. True, for Sadat it was more important to have an agreement with the Americans than with the Israelis, but Begin always argued that he was not going to be America's protégé as the Labor party had been and this stance made him powerful. From a longer historical perspective, people may argue about Begin's wisdom in clinging to Judea and Samaria, but there is no doubt that he was extremely able in achieving what he believed in.

But the answers to basic questions remained vague. Regarding a freeze of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, the Americans were convinced Begin had promised
them a five-year freeze, while the Israelis were sure they had promised only three months. Probably the parties' fatigue from dealing endlessly with complex issues, and their desire to terminate this process successfully, caused some wishful thinking to get mixed in. The sensitive issue of Jerusalem was not mentioned in the text because of disagreement over it; other issues remained vague as well.

According to Vance, Begin told the Americans that he would never sign a document transferring even one inch of Israeli sovereignty in Judea and Samaria to the Palestinians, but “There may be others who come after me who may feel differently. By the end of the five-year period I won’t be around.”

But what for Begin was the end of his list of concessions was for the Americans and Sadat only the beginning of a peace process that should extract more concessions from Israel. The Americans and the Egyptians believed that once they embarked on the peace process, no one could really stop the establishment of a Palestinian state and that, in time, other Arab countries would inevitably join in. But Begin saw it differently. He surely wanted to expand the peace process to include other Arab countries but not at the cost of being swept away by an “uncontrolled” process.

The hedging started on the way back home from Camp David. Begin declared to a reporter that the U.S. was mistaken in its interpretation of the “legitimate rights” of the Palestinians and that “the Israeli army would remain in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. Full stop.” Carter felt that Begin “wanted to keep two things: the peace with Egypt – and the West Bank.” He asked key Jewish leaders “to restrain Begin, who is acting

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716 Silver, 1984, p. 203

717 Temko, 1987, p. 233
in a completely irresponsible way”\footnote{Carter, 1982, p. 405} and warned him that such declarations were harmful to the peace process and might prevent other Arab countries from joining in. But “the next day in New York, Begin continued his disruptive comments… I had a feeling that he really did not want any early talks involving the Palestinians and other Arabs.”\footnote{ibid, p. 406}

In the cabinet, Begin met opposition from the other side. He was quite rude and insulting to some of his most loyal comrades who rejected the agreement, telling one of them: “I - not Moshe Dayan - was the one who signed them!” And to another - omitting his Irgun code name, and adding Mr. instead, something he had never done before - “You are just an engineer! You are not qualified to speak on this subject.”\footnote{Avinoam Izhak, 2001; Temko, 1987, p. 233}

After seven tough hours of discussions, Begin succeeded in passing the Camp David agreement in the cabinet by a vote of eleven to two.\footnote{Dayan, 1981, p. 191} Then, refusing to take it to his party, Herut, he brought the issue to the Knesset.

Begin promised the Knesset that Israel would retain eternal control of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. If an agreement about the sovereignty of those territories was not achieved within five years, Begin explained, everything would remain the same, including Israeli control of those territories. Concerning the evacuation of Sinai settlements, he posed a rhetorical question, borrowing from the Passover seder:

> What makes this night different from all other nights?... Tonight, we are discussing the signing of a peace treaty!... As Prime Minister, I say to you dear and honored friends, and opponents: In my own heart, in myself in my conscience with all my soul I knew that this way the Camp David summit would have broken down – the state of Israel could not stand up in the face of this. Not in America; not in
Europe. Not before American Jewry. Not before the Jews of other lands. We could not have faced this. All blame would have befallen us… Had the Camp David Conference agreed on everything and broken up just because of the settlements, Israel would not have been able to stand up, all of Israel, in no way before the Western World. On such a day, or in the future, it would have had no choice but to announce surrender. This is my estimation. This is my belief. This is my view without hesitation… There is no other way… This I believe, and will believe until my final day – that this is the right choice.722

Begin was ready to give up the settlements only as a last resort and when there was no other way. It was one of the rare occasions in which Begin contemplated possible Israeli surrender. The man who lived to win or to die but never to surrender signed a peace treaty only because of the acknowledgement of possible surrender.

On September 28, 1978, after seventeen hours of debate that ended at 3 a.m., the Knesset voted 84 “yes” and 19 “no” with 17 abstentions, in favor of accepting the agreement. Herut, Begin’s party, was split down the middle and Begin would not have won without the support of the Labor Party. Yitzhak Shamir, who would become Begin’s successor as prime minister, abstained.723 At this moment, the only source of comfort for Begin was, paradoxically, the Labor Party and the “Peace Now” movement which praised him; in the Israeli polls he received the approval of 78% of Israelis (16% more than his pre-summit score), 10.4% were not satisfied.724

From Carter’s point of view, Begin acted courageously this time, as he acknowledged in his diary on September 27, 1978:

722 Medzini, 1977-79, p. 549-553
723 Silver, 1984, p. 205
724 The Jerusalem Post, September 21, 1978
This was a remarkable demonstration of courage, political courage, on the part of Prime Minister Begin, who had to go against his own previous commitments over a lifetime [and] against his own closest friends and allies who sustained and protected him during his revolutionary days.\textsuperscript{725}

It took six months of diplomatic attrition instead of the predicted three to translate the Camp David accord into an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Begin rejected the American interpretation of the agreement to the Jordanians that said the final aim was Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank and Gaza. The Americans still hoped to entice the Jordanians as well as the Palestinian leadership to embark on the peace process. Instead Begin revealed plans to expand Jewish settlements prior to the end of the three-month freeze he had agreed upon.

Vance said:

This step was contrary even to Begin’s version of the Camp David accords. We were very angry…”\textsuperscript{726}

Begin explained his actions to Carter by saying that:

…his actions on the West Bank settlements were designed to assuage the feeling of some of his political allies, who had now turned against him.\textsuperscript{727}

Begin also angered the Americans by leaking his plan “that he was thinking of moving his office to East Jerusalem.”\textsuperscript{728} Harold Saunders (the assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs) was quite critical of Begin’s ability to “understand” whatever he wanted to:

\textsuperscript{725}Carter, 1982, p. 407
\textsuperscript{726}1983, p. 235
\textsuperscript{727}Carter, 1982, p. 408
\textsuperscript{728}ibid
You could have a two-hour conversation between him and Carter, and then when you heard him describe it to the press or somebody else, you wondered whatever happened to the other one hour and 59 minutes! Because he would go out and characterize it as the most marvelous conversation he had ever had. He’d say, ‘The president said this…’ fixing on one nice element, and you’d wonder what happened to all the rest of the stuff the president had said.”

On October 26, long before an actual treaty was achieved, the Nobel Prize committee announced the awarding of the 1978 Peace Prize jointly to Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat. It came at an embarrassing time for Sadat who was isolated and condemned in the Arab world and vulnerable in Egypt. He chose not to attend the ceremony as a protest against Begin’s stance, particularly toward the Palestinians, and sent one of his aides to accept the prize.

One could think that for Begin personally and for the Jewish people collectively being awarded this important prize might have been a kind of corrective emotional experience. This worldwide recognition – the very opposite of the goal of the Holocaust - was what Begin craved. The committee probably granted these leaders the prize before the treaty was signed in the hope that this great honor would encourage them to be more flexible. But this was not to be the case.\textsuperscript{729}

His adviser, Hecht, read the draft of Begin's speech and pointed out that he had not mentioned Henry Dunant, the recipient of the first Nobel Peace Prize in 1901, who had been one of Herzl's admirers. Begin replied that, although the speech had already been submitted to the press, he would add the relevant particulars that evening. He

\textsuperscript{729} Temko, 1987, p. 421

\textsuperscript{730} Temko, 1987, p. 235-236; Dayan, 1981, p. 228
was very glad, said his adviser, that a connection had been established between the
first Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Theodore Herzl.\textsuperscript{731}

On his way to Olso, Begin learned that Golda Meir, Israel's former prime minister,
had died that day (December, 8, 1978). Earlier, when Golda had heard about Begin's
awar, she jokingly remarked that Begin ought to have received the Oscar for best
actor and not the Nobel Peace Prize.\textsuperscript{732} Conscious as always of the historical context
and the ongoing saga of the Jewish people, he opened his address at the awards'
ceremony with a brief tribute to her. And then:

\begin{quote}
I have come from the Land of Israel, the land of Zion and Jerusalem, and here I stand in humility and with pride as a son of the Jewish people, as one of the generation of the Holocaust and Redemption. The ancient Jewish people gave the world the vision of eternal peace…
\end{quote}

Then, after touching on emergent world problems such as the nuclear threat, he
reminded the world of what it would probably prefer to forget:

\begin{quote}
But in my generation, Ladies and Gentlemen, there was a time indescribable. Six millions Jews – men, women and children – a number larger than many a nation in Europe – were dragged to a wanton death and slaughtered methodically in the heart of the civilized continent. It was not a sudden outburst of human or rather inhuman cruelty that from time to time has happened in the history of mankind; it was a systematic process of extermination which unfolded before the eyes of the whole world for more than six years. Those who were doomed, deprived of their human dignity, starved, humiliated, led away and ultimately turned into ashes, cried out for rescue – but in vain. Other than a few famous and unforgettable exceptions they were left alone to face the destroyer.
\end{quote}

Toward the end he said:

\textsuperscript{731} Hecht, 1992

\textsuperscript{732} Dinitz, 2002
I thank you for the great distinction. It does not, however, belong to me; it belongs to my people… because they suffered so much…

Begin ignored Sadat’s glaring absence from the ceremony. Critics said that Begin, who started and ended his speech with the Jewish people and spoke in the middle about the Holocaust, was still unable to see the needs of others, even when receiving an international honor like the Nobel Peace Prize. But Ephraim Katzir, who was the Israeli president from 1973-1978 and had been invited by Begin to attend the ceremony, thought differently:

I listened to Sadat's speech read by one of his officers. It was a dry speech that stated what he wants without any sophistication. But Begin's speech caused tears to well up. He spoke as a representative of the Jewish people who remembers our history, who knows what peace means, who knows what it means to represent a people who underwent a Holocaust. It was very thrilling and I still often think of this speech. I believe he felt what it means to be the messenger of the Jewish people and to have the rare privilege of being a prime minister who can decide and fight and demand and do his best to achieve peace. I think this speech should be taught in schools to show what a leader who represents purity, devotion and fairness should say. I think that Begin understood the role of President more than others.

"I worked with three prime ministers," Simha Dinitz recalled. "Golda Meir lived Jewish history. Yitzhak Rabin argued with it and Begin built upon it. Therefore, his connection with the Holocaust wasn't merely sentimental, but also a very important dimension of his diplomatic activity. At important events, he would always draw a connection between the Holocaust and Israel's resurrection, in other words, about how the Jewish people came out of the Holocaust and attained their revival. The hundred

733 Hurwitz, 2004, p. 158-164

734 Katzir, 2000
years of Labor's practical Zionism -- of building, of conquering point after point, of establishing kibbutz after kibbutz – didn't exist in his lexicon. Ben-Gurion, in comparison, didn't talk about the Holocaust and the Diaspora, because to him, this was not the best period in Jewish history and he wanted to forget it – He skipped straight from the Bible to Zionism.”

Begin's share of the Nobel Prize money was about $85,000. He donated the full sum to establish the "Menachem and Aliza Begin Nobel Prize Fund" to help needy university students. The Fund's Perach ("Flower") project had one condition attached: the students must assist an underprivileged child with his or her studies. At the inaugural ceremony, the students and their young "partners" were invited to the table to receive an envelope containing a check from Prime Minister and Mrs. Begin.

In one interview on American television (November 1, 1979), Begin promised that Israel would repay “every last cent” from the $3 billion it was to receive from the U.S. for redeploying its forces from Sinai to the Negev. His colleagues in Israel were shocked because he had not bothered to familiarize himself with certain “details” – namely, that part of this amount had been promised to Israel as a grant.

Meanwhile, Begin's relationship with Dayan started deteriorating as the negotiations ground to a halt. He reproached and embarrassed Dayan in front of Cyrus Vance, scolding him for giving up too much by agreeing to a target date for completing preliminary Palestinian autonomy talks within a year of the Egyptian-

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735 Dinitz, 2002
736 Hurwitz, 2004, p. 165
737 Silver, 1984, p. 206
Israeli treaty. Dayan told Carter that "he could not speak for Israel anymore, because each point had to be specifically cleared in Jerusalem." Carter's diary entry for November 9, 1978, reads:

> It is obvious that the negotiations are going backwards… I told Cy to withdraw from the negotiations …It is obvious that the Israelis want a separate treaty with Egypt; they want to keep the West Bank and Gaza permanently… And they use the settlements [on the West Bank] and East Jerusalem issues to prevent the involvement of the Jordanians and the Palestinians. 

The battle continued over the “linkage” with which the Americans and the Egyptians wanted to connect progress in the Egyptian-Israeli peace process to the advancement of Palestinian autonomy, which Israel rejected. Israel anticipated difficulties with the Palestinian track while the Egyptians and the Americans sought to push it as much as they could to lay the groundwork for a Palestinian state. Sadat said that even without any additional link, he would sign the treaty, and Carter publicly called Sadat’s attitude “very generous… in adopting basically an original Israeli position.” Begin, in return, accused the Americans of favoring Sadat. He argued that linkage had not been mentioned at Camp David. Desperate, Vance met with Begin face to face. Vance, whose lawyer's cool was rarely ruffled, told Begin with surprising emotion:

> Look, you are likely to go down as an important figure in the history of your country, perhaps even in this history of the world – if you get this treaty, this peace. But if you allow this

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738 Temko, 1987, p. 236, 423
739 1982. p. 409
740 Medzini, 1977-79, p. 603
741 Vance, 1983, p. 242
goal to be sacrificed for these relatively unimportant points, then you are going to be only a mere footnote!  

Begin did not say anything for few minutes, then, for the first time since Camp David, he promised to help Washington to reach a compromise. We must remember that at this time there was a broad consensus in Israel that a Palestinian state should not be permitted to develop. Weizman and Dayan, while rejecting a Palestinian state, were still more flexible than Begin during the negotiations. It seems that Begin gradually lost his zest for the peace process, conscious as he was of the unbridgeable gap between Israel and the Egyptian-U.S. position concerning a Palestinian state.

Begin stuck to his vision of one democratic-Jewish state west of the Jordan River. On December 28, 1977, he announced his peace plan to the Knesset -- as always, without mentioning the word 'Palestinians' which might bestow an identity on these people:  

The inhabitants of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip, no matter what their citizenship, or lack of it, will be given free choice – the option -- to accept Israeli or Jordanian citizenship... Those who choose Israeli citizenship will be eligible to vote and be elected to the Knesset, in accordance with the election law... Residents of Israel will be eligible to buy land and settle in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip. The Arabs who live in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip and choose to be Israeli citizens could also buy land and settle in Israel.

In today's terms, Begin’s proposals would spell the end of the Jewish state because of the demographic situation in which there are currently more or less the same number of Jews and Palestinians west of the Jordan River (not to mention Begin's

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742Temko, 1987, p. 237

743ibid

744Aizakson, 2003, p. 146-147
agreement to the “right of return” to the West Bank and Gaza for some of the Palestinians - an act that would have raised their numbers still further). Begin's reply to the demographic argument was primarily a religious one, saying that this argument had been made in the past and with God's help no catastrophe had happened (because of the waves of Jewish immigration to Israel during those years).

Carter requested that either Dayan be given more leeway in the talks or that Begin himself come to take part in the negotiations.

He [Begin] accepted, but later said that he would have to check with the cabinet, then that he would wait until Dayan came back to Jerusalem with a report, and finally that it would not be appropriate for him to meet with merely the Prime Minister of Egypt [Mustafa Khalil – Egypt Prime Minister - was authorized by Sadat to conclude an agreement].

Begin told the cabinet that he had no intention of going to the U.S. because of the pressure that awaited him there. He also told them that he knew his rejection of the Egyptian-American proposals might cause the peace process to break down and that Israel would be blamed for it, but that he would still not give up.

Carter called Begin and invited him to a private meeting with him and later a summit with Sadat.

Begin reluctantly decided to come, wanting to wait until next week. I pressured him into arriving here Thursday evening. He later sent word that he did not want to go to Camp David, and was not even bringing his Foreign Minister or other cabinet members with him – and even said he would not discuss substantive issues.

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745 Carter, 1982, p. 413

746 Temko, 1987, p. 238, 424

747 Carter, 1982, p. 413
Before leaving for the U.S., Begin declared: "Sometimes, negotiations are carried on for years" and promised that, with God's help, he would resist any pressure. He chose a passive stance towards Carter's active efforts to achieve an agreement. He did not run after Carter and Sadat with new ideas about how to bridge the gap but, with his reluctant attitude, invited them to woo him. Thus Begin's bargaining position was stronger and he could achieve better results.

At their meeting, Carter found Begin concentrating more on global issues such as an alliance of the U.S., Israel, Egypt and perhaps the Saudis against extremists like Ghaddafi of Libya.

He [Begin] did not seem especially interested in the terms of the peace talks. His purpose seemed to be to convince us that Israel should be the dominant military power in the area, and that it was our only reliable ally in the Middle East.

When Carter pressed Begin to accept the linkage between the advancement of the peace process with Egypt and the Palestinian cause, Begin argued that maybe Sadat did not want peace and showed Carter eight points of difference between the Camp David agreement and Carter’s present draft. Begin rejected all of Carter’s suggested changes and, according to Carter, also one or two that Israel itself had suggested in the past. Carter wrote:

Begin… was very strong, negative, apparently confident… Begin said that Sadat still wants to destroy Israel, and that Israel will not accept any interpretive notes… I emphasized… that Begin had made no proposals at all to resolve the differences. Therefore there had been no progress, and the prospects at this point were dismal. That Sadat had heavy pressures on him to withdraw from the negotiations altogether – had given Israel everything that they had originally wanted, but that Israel had continuously raised its demands…. We have gone as far as we can in putting forward suggested

748 Medzini, 1977-79, p. 645
749 Carter, 1982, p. 414
compromise language, with practically no constructive response from Israel.”

Carter warned Begin of the “adverse consequences of failure and the ultimate threat to Israel if Begin should permit his country to become isolated in the world… having the United States as its only constant friend…” Later Begin would admit to Carter that ”he had not been able to sleep at all, worrying about the consequences of failure.” Begin seems to have sensed that he was playing on the brink and taking too much of a risk of harming U.S.-Israel relations. Now he was ready to give up a little but not on the linkage issue that could promote a Palestinian state. Sadat asked that the accord should not violate his alliance with other Arab countries. The idea of subordinating of Egyptian agreements with other countries to the treaty with Israel was offensive to him. Israel naturally wanted the Egypt-Israel peace treaty to prevail. But Begin agreed to add:

It is agreed by the Parties that there is no assertion that this Treaty prevails over other Treaties or agreements or that other treaties or agreements prevail over this Treaty.

Begin apparently agreed to add this clause because he felt confident that Egypt’s future decisions about whether or not to go to war with Israel would not depend on this or that sentence in the agreement.

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750 ibid, p. 415
751 ibid, p. 414
752 ibid, p. 416
753 Vance, 1983, p. 240
754 ibid, p. 244
755 Silver, 1984, p. 208
The next day, Carter continued to exert pressure and told Begin that verbal formulas were not enough for peace. Begin ignored his remark and kept on dealing with the specifics of the clauses. In response, Carter excused himself and retired for the evening. The next day, Begin suggested a linkage formula in which Israel would agree to the target of completing the autonomy talks - rather than the elections - within a year. As soon as possible after that, elections for the autonomy council would be held in the West Bank and Gaza strip. Begin told Carter he had to obtain approval from the cabinet and phoned Israel to tell the ministers that he had won a “complete turnabout” in the American position. Dayan did not see any such turnabout nevertheless the ministers approved it. Begin reported the cabinet’s approval to the Americans but added his demand that Israel be able to buy Sinai oil after giving the wells back to Egypt. Carter suggested an American guarantee as a substitute in case of Egyptian refusal to sell oil to Israel but Begin insisted upon Sinai oil. To use a phrase Begin became particularly fond of: "In the whole world, there is no guarantee that can guarantee a guarantee." But Begin’s main idea was to ensure that Egyptian participation in the Arab boycott of any relations with Israel would end.

Carter described the negotiation process:

Once more, I wanted Begin to have his way with particular phrases and depended on Sadat to be flexible on language and to take the long view concerning the effect of the agreement.

Then he sent Brzezinski to Sadat with the treaty texts Israel had adopted:

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756 Temko, 1987, p. 239; Vance, 1983, p. 244

757 Dayan, 1981, p. 268

758 Vance, 1983, p. 244-245

759 Quandt, 1986, p. 80

760 Carter, 1982, p. 417

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I informed Sadat that Zbig [Brzezinski] was coming. He replied, ‘Great! Your trip will be a wonderful event, and a complete success.’ He repeated, ‘I can assure you, Mr. President, complete success.’

Brzezinski relates that there was still another reason for his mission to Cairo - to ask for Sadat’s help in Carter's re-election bid.

The President… told me to tell Sadat very privately that the President’s domestic political situation was becoming more difficult and that Begin might even wish to see the President defeated.

And finally:

From then on, I felt that I had a guarantee from President Sadat that my mission would not fail – or at least, that a failure would not be caused by differences between him and me.

Carter decided to fly to Cairo and Jerusalem to wrap up the agreement. Within an hour, he and Sadat had resolved the questions which had been left hanging for all these months. In his diary, Carter wrote:

Sadat understands that Begin may wish to back out if he gets a chance, or wait until after 1980 when there is a President in the White House who may not be so equally balanced between the Israeli and Arab interests. Sadat understands that it’s important to conclude the negotiations now.

But Vance presented a list of Sadat's old and new demands, in which he insisted that autonomy would start first in Gaza and that even before the autonomy period

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762 Brezezinski, 1985, p. 282
763 Carter, 1982, p. 417

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began, Egypt would be permitted to station "liaison officers" there as a symbol of an Arab presence.\textsuperscript{765}

Carter arrived in Jerusalem determined to get an agreement out of Begin. But "he [Begin] seemed to show little interest in my conversations with Sadat."\textsuperscript{766} Then Begin told Carter for the first time that even if he and Carter agreed he would still have to submit it to the cabinet for approval and then to the Knesset for debate. Carter said he could not believe what he had heard. He asked Begin why he came if he was going to leave without an agreement. They kept on arguing for 45 minutes:

I asked him if he actually wanted a peace treaty, because my impression was that everything he could do to obstruct it, he did with apparent relish. He came right up and looked into my eyes about a foot away and said that it was obvious from the expression on his face that he wanted peace as much as anything else in the world.\textsuperscript{767}

The President of Israel, Yizhak Navon, told Carter that "he had never heard of any such commitment by any prime minister to a cabinet, and pointed out that Begin was perfectly at liberty to negotiate on behalf of Israel, as all his predecessors had been."\textsuperscript{768} Carter said:

Rarely have I been so frustrated as I was that evening. I was convinced that Begin would do everything possible to block a treaty and to avoid having to face the problem of the full autonomy he had promised to the Palestinians on the West Bank. He was obsessed with keeping all the occupied territories except the Sinai, and seemed to care little for the plight of the Arabs living without basic rights under Israeli rule.\textsuperscript{769}

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{765}Vance, 1983, p. 246

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{766}Carter, 1982, p. 420

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{767}ibid, p. 421

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{768}ibid

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{769}ibid

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Then Carter went with Begin to visit the Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem. Carter said that Yad Vashem helped him to better understand "Begin's extreme caution concerning the security of Israel" but he still thought of Sadat as the generous one and considered Begin the recalcitrant one.

Begin invited Carter to preside over the cabinet meeting. He stood at the entrance to the office building waiting for Carter and between clenched teeth he tunelessly sang “Ani ma’amin,” (I Believe), the Jewish hymn of faith which the Jews sang as they entered the gas chambers.

Carter began by saying that Sadat was waiting to hear that evening if the treaty was within reach. Begin replied that Israel would not be forced to adhere to such a timetable. Treaties took time, he said, and the Knesset must debate it. Begin also rejected each of Sadat’s final demands and denounced the anti-Semitic attacks of the Egyptian state-controlled press. Carter argued that if Begin rejected Sadat’s suggestions, he must offer his own in order to address Sadat’s concerns. Begin said that that was fine, but he needed time, adding, "In Washington, a solution was found in two days. Carter replied harshly that he did not have two days."

William Quandt (a member of the National Security Council staff) described this meeting:

There was something unreal about Carter, Vance, Brzezinski, Brown, Ambassador Lewis, Atherton, Harold Saunders, and me all struggling to find synonyms for derogate or inconsistent… [to describe the relation between the Egypt-Israel peace treaty and Egypt's treaties with other Arab states]. Begin, once again,

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ibid

Silver, 1984, p. 208

Dayan, 1981, p. 271
had shown himself a master at controlling the agenda. For most of one day the negotiations had concentrated on one word in a note to one article of the treaty, and in the end Begin's version was accepted…. It must have given him a sense of power and importance.  

It might be the case that Begin really felt powerful confronting the entire American entourage and also relished making Carter's mission difficult. For one thing, Begin, the embodiment of the Jewish people, who'd been rejected and persecuted his entire life, now had the opportunity to achieve a corrective emotional experience – to feel powerful and see himself wooed by no less than the almighty America. Also, Begin had repeatedly protested what he felt was American collusion with Egypt against Israel, something which he had to bring himself to overcome throughout the entire peace process. A Sadat-Carter coalition would naturally arouse Begin's resistance. Begin was ready to be flexible on some points, such as the exact timing of the phased withdrawal and the ambassador exchange. But he refused any linkage with Palestinian autonomy and also postponed Sadat’s request for a liaison office in Gaza. “The heavens will not fall if it takes longer than a few days to arrive at an agreement,” Begin declared. 

The next day, Carter was again invited to a cabinet meeting. He went through the clauses one after the other. When he mentioned the Egyptian liaison office in Gaza, Begin rejected it. Carter said: “You will have to sign!”

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774 Vance, 1983, p. 246
775 Dayan, 1981, p. 272
Dayan described it:

Carter demanded with brutal insistence that we should agree to Egyptian liaison officers in Gaza so that Egypt could influence her people to support the autonomy program.\(^{777}\)

There was silence in the room and then Begin looked up at Carter and replied coldly:

Mr. President. We will sign only what we agreed on, and not anything with which we disagreed.\(^{778}\)

Carter flushed with anger, ran his fingers through his hair, paused and then said, “All right. Let us proceed.” Later he admitted:

Had I exploded in the cabinet meeting, had I gotten angry, and lost control of my equilibrium, it is likely I would have alienated other members of the cabinet – that is, lost any hope at all of a treaty.\(^{779}\)

Carter left the cabinet meeting to speak before the Knesset. There, he said:

The people of the two nations are ready now for peace. The leaders have not yet proven that we are also ready for peace enough to take a chance.\(^{780}\)

He noted that "Begin apparently resented this comment, but it was accurate and needed to be said."\(^{781}\)

But this glimpse into the Knesset helped Carter to understand Begin a little better, and perhaps some of the differences between American and Israeli culture as well.

\(^{777}\) Dayan, 1981, p. 274

\(^{778}\) ibid

\(^{779}\) Temko, 1987, p. 426

\(^{780}\) Medzini, 1977-79, p. 654

\(^{781}\) Carter, 1982, p. 422
When Begin got up to try to speak, he was interrupted constantly by shouts and rudeness. He seemed to take delight in it, beaming with pleasure every time it occurred. One of the women members of the Knesset, Mrs. Cohen, was expelled…. Strangely, in the rough and tumble of the Knesset debate, I learned a lot about Prime Minister Begin, and felt friendlier toward him. Although some of the other leaders were very embarrassed at occasional comments and the complete absence of order, he seemed to relish the parliamentary combat, and in his asides to me was very proud of this display of democracy at work.  

Carter, deeply disappointed, packed to leave while Begin drafted a statement saying the discussions had been fruitful, progress had been gained and negotiations needed to continue. Begin handed Vance the letter for Carter and went home. Carter said that they "were astonished to hear that Begin had told the press we had made substantial progress and only a few issues of substance remained to be resolved." Carter told the press that it was a failure and this is how it was reported in the American media.

Cabinet members felt they could not let Carter go back home empty-handed and they encouraged Dayan to try to bridge the gap. Dayan called Begin to suggest a compromise whereby if Egypt refused to sell oil to Israel, the Americans would supply it to Israel at the market price. Begin consented to let Dayan take it to Vance but added that he would do nothing without cabinet approval. Dayan also persuaded Vance to postpone the issue of the Gaza liaison office until the autonomy talks by saying that Israel would gladly consider visas for liaison officers through the normal application process at this later stage.

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782 ibid, pp. 422-423
783 Dayan, 1981, p. 275
784 Vance, 1983, p. 249
785 Carter, 1982, p. 423
786 Dayan, 1981, p. 275-276
Begin met Carter for breakfast shortly before he had intended to leave and agreed with Carter that the Dayan-Vance progress made a signing very close, but added that he still needed cabinet approval. When Carter asked Begin for the position he would take in the cabinet, Begin refused to tell him because - according to him – “this would imply a cabinet commitment, which he was not willing to give.”

At the farewell ceremony at the airport, Begin murmured to Carter, “You have succeeded.” Carter commented that Begin had apparently forgotten about his strange "commitment" to the cabinet. Evidently it was important for Begin to demonstrate Israel's independence in the face of American pressure. But it was indeed Carter's success – as Begin put it - against Begin's passive stance.

Carter left for Cairo. Sadat told him: “My people in Egypt are furious at how the Israelis have treated our friend Jimmy Carter.” Carter answered: “It was not bad” Carter rapidly persuaded Sadat to accept the entire package. Sadat’s advisers were not sure, but he cut them short saying, “this is satisfactory with me”.

Some prominent American journalists felt they were misled and fooled by Carter, having been informed by him that the negotiations were a failure, only to see success proclaimed the next day in spite of their gloomy headlines. Begin, in contrast, said that there had been progress. His prediction was also more accurate because he was

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787 Carter, 1982, p. 424
788 Vance, 1983, p. 251
789 Carter, 1982, p. 425
790 Ibid
790a On the Iron Wall, Jabotinsky, 1946
not as emotionally involved in the process as Carter was and therefore could see the entire picture.

How could one side have been so pessimistic during the negotiations while the other was optimistic and yet didn't try to encourage its partner? Begin apparently did relish letting Carter sweat a bit – as revenge for his having preferred Sadat throughout the entire peace process and for having pressed Begin so hard.

But most importantly, Begin's passive stance actually gave him immense power during the negotiations. Instead of Israel chasing after peace, Israel was being wooed for peace. It was Jabotinsky who originally argued: “The only way to achieve an agreement in the future is by the absolute abandonment of all attempts to achieve an agreement in the present.”

On March 20, 1979, after getting the cabinet's approval, Begin presented the accord to the Knesset, enumerated its achievements and asked for its endorsement. He ended by saying:

We do not exult. There is no reason for exultation. We do not boast. There is no cause for boasting. All the previous governments wanted what this Government is proposing to you today, and all due respect to their efforts. But it so fell out that at this very time we can sign a peace treaty. Therefore, without exaltation, without boasting. But with subdued heart, and with abundant love, and with profound faith. On behalf of the Government and with its concurrence, I ask that the Knesset approve the Treaty of Peace between Israel and Egypt…

It was approved by a large majority of 95:18.

Begin suggested that the signing ceremony be held in Jerusalem; Sadat refused. It was held on March 26, 1979 on the White House lawn. In his speech, Begin said it

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791 Medzini, 1977-79, p. 684-685
was the third greatest day of his life. The first was the day the State of Israel was established. The second was the day of the unification of Jerusalem -- and he went on to describe the famous picture of Israeli parachutists weeping in front of the Western Wall. He then described the Holocaust and the fact that it happened because there was no one to defend the Jews. Here, too, on the occasion of the signing of a peace treaty, Begin did not forget to remind the world how the Jews cried for help and the world did nothing to save them. He concluded by donning a skullcap and reciting the Ma’alot Poem (A Song of Ascents, Psalms, 126):

> When the Lord brought back the captivity of Zion, we were like men in a dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then they said among the nations, The Lord has done great things for them. The Lord has done great things for us; we are glad. Bring back our captivity, O Lord, like the streams in the Negev. They who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who goes weeping on his way, bearing a bag of seed, shall come back with a joyful shout, carrying his sheaves.

Begin was invited by Sadat to visit Cairo. He was euphoric, crowing that two years ago no one would have believed that an Israeli prime minister would be accepted in Egypt with a presentation of arms and the playing of “Hatikva” (Israel’s national anthem). He took with him veterans of the Irgun, Hagana, and LEHI, and said:

> For thirty five years I have been dreaming of the day of a meeting of the hearts among all the fighters. That day was long in coming – but come it did.792

Begin toured the Pyramids, dined with Sadat and prayed in Cairo’s synagogue. On the plane on his way back he snatched the microphone from an Israeli radio correspondent and conducted an interview in which he acted the part of the reporter. Imitating an excited radio correspondent, he asked his interviewee to describe his

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792 Medzini, 1977-79, p. 728
experience of the visit. After a few questions, Begin said into the microphone: “This is Menachem Begin. Now, back to the studio”\(^{793}\)

Carter described how an ecstatic Begin called him and shouted into the telephone:

I had a wonderful visit to Cairo! The people of Egypt opened their hearts to me. In the morning, tens of thousands lined the streets on both sides, and cheered and waved, and took me to their hearts. I am very moved. I left my car for a while, to the disturbance of the Egyptian secret service, and went into the crowd, which was crying, ‘We like you, we love you!’ It was absolutely wonderful. Yesterday's reception was at the Qubba Palace. The evening was a ‘thousand nights into one’\(^{794}\)

Samuel Lewis summarized Carter's attitude toward the peace process:

Carter had more of a genuine personal crusade mentality about Arab-Israeli peace than any other American president. I think Carter was seeing himself as on a mission and it had to do with his Bible-Belt Baptist upbringing, that making peace in the Holy Land was something which go down in history and was a worthy objective for an American president, even if it meant sacrificing a lot of other issues in not spending time on other things which he probably should have been spending time on. Carter Administration in many ways destroyed a lot of his political support by not paying enough attention to other issues, when it was immersed in this one. Vance did practically nothing for about nine months except this, while China went down several bad roads and Russia did too. So there was a big price, but Carter felt it was worth it and even when he realized that it probably wasn’t going to go any further than Egypt, I think he always felt that that was an historic achievement.\(^{795}\)

According to Sadat, the entire peace process was a direct consequence of the restoration of Egyptian honor:

We have recovered our pride and self-confidence after the October 1973 battle, just as our armed forces did. We are no longer motivated by

\(^{793}\)Aizakson, 2003, p. 182

\(^{794}\)Carter, 1982, p. 428

\(^{795}\)Lewis, 2002
'complexes' – whether defeatist 'inferiority' ones or those born out of suspicion and hate.\textsuperscript{796}

\textsuperscript{796} Sadat, 1978, p. 312
On May 19, 1979, Begin declared that he was going to “carry out each and every word of the accord we signed.” Thus, there would be no “negotiations on autonomy” but on “administrative autonomy.”797 Begin refused to let citizens of East Jerusalem vote in a West Bank election because, according to the Camp David agreement, East Jerusalem was not part of the proposed autonomy plan but of the united capital of Israel.

He declared that Israel would continue to control the water sources and all the land that did not clearly belong to the Palestinians. The Camp David treaty, as well as the final agreement, could not cover all those “details.”798 When Sadat expressed his support for broader Palestinian autonomy, Begin boasted, “Anwar Sadat doesn’t understand what he agreed to at Camp David.” While Dayan and Weizman believed Sadat was genuinely interested in extending the peace in the Middle East, Begin thought that Sadat was just pretending, that he wanted Sinai back and all the rest was less important to him. Begin was proud of the agreement he managed to extract from Sadat and Carter at a time when Dayan and Weizman were ready to give up.799 As he put it, Israel made 'sacrifices' to achieve the agreement, not 'concessions'.800

Begin protected Dayan from his old comrades who wanted to fire him. But he distanced him from taking part in the autonomy negotiations and gave that role to

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797 Medzini, 1979-80, p.21  
798 Temko, 1987, p. 246  
799 ibid, pp. 427-428  
800 Medzini, 1979-80, p. 25
Josef Burg, the National Religious Party leader.\footnote{Dayan, 1981, p. 312-314} Begin told Burg that he had given him this role because of his loyalty to the Land Of Israel.\footnote{Burg, 1994} But Burg was also Israel's interior minister at this time and Begin was highly sensitive to symbols. This appointment was a sign for Dayan that Begin did not want positive results in the autonomy negotiations.\footnote{Naor, 1993, 201} Sharon pressed as hard as he could for an in-depth discussion of exactly what Israel wanted and meant by "autonomy," but Begin insistently avoided such a discussion time and again.\footnote{Sharon, 1989, p. 405} It seems that Begin himself did not want to know and preferred to leave this key issue obscure for future generations to resolve, feeling that providing any opening at that time might make things worse.

Feeling that there was no partner within the Palestinian people with whom to negotiate autonomy, Dayan proposed a unilateral withdrawal of the army from the West Bank and Gaza in order to promote it.\footnote{Naor, 1993, p. 203} Begin rejected the idea. “I am not in favor of unilateral action. I am in favor of abiding by the agreements…,” he said.\footnote{Medzini, 1979-80, p. 161} In June 1979, Begin approved the Elon Moreh settlement near Nablus.\footnote{ibid, p. 48} Dayan and Weizman opposed it\footnote{Dayan, 1981, p. 313; Weizman, 1981, p. 227-230} and the Americans also protested, adding that the move was

\footnote{801 Dayan, 1981, p. 312-314}
\footnote{802 Burg, 1994}
\footnote{803 Naor, 1993, 201}
\footnote{804 Sharon, 1989, p. 405}
\footnote{805 Naor, 1993, p. 203}
\footnote{806 Medzini, 1979-80, p. 161}
\footnote{807 ibid, p. 48}
especially harmful because it was done at the beginning of the autonomy talks. A group of Palestinians whose land was confiscated for this purpose petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court and won. Begin asked the Chief of General Staff to write to the court and explain why this settlement was a security necessity for Israel. The Supreme Court again rejected Israel’s claim. But Begin was reluctant to order the army to evacuate it. “In the underground, I avoided bloodshed”, he said. "We won't raise our hands against Jews.”

To the cabinet, Begin solemnly proclaimed: “Gentlemen! When my time comes to face the heavenly tribunal and I am asked: ‘What is the good deed you have done which makes you worthy of entering paradise’ - I shall reply: ‘Elon Moreh.’” These declarations notwithstanding, Weizman "found him borne down by a sense of despondent helplessness, casting about for a solution…”

Weizman adds: "Whenever he had to deal with the issue, his face would break into a grimace of pain, 'What will become of the land of Israel?' he would groan.” In the end, the few prefabs were transferred to an adjacent hill.

Yehuda Lapidot - Begin’s comrade who was appointed by him to head the secret bureau for relations with the Russian Jews who were still under the Communist regime - worked with three prime ministers. He recalled the differences among them. When Begin received visitors, everyone sat together at a round table and tea was served to all. No one was asked what they would like to drink. Yitzhak Shamir sat behind a desk, drank only water and offered nothing to his visitors. Peres used to read all kind of documents while his visitors spoke to him.

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809 Weizman, 1981, p. 230

810 ibid, p. 228

811 ibid, p. 230

812 Lapidot, 2000
Many of the Jews who left Russia immigrated to the United States because they were recognized there as refugees and received significant financial support from the American government. Lapidot suggested that Begin talk with Carter and tell him that those Jews were not refugees because they have a place to go named Israel. Begin's response was firm: "I will never ask a gentile not to allow a Jew to enter his country."

When Lapidot later made the same suggestion to Prime Minister Shamir, he said "no problem" and asked the U.S. president not to recognize the Russian Jews as refugees. Another difference between the two, according to Lapidot, was that Shamir was very passive in his attitude toward this issue while Begin regularly came up with new ideas for the International Committee for Russian Jewry, was interested in the details of the situation and frequently asked about ways to enhance the immigration of Jews from Russia. Peres, in contrast, opposed the public struggle for Russian Jewry. He argued that it made the Russian government angry and therefore should be moderated.\textsuperscript{813}

Parts of the agreement with Egypt were implemented earlier than the due date; the borders were opened and for the first time an Israeli ship sailed through the Suez Canal. But the autonomy negotiations were stalled. Begin, who in the Camp David agreement agreed to leave open the question of sovereignty of the West Bank and Gaza, now aspired to exercise sovereignty over the entire territory west of the Jordan River. Begin stated:

\begin{quote}
At the end of the five-year transitional period, Israel will continue to maintain its claim to the right of sovereignty in the Land of Israel territories – Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District.\textsuperscript{814}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{813} ibid

\textsuperscript{814} Dayan, 1981, p. 305
When Dayan - who rejected any kind of sovereignty in the West Bank, either Israeli or Palestinian or Jordanian - felt he no longer had any influence, he decided to resign. And he had some criticisms of Begin's style:

I served in three earlier governments – Ben Gurion government, Eskol and Golda one – in no one of them there was so self annihilation as in Begin's one. I mean mainly of the Likud ministers in front of Begin. Ben Gurion was very authoritative but still the ministers often disagreed with him and voted against him. The tradition in Begin's government was that the leader is always right and a refusal to disagree with him.\textsuperscript{815}

He said also that Begin exhibited:

a sense of intellectual superiority, as though he harbored not the slightest doubt that if he himself directed every move in our foreign policy, he would do it more successfully.\textsuperscript{816}

In an interview on Israel Television, Dayan was asked about Begin's rhetoric, which always aroused interest, sometimes verging on ridicule. He described how Begin could solemnly swear that if he signed such and such a document his hand would wither (an allusion to the biblical phrase, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, may my right hand wither”). Nevertheless, said Dayan, with an understanding smile regarding Begin's dramatic needs, his hand did not wither when he signed it.

On October 2, 1979, Begin accepted Dayan’s resignation and announced it without any attempt to persuade him to change his mind.

The international situation had changed. The Americans had problems in Iran and Afghanistan; Sadat had started an irreversible process and now Begin was in an unshakable position of power in Israel. When a group of ultra-Orthodox women from the right-wing Gush Emunim movement seized a formerly Jewish hospital in the heart

\textsuperscript{815}Dayan, 1981, Hebrew, p. 76

\textsuperscript{816}Dayan, 1981, p. 303
of Hebron, the second largest Arab city in the West Bank, Begin said: “Hebron is also Israel. I will not have any place in Israel made Judenrein!” But in February 1980, half a year later, he said to reporters:

   The ladies should not have come on their own to that house. They should go home. Buildings are not seized in Israel – not in Hebron, not in Tel Aviv, not in Haifa. It is not nice.817

Though he acknowledged the seizure as a violent act, he said he would not force the women to leave, though he had asked them to leave and would continue to do so. At another moment, Begin would say angrily: "What do these little Messianists think they can teach me about loyalty to the Land of Israel?"818 and argue that Gush Emunim had a Messiah Complex.819 But a few days later the cabinet approved the right of Jews to live in Hebron.

In January 1980, Elyakim Rubinstein819a, who had been Dayan's adviser in the foreign ministry, paid Begin a farewell visit before leaving for a six-month stay in the U.S. "I was shocked," Rubinstein said afterwards. "He looked very depressed. He was kind and nice with me but he was in a state of mourning."

In March 1980, Begin appointed Yitzhak Shamir, who had abstained in the Knesset vote for the Camp David accord, to be foreign minister. Begin flew to Washington – for the first time since the signing ceremony of the peace with Egypt - knowing that Carter was weakened because of his problems with the American hostages in Teheran and with the Russian invasion of Afghanistan. Carter tried to press Begin to make progress in the autonomy talks in which Jordan and the Palestinians refused to

817Temko, 1987, p. 248
818Temko, 1987, p. 430
819Naor, 1993, p. 163
819a1994
participate. Begin responded that he hoped agreement would be achieved by May 1980 as they had agreed, but "if we don't, the sky is not on our heads. We shall continue negotiating..."820 Before resigning, Dayan told Carter that “there would be no more progress as long as Begin was heading the government, because he was firmly committed to retaining maximum control over the West Bank in spite of the Camp David commitments.”821

Sadat reacted by suspending the autonomy talks and Begin replied that only Sadat could repair what Sadat had done. Again citing passages from the Camp David agreement, he said in a buoyant mood: “We are not in a …shuk” (meaning a market in which you bargain by opening with a higher price in order to conclude a negotiation with a satisfactory result after some concessions). On the same occasion, to the surprise of his press aide, he revealed Dayan’s 1977 meeting with King Hussein, referring to the latter as “the little king.”822

In May 1980, Weizman resigned, but not before calling for early elections on Israeli TV. In a resignation letter he wrote:

For the people of Israel there were days of richness and hope during your term of office. The people believed in the Government and believed in peace. It was not the people who stopped believing in peace.823

820 Medzini, 1979-80, p. 235

821 Carter, 1982, p. 494

822 Temko, 1987, p. 249, 430

823 Silver, 1984, p. 212
Begin replied:

A shocking frivolity has guided you, through a desire to appear in certain foreign countries as the only ‘pursuer of peace’ in a government composed of peace saboteurs. I assure you, my esteemed Mr. Weizman, that we shall concern ourselves with remedying this injustice you have done to truth, to the people, to the government, and to each one of its members.”\textsuperscript{824}

Begin took over the defense ministry. To some Irgun veterans it seemed that Begin was again in the shoes of the Irgun commander. To Labor veterans it looked as if Begin trying to emulate Ben-Gurion, who had been prime minister and defense minister at the same time. “Begin never went into the purely military details,” said his military secretary Brigadier General Poran. “But every Thursday - like a Swiss watch – he would trade his tie and jacket for an open-necked shirt” when he received Israel’s top commanders in the defense minister’s office. Begin used to say about his fellow high officers: “What a tremendous breed of guys we have in the military!”\textsuperscript{825}

In this new double role as defense minister and prime minister, Begin visited the graves of Altalena victims on Israel's Memorial Day and said: “I came here today as a prime minister and also as a defense minister in order to ask your forgiveness and atonement in the name of IDF\textsuperscript{825a} (It was the IDF that fired on the Altalena while Begin was aboard, at Ben-Gurion's command).

When settlers wrecked Arab cars in Ramallah in retaliation for the stoning of Jewish cars, Begin did not order an arrest of the Jewish suspects. One of his aides told him:

\textsuperscript{824}Temko, 1987, p. 249

\textsuperscript{825}ibid, p. 250

\textsuperscript{825a}Naor, 1993, p. 89
This was a genuine pogrom. The particular Arabs whose cars were stoned might have had nothing to do with attacking Jews!

Begin replied that this was not the point:

Stones can also be very dangerous. You can even take out someone’s eye with a stone. You can kill someone!

The aide argued that he had not meant to accept violence against the settlers. But that the law, not the mob, should punish the Arabs involved:

That is collective punishment! It’s what the Germans used to do!

Begin was not yet convinced. Only when the aide reframed the event in such a way that those Arab victims became part of Begin’s “family” could he feel some empathy for them. The aide said:

Think of the Arabs whose cars were destroyed. Legally, they have no redress, no one to complain to – unless you want them to petition King Hussein. But he is not their king anymore, and you don’t want them to complain to Arafat. If you want them to be part of Israel, then you are their prime minister. And you must help them and listen to them.

Then Begin ordered the suspects’ immediate arrest.\textsuperscript{826}

Kadishai described how Begin’s Achilles’ heel was the settlers. He felt as if he was one of them and their arguments were very difficult for him to bear. Many times, Kadishai had to stop the settlers from meeting with Begin because these encounters were too exhausting for him. In contrast, Begin was quite immune to criticism from the left.\textsuperscript{827}

Samuel Lewis described Begin’s difficulty in feeling empathy for non-Jews:

All through this period of Camp David and what followed it, I must have had 50 or 75 times that I talked with Begin about understanding Sadat better and

\textsuperscript{826}Temko, 1987, p. 251

\textsuperscript{827}Kadishai, 1993
understanding Egyptians better and understanding the Palestinians better. He never was having any other, he said: Listen, don’t talk to me about Sadat’s troubles. I’ve got worse troubles. His whole way of looking at the world was really from a very Israeli-centered and Jewish-centered tradition, and he was a great man in many respects, but one thing he wasn’t able to put himself into the skin of non-Jews. He could never put himself, he didn’t have empathy for other nations’ problems, because his problems, or Israel’s problems or the Jewish problems were so overwhelming that it just dominated his whole worldview.

I talked to him about problems that President Carter was having or President Reagan was having. He said: Oh, you don’t have problems. You’re a big country, you can do anything you want to. Poor little Israel, we’ve got problems, we’re the ones with the problems.

Confidence building measures was a subject we discussed endlessly, because the Egyptians were always giving us list of things if only Begin would do, then that will increase confidence enough so they could do something in the Autonomy negotiations or in the peace treaty negotiations. But he didn’t believe in confidence building measures. He really didn’t, and I am not sure that he was wrong, but he certainly didn’t believe in them. He said to me once: “Come on Sam, you want me to do this just to make them feel good? In this world nobody gets something for nothing”. That kind of summed up the way he looked at negotiating with the Egyptians and Arabs in general.

At the end of June 1980, Begin collapsed in the Knesset from a minor heart attack. It was his third one and was hospitalized for a short time. He had previously suffered a mild stroke as well. The media, and the public, questioned Begin’s ability to function as prime minister. There were also signs of depression. Ministers complained of his absence of leadership and visitors found him apathetic in affect, remote and sentimental. Sometimes he did not know who his visitors were or why they had come. There were also rumors that Begin fell asleep in meetings. But at other times he seemed so up that Burg (the interior minister) sent a note to a colleague saying "If that's what the pills do for him, I want some too.”

Burg recalled:

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827a Samuel Lewis, 2002

828 Silver, 1984, p. 212-213
There were two or three cabinet meetings in which Begin was there physically but not really there. On one occasion we noted that he did not react. Simcha Erlich, Yigael Yadin and I were frightened. We decided that if it happened again the next week, we should report it to the president or to the attorney general because it was impossible to carry on like this. The next week, Begin conducted the session as if nothing had happened.829

Meanwhile, Israel’s economy was seriously deteriorating. Throughout the years, Begin neither understood nor was very interested in economics. Apart from his desire to uplift Sephardic neighborhoods, he left this job to others. Back in 1979, he suddenly announced an ill-planned price freeze and then halted it just as abruptly, and inflation in Israel soared into the double digits. Then he declared a “courageous” plan to cut government spending and raise interest rates but did neither and accepted his finance minister’s resignation.830 Begin did not really back the next finance minister, Yigal Hurwitz, who tried to take the correct but painful steps for economic recovery. Begin said that he tried to “bring about consensus” at a time when his authority should have been utilized to support the finance minister who was attempting to cut expenses in the face of resistance from other ministers. To the teachers who went on strike for an improvement in their salaries Begin said that the Jewish teacher was always modest and knew how to suffice with little. In January 1981, with his majority in danger after the resignation of his second finance minister, who left the coalition together with other colleagues, Begin had no choice but to call for early elections in June of that year. He knew that what mattered to Israelis was the economy and that because of this the Likud trailed Labor in the polls by 30 percent.

But Begin had the advantage of a being a leader who had led a modest life. Begin never knew the price of a car but was always interested in the price of bread, Minister

829Burg, 1994
830Temko, 1987, p. 252
David Levy (himself of Moroccan origin) once commented. He insisted upon subsidizing bread and public transportation. He argued that bread was a symbol - the main source of nutrition for the poor, and public transportation was a necessity for those who could not afford a car. In a debate regarding the best way to approach the huge project of rehabilitating the poor neighborhoods, when the discussion centered on whether to expand the square footage of public housing units or to invest the money in helping the lower socio-economic levels with social activities, social workers and community development, Begin – who used to study in the living room as a child and spent his entire adult life in a two-and-a-half-room apartment with three children in Tel Aviv - argued that living space was the essence. He argued that children cannot grow intellectually in too narrow a space or succeed in their studies if they have to study for exams in the same room as the whole family. There was not enough money to implement both approaches but Begin’s approach was finally accepted when David Levy was appointed minister of housing. Meir Sheetrit, a minister of Sephardic origin, noted that under Begin, Sephardic Jews received not only the positions of postal or police minister, as was the case under previous Labor governments, but more prestigious ministries.

Begin’s deterioration was not only physical and was accompanied by frequent hospitalizations. “He lost weight, gave fewer interviews, seemed distracted at meetings,” said the government secretary. “He was in quite a deep depression. He was doggedly going through the paces, assuming the party would lose and lacking the

831 Aizakson, 2003, p. 155
831a Aizakson, 2003, p. 150
832 Meir Shitrit; Aizakson, 2003, p. 125
psychic energy to do something about it,” said an aide. Still another aide remembered
Begin was “mopey, sulking, pitiful to watch, in those months.”833

Before the 1981 election, a group of Israeli psychologists – the majority of them
from the left, no doubt - considered issuing a public statement about Prime Minister
Begin's shaky mental condition, believing him to be manic-depressive. In the end,
they did not do so on ethical grounds, declining to utilize the amateur diagnosis of
non-patient as a political weapon.834

The Likud hired the services of American public relations expert David Garth, who
conducted a survey in Israel and found that although Labor was leading by 26%,
Begin’s personal “favorable rating” as a leader was around 50% and his
“unfavorable” rating around 25%. Shimon Peres’s results were the reverse. “Look,”
he told Begin, “these guys have nominated somebody – if you had to pick a guy to run
against you, this is the guy you would pick!” It was the first time in weeks that Begin
laughed out loud. Garth also remembered how Begin could not understand “why
people were against him.”835

Begin’s mood started to perk up in April, two months before the general election,
after the Likud's relative success (although it lost) in the Labor Union (Histadrut)
election. “We can really win the election,” he told his aides. In strategy meetings
Begin was the encouraging one, now saying to the American: “Relax, David. If we

833 Temko, 1987, p. 252-253

834 Berman, 2002

835 Temko, 1987, p. 253
are short two or three or four seats, we’ll still control the thing! We can assemble a coalition.”

The political-military situation also brought Begin to life. The Lebanese-Christian militia led by Bashir Gemayel and armed by Israel, and the Syrian army began fighting over the city of Zahle in the Bekaa Valley in eastern Lebanon. Begin declared that Israel could not stand idly by while the Christians were threatened. The Israeli Air Force downed two Syrian helicopters. In response the Syrians moved Soviet anti-aircraft missiles into eastern Lebanon. Begin demanded their removal. He said the Syrians would not achieve anything from war but defeat: “We do not rely on miracles. We will do what we have to do.” And at an election rally in Netanya Begin exclaimed: "Assad, Assad! Yanush and Raful are waiting for you!"

Addressing the Knesset foreign affairs and defense committee, Begin talked about Arthur D. Morse’s book (1968) While Six Million Died:

Every time I read it, I am not ashamed that tears come to my eyes when I think how our people were left to themselves. The Germans murdered, but the world left us on our own. I want to tell you, I said (to Samuel Lewis, the American ambassador in Israel), that we are a Jewish state, with our own experiences, and under no circumstances will we acquiesce in the Syrian’s attempt to transform the Christians in Lebanon in the 1980s into the Jewish people in Europe of the 1940s. The Syrians along with the terrorists are treating a civilian population exactly as the

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836 Temko, 1987, p. 253

837 May 7, 1981, Israel Radio interview for Israel’s 33rd birthday

838 Yanush Ben-Gal, one of the more famous generals, was stationed on the northern front; Raful was the nickname of Rafael Eitan, the Chief of General Staff; Naor, 1986, p. 65
Nazis did. They care nothing about men, women and children.”

In a May 7, 1981 interview on Israel Radio for Israel’s 33rd birthday, Begin also said:

> I have never felt better… From the mental point of view, from the point of view of morale, I feel much better today than I have in the past four years, because now I am in a fight. That has been my element all my life.

When German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt said on a visit to Saudi Arabia that Germany had obligations to various peoples, among them the Palestinians, and failed to mention the Jewish people, Begin said that he found the Chancellor's statements "astonishing," particularly coming from a head of a state who should have felt some responsibility for the extermination of six million Jews. Schmidt demanded that Begin apologize. Begin's response was:

> I will not apologize to Mr. Schmidt. Rather, I counsel him, speaking as a free man who fought for the continued existence and the liberation of the Jewish people, that he take an example from his predecessor, Mr. Brandt, visit Warsaw, go to the site where the Jewish ghetto once stood, go down on his knees and ask forgiveness of the Jewish people and of all nations loving justice and liberty for what his countrymen perpetrated under the Nationalist Socialist regime against my people at the time when Mr. Schmidt remained faithful to the personal oath he had given to Adolf Hitler as a soldier and officer in the army.

Impelled probably by his need to demonstrate Israel's might, Begin told the Knesset that it was only because of the weather on April 30, 1981 that the Syrian anti-aircraft missile batteries were not bombed. Top military officers were shocked by Begin’s revelation. Now the Syrians could analyze the weather on that day to learn the

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839 *Haaretz*, May 13, 1981
840 Hurwitz, 2004, p. 188
limitations of the Israel Air Force. No defense minister or prime minister had ever done anything like this.\textsuperscript{841} Begin became very ambitious to win the upcoming election. Labor was still promoting the Jordanian option, hoping that King Hussein would agree to divide the West Bank between Israel and Jordanian rule. Meanwhile, Begin told his aides that the fate of Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip was dependent on their victory. The Likud gradually narrowed the gap. Garth chose the opposite tactic of Weizman: Instead of trying to round off Begin’s rough edges, he celebrated them. Garth said: “We found that Begin’s personality was so strong that he seemed to convey a feeling of direction. Even people who did not like Begin felt that there was something to react to.”\textsuperscript{842} The campaign slogan was: “Vote Likud... Now Is the Time to Choose: Forward or Backward.”

Garth described Begin as a good student who listened carefully and was eager to understand while remaining the boss. He recalled:

I called him ‘Mr. Prime Minister.’ I never had the inclination to call him anything else. And it’s very funny: He may be the only client I had, ever had, who I addressed in private, in conversation, by his title.\textsuperscript{843}

Garth did not see Begin's nostalgic anecdotes about Poland or the Irgun that were introduced throughout the conversation as a sign of depression or other dysfunction but the opposite:

At first, I thought his mind wandered. But I discovered it was his way of changing the agenda. Like a fox, his mind wanders! Other people would remark how Begin was always lecturing.

\textsuperscript{841} The Jerusalem Post, May 12, 1981

\textsuperscript{842} Temko, 1987, p. 255

\textsuperscript{843} ibid

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But in lecturing, he was controlling the turf, the dialogue, the territory of the meeting.

I cannot think of anybody in my 25 years in political life who executed power better by not having to use power – and by letting you kind of do your thing, but keeping you always in your place.”

Ze’ev Chafets, director of the Israel Government Press Office during Begin’s term as prime minister, also described his unique power and control:

He had a ‘cold warmth.’ He had set up this concept of the Fighting Family and then defined it in such a way so that the kids would always be vying for their father’s approval.

Samuel Lewis, the American ambassador in Israel during Begin’s tenure, added:

He had an extraordinary instinct of how to play other people. Instinctively. He managed to inspire tremendous loyalty… He would give lots of little remarks of encouragement. This was instinct but also partly calculation. He manipulated people. Subconsciously, he knew how to play on fears and hopes – to tantalize with rewards – and also how to come up with an explanation when sometimes he couldn’t deliver the rewards.

The campaign was full of ethnic violence. Begin was accused by the Left of using his rhetoric to fan the flames among Sephardic Jews or at least of not trying to control them. At his rallies Begin was often hailed as “King of Israel” and other opinions were considered treason. Peres shouted, “Khomeini-ism,” to the crowd, which pelted

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844 Temko, 1987, p. 255; Israeli TV, Channel 8, October/November 2003, Program on Begin

845 Temko, 1987, p. 432

846 ibid
him with tomatoes, and other Labor politicians also lost their cool and shouted various insults at the crowd.\textsuperscript{847}

Begin ordered very heavy air and artillery bombardment of PLO positions in east Lebanon and when the new American president – Reagan - protested, fearing war, Begin said during a campaign rally that the Americans should take care of their own business and he, Begin, would take care of Israel. By early June, the Likud had closed the gap in the polls and even surpassed Labor, 45 to 42 percent.\textsuperscript{848}

At Begin's request, Sharon - who visited Egypt in May - asked Sadat to meet with Begin soon. Sadat immediately agreed. But then the Egyptians delayed the meeting for no apparent reason. Sharon tried hard to make the meeting happen sooner, knowing that it should be held before the planned bombardment of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, but the Egyptians kept on postponing it. Finally, the summit was scheduled for June 4 in Sharm al-Sheikh. During the summit, at the dinner, the Egyptian foreign minister Kamal Hassan Ali whispered to Sharon that the Egyptians had purposely postponed the summit in order to have it occur as close as possible to the June 30 Israeli election, to give a boost to Begin's re-election campaign.\textsuperscript{849} On June 7, 1981, Begin convened his cabinet at his home and said: “My friends, shalom. In these very minutes, our planes are approaching Baghdad. The first plane will be above the nuclear reactor in a short time.” He informed them that the mission was the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor in Osirak, which was built with the

\textsuperscript{847} Silver, 1984, p. 215-216; Chafets, 1986, p. 136-137

\textsuperscript{848} The Jerusalem Post, June 2, 1981

\textsuperscript{849} Sharon, 1989, p. 380
help of France and Italy. The ministers were shocked. In a short while, after hearing the pilots' reports about the successful completion of the mission, they would cry and laugh in relief. After all the congratulations, when everyone else had left, Begin put his hand on Sharon's shoulder and said, "Arik, if it weren't for your persistence I don't know if we would have done it." According to Sharon, and as our knowledge of Begin shows, this was a rare sort of gesture for him to make.

In October 1980, after a cabinet debate that included strong opposition, Begin had won standby approval to bomb the reactor whenever an “inner committee” approved it. The inner committee was composed of three: Begin, Ariel Sharon (then agriculture minister) and Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir. The questions that were raised by the cabinet ministers and military officers who opposed the attack were: “Do we have the right to bomb or destroy a reactor that is civilian, at least for the time being? Does this mean that from now on we’ll destroy every civilian nuclear reactor built in the Middle East?” Israel had no doubt that President Saddam Hussein intended to produce a nuclear bomb. And it was becoming increasingly clear to Begin that Israel's efforts to get the international community to block this were not bearing fruit. The question was when the reactor would go critical for manufacturing the bomb. The majority of

850 Weizman, 1981, p. 6

851 Nakdimon, 1993, p. 255

852 Sharon, 1989, p. 383
853 Temko, 1987, p. 433
854 Nakdimon, 1993, p. 168
Washington’s intelligence community thought it would take a year. Others argued that it might take anywhere from one month to five years. The director of military intelligence, General Yehoshua Saguy, believed it would take the Iraqis five years to get to a bomb – enough time to apply non-military methods. Begin did not want to take the risk of bombing the reactor after it had gone critical because of the risk of thousands of radiation casualties in Baghdad. And the air force was confident of its ability to successfully perform this operation 600 miles away from Israel.

Toward the end of 1980, Begin invited the opposition leader, Peres, to a private meeting and told him about the plan. Peres warned Begin about the potential international backlash but Begin was not impressed by this argument. This was a rare instance in which Begin insisted on bucking a substantial majority -- consisting of the general staff, his advisers and his cabinet ministers; the only support for the action came from Sharon and Chief of General Staff General Rafael Eitan (Even Shamir opposed it at the beginning). Begin chose to act in June without warning the cabinet, the Opposition or the Americans. One reason Begin took action in June – before the election – was probably that he feared a Labor victory and anticipated that they would not do what he was convinced should be done.

All the Israeli planes returned home after the completion of their mission, without any losses. The worldwide public, Israelis included, was stunned. On June 8, 1981, the Israeli government announced the attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor. There was international condemnation of the operation. On June 9, 1981, Reagan wrote in his diary:

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854a Nakdimon, 1993, p. 214

Under the law I have no choice but to ask Congress to investigate and see if there has been a violation of the law regarding use of American-produced planes for offensive purposes. Frankly, if Congress should decide that, I'll grant a Presidential waiver. Iraq is technically still at war with Israel and I believe they were preparing to build an atom bomb.  

"I sympathized with Begin's motivations," said Reagan, aware of Begin's Holocaust experience. Still, Reagan was quite angry when he learned that Israel had used U.S.-made bombs. He ordered the impounding of four F-16 jets that had already been paid for by Israel. Begin swept aside this criticism arguing that Israel had acted out of "supreme national self-defense."  

In its official announcement of the bombing of the nuclear reactor, the Israeli government made it clear that Saddam had been developing his nuclear weapons for use against Israel:

...The target for these bombs was Israel. The cruel ruler of Iraq said so explicitly after the Iranians slightly damaged the reactor. Saddam Hussein said it was pointless for the Iranians to attack the reactor because it was built solely for [use against] Israel. 

Begin took every Arab declaration seriously and could also envision the details of a prospective "Holocaust":

With three bombs like those dropped on Hiroshima in 1945, Iraq could destroy greater Tel Aviv, the hub of Israel's industrial, commercial, farming and cultural life. Six hundred thousand casualties we would suffer. Where is the country that would tolerate such a danger? There will not be another Holocaust in the history of the Jewish people. Never again. We

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856 Reagan, 1990, p. 413

857 Haig, 1984, p. 182

858 Aizakson, 2003, p. 132
shall defend our people against any enemy. Arthur D. Morse’s nightmare will not be repeated.\textsuperscript{859}

And at an election rally, soon afterwards:

When we went out in the street and saw a group of our children playing, we would look at them and ask ourselves: Today they are five years old; in two or three years they will be seven or eight. What will happen to them when Saddam has just two or three bombs like those of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?\textsuperscript{860}

Concerning the U.S. impoundment of the F-16s, he said:

This is the morality of Sodom and Gomorrah! It punishes the righteous for their act of self-defense; but rewards the murderous, dictatorial aggressors.\textsuperscript{861}

To Weinberger, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, who advocated punishing Israel, Begin wrote:

I feel I have the moral obligation to ask you that in any of your actions and judgments you consider the following: At a time when your children and grandchildren live and continue to live in the big country of America, my children and grandchildren will keep on living in small Israel which has many enemies that would like to see her be totally destroyed and disappear. Does Israel have to be punished by a weapons embargo because of this?...

After you read this letter, when looking at pictures of your children and grandchildren, you might think that a million like them are living in Israel. It is about them that I write.\textsuperscript{862}

Begin also said: "We do today something that has no precedence in world history and we are saving our people."\textsuperscript{863} Indeed, by striking a preemptive blow to prevent

\textsuperscript{859}Silver, 1984, p. 219

\textsuperscript{860}Aizakson, 2003, p. 154-155

\textsuperscript{861}Temko, 1987, p. 257

\textsuperscript{862}Nakdimon, 1993, p. 282

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possible nuclear disaster, Begin violated a taboo, which probably explains in part all the condemnation Israel received following this operation. One has to be a Begin who lives in a Holocaust-informed world and leads a Holocaust-informed life in order to see such a devastating potentiality as clearly as Begin did in all its gruesome detail. Begin also argued that "No nation can live on borrowed time" - in other words, "We must take care of our future." Few in Israel today would oppose this operation and fewer in the world would condemn it than did back in 1981. At the time, Ariel Sharon said: “This is perhaps the most difficult decision which faced any government during all the years of the State’s existence.” And Begin felt as certain as always that, at the end of the day, Israel’s strength and courage would be appreciated and those who denounced the operation would eventually come to thank Israel for what it had done.

Some opposition voices protested that the operation was carried out shortly before the election in order to give Begin an electoral boost. But the operation could well have failed and ruined Begin’s chances of reelection. Begin argued persuasively that he would not have taken the risk of an Israeli pilot in Iraqi prison for the sake of electoral gain. He also said, "...A government headed by Peres would not have been able to make such a decision and implement it," adding "I do not have any intention of leaving this problem for our children." Begin later revealed that during the mission he thought of his parents and family who were killed by the Germans.

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863 Naor, 1973, p. 223; Nakdimon, 1993, p. 246
864 Nakdimon, 1993, p. 209
865 Weissman, 1981, p. 8
866 Nakdimon, 1993, p. 218
867 Nakdimon, 1993, p. 209
868 Naor Arie, 2000/2001
357
The Air Force commander asked Begin to receive the pilots who had performed this mission for few minutes at his office. But Begin insisted instead on visiting them at their base. There Begin said:

On behalf of the nation and its democratically elected government, I have come to thank you. We have come here because we wished to breathe the atmosphere in which you fly. Everything said here may perhaps be forgotten, but what you did shall be remembered by the generations to come. Thanks to you, we have been freed of a nightmare which had pursued us for two whole years.\textsuperscript{870}

If one were to search history for a comparison, Begin would say, then this operation of ours is similar to the operation of the Allies during World War II, when a commando unit attacked a Norwegian town where the Germans were making heavy water in preparation for creating an atomic bomb. This was one of the miracles of Divine Providence that America got ahead of Germany. Humanity was on the verge of the abyss. And this is one of the reasons that one must believe in Divine Providence. From this perspective, our operation is similar to that operation in Norway.\textsuperscript{871}

On June 26, 1981, four days before Election Day, in a famous election speech in what is today Rabin Square, before thousands of his supporters, Begin opened:

Yesterday in this place there were many red flags (shouts of protest from the crowd). Today there are many blue and white flags here (shouts of support). This is the moral, historical and ideological difference between us and Socialist Labor (shouts

\textsuperscript{869} Hurwitz, 2004, p. 170

\textsuperscript{870} Hurwitz, 2004, p. 173, Nakdimon, 1993, p. 373

\textsuperscript{871} Nakdimon, 1993, p. 374

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of protest). They have not studied yet what the red flag symbolizes in our time. This is the flag of pre-Naziism (shouts of protest). But it is not about Nazism that I will speak tonight. I shall speak about communism (shouts of protest). This is the flag of hatred of Israel and arming the enemies of Israel (shouts of protest). This is the flag of Jewish and Hebrew persecution. This is the flag of concentration camps and suppression of man. This is the flag of slavery and hatred - and this flag was waved by those who came from all corners of the country in the buses and trucks of the kibbutz (shouts of Begin, Begin!).

The background for the following paragraph in Begin's election speech was the claim of some on the Left that statistically most of the fighting soldiers and officers came from Ashkenazi families who also mostly voted for the Labor Party.

Yesterday evening, in this square, stood a young actor, what’s his name? Dudu? Dudu, To-paz (He makes fun of his name by pronouncing it in a wrong way), Dudu Topaz. He said here the following things. Now -- silence, please... total silence. Listen: Dudu Topaz, before 100,000 people of the Labor [party] he says the following things: 'The 'chakh-chakhim' (slang term parallel to “redneck” or “nigger” in tone and referring to the Sephardim), they are in Metzudat Ze’ev (Ze’ev Fortress - the central building of the Likud administration), they are barely ‘S.G.s’… (an abbreviation for soldiers who are not fighters but guards at the entrance of military camps). Here are the soldiers and the commanders of the fighting units (shouts of protest).’ I will tell you the truth: Up to this morning I had never heard the word ‘chakh-chakhim’ or know its meaning. Did you hear what they called you? (Drawing a crumpled scrap of paper from his pocket – squinting as if to get the odiously unfamiliar term just right – he repeated, in mispronounced Hebrew) They called you 'chakh-chakhim!' Is that what you are? (The crowd roared back, “No!”).

In the underground, Galili (a Hagana commander) asks me... How did you solve the problem of the Sephardi Jews in the Irgun? I look at him in astonishment and ask him, ‘Yisrael, what are you asking? What problem are you talking about?’ And he says, ‘Don’t you know; didn’t you hear [about] the problem of the Sephardi Jews?’ Then I say to him: ‘What

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872 Aizakson, 2003, p. 152
872a Temko, 1987, p. 258
Begin could touch on such delicate issues with so much self-confidence only because he really felt they were brothers. With his knack for the dramatic, he turned the phrase that should have been shameful for him and his constituency -- ‘the chakh-chakhim are all in Metzudat Ze'ev' - into their source of power and pride.

He also told the crowd the story of Meir Feinstein and Moshe Barazani, the first Ashkenazi and the latter Spharadi, the first a member of the Irgun the second of the LEHI, who committed suicide together clutching a hand grenade between their hearts the evening before they were to go to the gallows and before the Rabbi was due to come in, in order not to hurt him. This story of Ashkenazi and Sepharadi united in their death for a common cause of the Jewish people became a cherished symbol for Begin; as noted before, he asked in his will to be buried by their graves. Begin began this story by telling his audience: "Today I am going to tell you who were our Eastern Jews' sons – Our Eastern Jews' sons were heroic fighters" and ended it with the emotional cry that all of us are "Jews! Brothers! Fighters!"

At one point in the speech, he elaborated for his audience on how he manipulated Carter:

…In the last four years we built 144 new Jewish settlements (applause). I am happy to tell you that Ariel Sharon, the architect of the settlements, is here with us (applause). What difficulties he had from home and from outside. I will tell you this story. Four years ago, in July, I went to Washington for the first time at the invitation of the U.S. President. We spoke about very important issues. Suddenly the

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Aizakson, 2003, p. 158

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President, Mr. Carter, who is a good friend of ours, who has
done a lot for us, said to me: Mr. Prime Minister, your
settlements – as he put it in his language - in the West Bank, in
Judea and Samaria, are illegal and an obstacle to peace. I told
him, Mr. President, our settlements in Judea and Samaria are
legal and will strengthen the peace. Since then I have visited
America more than 10 times and we have discussed important
issues and conducted negotiations. Every time he told me, Mr.
Prime Minister, your settlements are illegal and an obstacle to
peace. And every time I told him, Mr. President, our
settlements are legal and will strengthen the peace (applause).
This is the way we talked for four years, he in his way and I in
mine. And meanwhile we built 144 new settlements! (applause). We did not surrender to any pressure.  

He went on to describe how the State of Israel prevented genocide:

… The Syrians tried to exterminate the Christians in north
Lebanon. We did not let them. All the Christian nations stood
by. This is the great historic honor that we have bequeathed to
the people of Israel. A Jewish state did not allow genocide in
our time and literally saved the Christians in northern Lebanon
by its decisions, assistance and actions.  

And then warned Syria in his own way:

And then the Syrians came and brought their S.A.6 missiles
into Lebanon. About these missiles, I have just one thing to say
– Listen carefully --My friends, the Syrian missiles in Lebanon
will not stay there! They will be taken out of Lebanon!
(applause) They will not be there! I say this simply and
calmly.”

Four days later, on June 30, 1981, the Likud won election by a slim margin: 48
seats versus 47 for Labor.

Arye Naor, the government secretary from 1977-1982, recalled that Begin
appeared weaker before the election, but after the election became very confident in
himself – many said overconfident. Samuel Lewis, who was the U.S. Ambassador

874 ibid, p. 157
875 ibid, p. 158
876 ibid
877 Naor, 1993, pp. 214, 231
to Israel throughout those years, remarked on the immense difference between the
Begin of 1977 who chose Dayan and Weizman to be by his side, and the one of 1981.

This time there wasn’t any Weizman to take the credit [Weizman ran Begin’s 1977 campaign]. It was his victory. It
was an extraordinary comeback, and it was his oratory, and his
savvy, that enabled him to pull it off… He was so self-
confident that he really ceased to listen to anyone. 878

For a long time, Ariel Sharon had striven to deal with defense issues, which was
his natural milieu. After Weizman’s resignation, he proposed that Begin appoint him
deputy defense minister instead of the agriculture portfolio that he held, explaining
that his ‘military expertise’ would thus be at the disposal of whoever eventually
received the defense portfolio. 879

Begin rejected the idea. Half a year earlier, on January 1, 1980, Begin said half
jokingly about this idea: “He will circle the Prime Minister’s Office with tanks!” 880 In
April 1981, Sharon asked how it was possible for an aging lawyer like Begin to be
handling security issues while he, Sharon, a war veteran, was not involved. Begin’s
reaction was: “I never argue with friends in public. He said whatever he said. We are
still friends.” 881

During and immediately following the election period, the situation on Israel’s
northern border with Lebanon deteriorated. In addition to the missile crisis in which
Syria sent its surface to air missiles into southern Lebanon, the PLO, headed by

878 Temko, 1987, p. 437

879 The Jerusalem Post, June 6, 1980

880 Weizman, 1981, p. 142

881 Temko, 1987, p. 261
Arafat, used its mobile Katyusha launchers and Soviet 130mm artillery to intermittently strike towns and villages in the northern part of Israel (the Galilee).

Four years earlier, in 1978, Israel invaded southern Lebanon in what was called Operation Litani (named for the river Israel reached during its invasion) in retaliation for the massacre of 32 civilians in a hijacked tour bus on the coastal road between Haifa and Tel Aviv. In this operation, the Israeli army cleared a narrow security belt of PLO presence and handed the area over to Israel’s protégé, Maj. Sa’ad Haddad – the commander of the Christian militia group. Until then the Palestinian guerrillas had been situated close to the border and made life difficult for the Israelis, Lebanese Christians and Shi’ite Moslems nearby. This first invasion brought some peace.

PLO infiltrators into Israel had to get by a UN buffer force and Haddad’s local militia and finally the Israeli forces that were deployed along the border. But the width of the security belt was less than the 40 kilometers necessary to defend northern Israel from the Katyushas.

During his campaign Begin promised not only that the Syrian missiles would be removed from southern Lebanon but also that no more Katyushas would fall on Kiryat Shmona (a development town near the border that became a symbol of fear and disrupted life; the local children used to sleep and study in underground shelters). A month after the election a new bombardment, the heaviest ever, had caused half the population of Kiryat Shmona to flee their town and become refugees within Israel. The rest of the population was confined to bomb shelters.

Begin ordered air attacks of the Palestinians’ strongholds. When this did not prevent additional Palestinian shelling, Begin ordered the bombing of the PLO headquarters in western Beirut. Dozens of civilians were killed and the Americans

882 Silver, 1984, p. 222
became very angry. Reagan extended the embargo on supplying Israel with F-16s. Begin said that he was sorry about the civilian casualties but argued that the PLO had deliberately placed itself within a civilian population. He said:

If they attack us again, we shall hit them; because we will not allow in our generation of the Holocaust and redemption to be shed again Jewish blood, while those responsible for its shedding enjoy impunity and even luxury. It happened in the Holocaust. It will never happen again…

At the end of July, when Begin formed his new coalition, some, including opposition leader Shimon Peres, Dash (Democratic Movement for Change) leader Yigael Yadin, military adviser General Poran and government secretary Arye Naor, advised him not to appoint Sharon as defense minister because of his reputation for being unruly. Dayan warned Begin that Sharon might get Israel into trouble in Lebanon. But when Begin presented his new government, he appointed Sharon defense minister - something he'd refused to do in the past - and Shamir foreign minister. With Rafael Eitan as Chief of General Staff and Moshe Arens as Ambassador to the U.S., it was a hawkish government quite different from the 1977 government with Dayan, Weizman and Yadin.

The government program stated:

At the end of the interim period determined in the Camp David agreement, Israel will raise its claim, and act to realize its right, to sovereignty over Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District.

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883 Temko, 1987, p. 261
884 ibid, p. 435
885 Naor, 1986, p. 25
886 ibid, p. 262
887 Temko, 1987, p. 262
In September 1981, Begin flew to Washington to meet Reagan – his first meeting with the new American president. Reagan's attitude was quite different from Carter's, and he openly expressed warm feelings for Israel:

I've believed many things in my life, but no conviction I've ever held has been stronger than my belief that the United States must ensure the survival of Israel.

The Holocaust, I believe, left America with a moral responsibility to ensure that what had happened to the Jews under Hitler never happens again. We must not let it happen again. The civilized world owes a debt to the people who were the greatest victims of Hitler's madness.

My dedication to the preservation of Israel was as strong when I left the White House as when I arrived there, even though this tiny ally, with whom we share democracy and many other values, was a source of great concern for me while I was president.888

"Reagan started out with quite a lot of admiration for Begin and always had a kind of soft spot for him. He also had a soft spot for Israel as well," Samuel Lewis later wrote.

"He from the very beginning saw Israel and Begin in the terms that Begin wanted to be seen, that is as a democratic ally of the United States. Carter would never use the word "ally" ever, or let anybody else use it. He didn’t see Israel as an ally, as a strategic ally. That came with Reagan, and it was quite a change actually in the rhetoric.889

Begin appeared more confident than on his first visit to Carter. He said that now there was someone in the White House “who looks upon Israel as an ally, and doesn’t mind saying so.”890 Begin also proposed a strategic agreement between the two countries to formalize their shared view of the world, a suggestion that Reagan

888 Reagan, 1990, p. 410

889 Lewis, 2002

890 Temko, 1987, p. 262
Begin played down America's unchanged intention to sell AWACS radar planes to the Saudis and Henry Kissinger found him "euphoric" and confident that the deal could be defeated. He dismissed Washington's assurances that "We won't give them AWACS for another five years, so you don't have any reason to worry now." With his historic perspective, Begin could not leave such a problem to his successor. At their meeting, Reagan understood Begin to be saying that he would not lobby against the President on the AWACS issue. But right after Begin left the White House, he began lobbying against Reagan and when the President later won the AWACS battle in the Senate, Israel accused the administration of anti-Semitism and betrayal. Reagan felt that Begin had not kept his word and it made him angry.

Secretary of State Alexander Haig – who was known to be extremely pro-Israel in tune with Reagan) cautioned Begin of “very grave effects in the U.S.” if he went too far in his Lebanese war against the PLO.

U.S. Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and Sharon tried to negotiate this strategic agreement. Sharon wanted it to include all sorts of details about how the U.S and Israel would cooperate in far-flung military enterprises in the Persian Gulf and elsewhere. Weinberger wanted a document that had no real content, but just some headings about mutual interests in dealing with the Russian threat. Sharon finally decided that no agreement at all was better than one this meaningless. So he recommended to Begin that they drop it. Begin said: “Absolutely not. We want this

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891 Lewis, 2002
892 Haig, 1984, p. 187
893 Hurwitz, 2004, p. 181
894 Reagan, 1990, p. 415-416
895 Ibid, p. 188
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agreement” and he forced Sharon to sign it, much against Sharon’s better judgment, because what counted for Begin wasn’t what was in the document, but the symbolic value of the document.

Meanwhile, Begin’s mental condition kept on deteriorating. Yitzhak Hofi, the head of the Israeli intelligence agency from 1974 to September 1982, described how withdrawn Begin seemed in cabinet meetings, sometimes making no response to harsh comments. At other times, he would suddenly roar to life like a lion, reply firmly with all his verbal agility and make decisions, only to subsequently withdraw again. He had these ups and downs, said Hofi. "Some people tried to deny his condition but I noticed that he was not as I had known him in the past. There were occasions in which I came to him for a meeting and I got the impression that there was no point in it. Then I would find a way to terminate the meeting and would come to him later."896

In August 1981, former American President Richard Nixon met Sadat in the United States. He opined to Sadat that Begin had acted irresponsibly and erratically in his destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor. Sadat responded: "Yes, he is crazy. He is also probably crazy like a fox." When Nixon added that more progress could have been made in the Mid-East had Begin not been kept in power, Sadat demurred: "I prefer to deal with him. He is very tough and will be able to make a deal that others may not be able to make. Israel needs a deal, and I am confident that between Begin, Reagan and myself, we will be able to make greater, more lasting progress than was made during the Carter administration.”897

896 Hofi, 2002

897 Nixon, 1982, p. 296
In late August 1981, Begin and Sadat met in Alexandria. Many ministers, advisers and officials from both sides were also present. The leaders decided to resume negotiations over normalization between the two countries, and to renew the autonomy talks. Elyakim Rubinstein (then a representative of the foreign ministry) described how Sadat and Begin sat on the balcony like a bride and groom and talked for hours. "The atmosphere was splendid. It was idyllic." 898

On October 6, 1981, Anwar Sadat was assassinated while watching the annual Cairo military parade celebrating the October War. Begin came to the funeral and praised Sadat as a statesman and a friend. He took Hosni Mubarak’s hand in his and declared “peace between us forever.” 899 Haig met Begin there and expressed his wariness that Israel might not go ahead with the return of the Sinai as agreed upon in the Camp David accord. "Begin held up a hand in reassurance," and said: "I will meet my commitment or resign – and there may be such turmoil over the issue that I will have to resign." When Haig asked him to withdraw ahead of time as a gesture to Egypt’s new president Mubarak, Begin turned him down. Begin was worried because of Sadat’s assassination and the uncertainty over whether Mubarak would continue on Sadat's path. 900

In the forward to Sadat's book, Those I have known, published after his assassination, Carter wrote:

898 Rubinstein, 1994


900 Haig, 1984, p. 326
I have known many powerful and famous leaders in my life, all interesting and many quite admirable, but when I first met Anwar Sadat early in 1977 I recognized him as a rare figure on the world political stage… There was no element of subterfuge or evasiveness in his analysis of the many complicated issues or in his own enlightened proposals to resolve them… In spite of great political pressures that later arose, he never broke a promise to me nor equivocated on a commitment of any kind. I soon learned that, with Sadat, I did not have to examine the fine print of an agreement nor be concerned about possible loopholes that might some day work to his advantage at the expense of those with whom he dealt. He despised evasiveness in others, and had little patience with those leaders who were not bold enough to stand firm for principle when pressure was on them 900a.

Carter admitted that he also had a hard time with Sadat's tendency to be dramatic and unpredictable, with the way the Egyptian president often came out with new ideas without giving Carter any notice beforehand (The trip to Jerusalem was the most salient of them). But both were farmers and Carter, the precise and restrained engineer, admired his friend's impulsive and freely spontaneous nature. Sadat always believed "that if it had not been for the action of October 6 there would have been no subsequent peace." 901 He was convinced there was a vital need to restore Egyptian honor. But as a leader of a culture relatively oriented to the past, he was inclined to look to the future and to change perceptions 901a.

Boutrous Ghali summed up the Begin-Sadat relationship:

The first contacts were never easy between Sadat and Begin. Good contact was only realized with Ezer Weizman. He was the middle man between Begin and Sadat. Up to the signature of the peace treaty, the chemistry between Begin and Sadat was not working. After the treaty was signed and Begin had delivered, Sadat began to trust Begin. But you can trust without sympathy. There was always a reserve. 902

900a Sadat, 1984, (p. vii-viii).

901 Sadat, 1984, p. 1

901a Sadat, 1984, p. viii

902 Silver, 1984, p. 178
Sadat used to address Begin as "Menachem" and opened his letters to him with "Dear Menachem." He asked Begin to do likewise but Begin at first declined, saying "I am only a Prime Minister and you are a President." But in their conversations, Begin eventually started addressing Sadat by his first name. This is exactly the sort of personal relationship that was difficult for Begin to implement since it meant leaving off being the embodiment of the Jewish people for a while and becoming Menachem the individual instead.

Begin then told Haig about Israel's intention to invade Lebanon – while attempting not to involve the Syrians – solely to push the PLO further back from the border and then to go the United Nations and ask for a guarantee that Israel's border would not be attacked. Haig warned him again of going too far. Haig, who had once described Begin favorably as "combative, even harsh, but scrupulously truthful" now concluded that Begin had "lost the sympathy of powerful figures in the Administration and sorely tried the tolerance and understanding of the President".

The generally pro-Israel *New Republic* wrote:

Begin’s actions are a threat both to the moral fiber of Israel and to the support Israel still enjoys in the West among those who have not wearied of its cause or sold out to Arab oil…

It appears that Begin's friends -- his fighting family -- more than his enemies proved to be his Achilles' heel. He refused to subject the ministers to polygraph tests to find out who was leaking secrets from cabinet meetings to the press. He protected

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903 Hurwitz, 2004, p. 141
904 Haig, 1984, p. 326
904a Haig, 1984, 188
905 ibid, pp. 88, 174
906 Temko, 1987, p. 435
his 'family' by saying "I would not take good people to the polygraph, absolutely not!" Begin also used to protect Sharon during his first tenure. When there were leaks from cabinet sessions and Sharon was suspected, Begin rejected investigations. On a few occasions, Sharon openly denounced and threatened other ministers. In these cases Begin refrained from calling Sharon to order. On one occasion Sharon promised to strip the demure Yadin “naked on the cabinet table.” Begin had the remark stricken from the cabinet minutes. In another incident, Sharon made an obscene hand gesture toward Labor members in the Knesset. Begin replied to the critics: “He is someone whose heroism will be remembered by future generations, while his critics will be forgotten!” Begin admitted that Sharon did not know how to exercise self-control. But later he forgave him as he never did anyone else. On the rare occasions when Begin reprimanded Sharon, he did so in the tone of an admiring father to his rascally son.

Through the years, Begin consistently rejected Sharon’s contention that the real Palestinian state had already been established and that it was Jordan, the majority of whose population was Palestinians. Sharon once stated that if he were prime minister he would give Hussein 24 hours to get out. Begin rejected what he considered

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907 Nevo Azriel, 2000

908 Weizman, 1981, p. 223

909 Naor, 1993, p. 260-262

910 Temko, 1987, p. 263, 437

911 Naor, 1993, p. 324

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Sharon’s overly audacious ideas of changing Jordan’s regime, saying that he would like to have good relations with Jordan.

When Sharon was appointed defense minister, he became more polite to his cabinet colleagues and more respectful in relation to Begin. One of Begin’s aides described the transformation of Sharon as “incredible. Sharon’s approach to Begin was: ‘You are the greatest! I adore you! I’ll do anything you tell me.’” Haig also said: “Sharon, who is not a humble man, nevertheless always gave clear deference to Mr. Begin. And Sharon can be very charming…”

Sharon chose his people while blocking other possible competitors and Begin did not intervene. “Sharon’s bureau in the Defense Ministry took on the air of a Byzantine court deliberately isolated from most of the top brass of the IDF and of the ministry itself.” He replaced Begin’s military secretary General Poran with Azriel Nevo. He also put a stop to the intelligence division’s habit of informing the prime minister directly, and Begin accepted this. Samuel Lewis said that the effect was: “to leave Begin intellectually dependent on Sharon alone for military information and advice.” Begin's growing sense of weakness coincided with his growing dependency on Sharon, whom he perceived as "the most fearsome Fighting Jew since the Maccabees" (the ancient Jewish family of heroes who fought the Greeks).

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912 Temko, 1987, p. 262, 437
913 Schiff-Ya’ari, 1984, p. 40
914 Temko, 1987, p. 265
915 ibid, p. 270
At the end of November 1981, Begin slipped in his bathroom and broke his hip. He was rushed to the hospital. Questions about his failing health were raised again by the press. Sharon described a cabinet meeting around Begin's bed in Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem for approval of the memorandum of strategic co-operation with United States.

Tired and in severe pain, Begin conducted the meeting with the ministers ranged around his bed in a semicircle. Whether from the effects of his medication or from the shock of the injury, now and then he dozed off for a few minutes, bringing the discussion to an awkward halt as the other members shuffled uncomfortably or just waited…

But Begin was determined to carry on in the meantime in a wheelchair despite his pain. His military secretary Nevo Azriel noted that the reason for his injury was his unsuitable house, which he did not want to improve using money taken from the treasury.

On the morning of December 14, just prior to his release from the hospital where he was still recovering from his injury, Begin summoned his ministers to his sick-bed and told them: “Gentlemen: I am very pleased to propose to you the Law of the Golan Heights.” The law would actually annex the Golan Heights to Israel. The ministers were completely taken aback; some expressed apprehension about what Washington’s reaction would be, but as in the case of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, almost all of them acquiesced. Some people could not help but notice Begin's timing. The impression was that Begin overcame his injury and pain on the day of his release from the hospital by making a significant declaration.

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916 Sharon, 1989, p. 412
916a Nevo, 2000

917 Temko, 1987, pp. 265, 438
That very day Begin brought “Law of the Golan Heights” before the Knesset the.
In one day he was able to get the law passed on its first, second and third reading, including all the necessary discussions. Yitzhak Zamir, the attorney general at the time, whom Begin had asked to formulate the wording of the law, said that "Begin was euphoric the whole day," and pointed out that it was unprecedented to pass such a law in one day.\(^{917a}\)

Begin addressed the Knesset from his wheelchair:

Dear chairman, honorable Knesset members, one cannot find a serious person inside Israel or abroad who has studied the history of the Land of Israel and still would deny the fact that for many generations the Golan Heights was an inseparable part of the Land of Israel.

From the time our independence was established, respected chairman, the Syrians controlled the Heights... and they proved what they are capable of doing to the civilian population in the kibbutzim, the villages and the towns in the valley below. The Syrians turned the life of these tens of thousands of citizens into hell.

… Today we are discussing not only the historical aspect, not only the security aspect, which means the lives of our citizens but also the moral-political aspect. So many times we have called upon the rulers of Syria to start negotiations with us in order to achieve a peace treaty... I said time and again that I invite President Assad to Jerusalem or I am ready to go to Damascus for peace negotiations. The Syrians rejected our outstretched hand and our right to exist as a Jewish state.

These are the reasons, honorable chairman, the historical, security, political and moral reasons, for which I am honored to propose on behalf of the government the Law of the Golan Heights...\(^{918}\)

\(^{917a}\) Zamir, 2001

\(^{918}\) Aizakson, 2003, p. 165
Back in 1977, Begin declared in his party's political manifesto that after the signing of a peace treaty, the border with Syria would pass inside the Golan Heights. Now the Golan Heights had become part of “Biblical Israel.” But it seems that the real reason for Begin's change of position regarding the Golan was his desire to punish the Syrians for their behavior throughout the years in refusing any peace process with Israel and especially for their recent behavior in Lebanon – their invasion of that country, their aid to the PLO and the introduction of Syrian surface to air missiles into eastern Lebanon. Begin could offer punishment as well as peace.

One of the main principles Reagan thought he was getting in his strategic agreement with Israel, though it’s never stated anywhere, was that neither side would surprise the other by doing things that affect the interests of the other party. Reagan's administration believed they should have known about this Golan Heights annexation ahead of time and had a chance to discuss it. There was a lot of anger in Washington, followed by efforts to figure out what to do. Al Haig did not want to do anything that would hurt Israel and he supported very soft signals. But there were people in the White House and certainly in Defense, who were very offended by this act.

Reagan decided to freeze the “strategic cooperation” and other plans to sell Israel military equipment. Begin summoned Ambassador Lewis - calling him Mr. Ambassador instead of Sam - and told him:

Is Israel a vassal state? A banana republic? Are we 14-year-old boys who, if they don’t behave, have their knuckles smacked? I

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919 ibid, p. 185
920 Lewis, 2002
920a Shamir, 1994, p. 115, when angry he used to call people by their surname or official name.
will tell you of whom this government is composed. It is composed of men who fought, risked their lives, and suffered. You cannot and will not frighten us with ‘punishments’ and ‘threats.’ Threats will fall on deaf ears… You have no right to ‘punish’ Israel, and I protest the use of this term… The people of Israel have lived for 3,700 years without a memorandum [strategic cooperation] of understanding with America, and will continue to live without it for another 3,700 years! … The word ‘rescind’ [concerning the Golan announcement] is a concept from the time of the Inquisition. Our forefathers went to the stake rather than rescind their faith.

Begin was also not afraid to speak of anti-Semitism in America and to expect American Jews to be more loyal to Israel than to their country. He told Lewis:

Now I understand why the whole great effort in the Senate to obtain a majority for the arms deal with Saudi Arabia was accompanied by an ugly campaign of anti-Semitism.
First the slogan was sounded "Begin or Reagan?" – and that meant that whoever opposes the deal – including Senators like Jackson, Kennedy, Packwood, and of course Boschwitz – is supporting a foreign prime minister and is not loyal to the President of the United States.
Then we heard: "We should not let the Jews determine the foreign policy of the United States." Let me say that no one will frighten the great and free Jewish community of the U.S. No one will succeed in cowing them with anti-Semitic propaganda. They will stand by our side. This is the land of their forefathers – and they have a right and a duty to support it.

Begin decided to abolish this agreement which he had wanted very much, and stated in his own way that Israel does not need any favors from U.S.

Begin summoned the cabinet this time to listen to Sharon’s presentation of his Lebanon war plan. Sharon presented maps and explained to the ministers his intention to invade by ground and air up to the Beirut-Damascus highway, the main road between the two Arab capitals. The ministers were shocked. One of the ministers

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921 Temko, 1987, p. 265
922 Hurwitz, 2004, p. 184
923 Naor, 1993, p. 234
(Burg) asked with disbelief and anger about the immediate need to decide upon a large-scale invasion to a neighboring country:

Burg: Must we decide today, right now?
Begin: Yes. It may be necessary to put the plan into action at any moment.

This time, more ministers rebelled. Begin halted the discussion, saying: “I see how feelings are running. And I understand that it is pointless to continue.” To the press Begin sent the message: “As regards Lebanon, I have asked that the Secretary of State be informed that we will not attack. But if we are attacked, we will counterattack.”

In the following weeks, Begin mentioned the war plans in Lebanon. “There are people around this table,” he said, “who know from their own experience that hitting Beirut would solve the problem of Palestinian terrorism!” But the ministers and the intelligence service were skeptical. In January, Sharon made a clandestine visit to the Christian area of east Beirut and met Bashir Gemayel – the leader of the Phalange. Upon his return, he told his aides, “We will make Bashir president!”

Bashir used to flatter Begin. He would express great appreciation for Israel as the only nation that cared about the Christians’ fate. In response, Begin - with characteristic magnanimity - exempted the Phalange from a one million-dollar debt to Israel, dismissing the protests of the captains of the Israeli military industry. Israel gradually

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924 Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 48
925 Temko, 1987, p. 266
926 ibid
927 Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 51
stopped helping the Christians help themselves and took responsibility for their interests.\textsuperscript{928}

There were warnings that the Christians were not so 'pitiable' and not that reliable. Sadat candidly advised Begin “Let Chamoun be. He is a despicable human being. He was an agent of the British, the French, the Americans, the Syrians, and now he is your man” (Camille Chamoun was the former Lebanese president and patriarch of the Maronite Christian community).\textsuperscript{929} Intelligence chief Yehoshua Saguy said about the Christians: “No matter what we do for them, in the end they will turn right back to the Arab world.”\textsuperscript{930} Saguy based his assessment on the fact that the Christians in Lebanon were Arabs living among Arabs and that in the final account they would have to continue to live with them and not with Israel, which was a foreign power. But Begin, whose weakness was especially evident with those who were dependent on him, was fixated on the idea that the prospective victims, the Christians in Lebanon, would thank Israel for its help and not betray her.

April, 25, 1982 was the deadline for complete evacuation of the Sinai and its settlements. Some of the settlers vowed not to leave. The more extreme among them threatened to fight against whoever would come to evacuate them, or to commit suicide. Begin was determined to fulfill the Camp David agreement meticulously and completely and declared that the settlers, despite all the pain, should leave. When Sharon pressed for a short delay in the implementation of the final stage of withdrawal in order to clarify exactly where the border should pass, Begin rejected the

\textsuperscript{928}ibid, pp. 25-30
\textsuperscript{929}ibid, p. 25
\textsuperscript{930}ibid, p. 50
idea of finding excuses and insisted on fulfilling the agreement, including the timetable, to the last comma and period.\textsuperscript{931}

He wrote to Reagan concerning his apprehension regarding a U.S. and Egyptian abandonment of the Camp David agreement:

\begin{quote}
The question that is being asked today in Israel is how Egypt will act after April 1982 if it is already – three months before completion of the withdrawal – demanding that the Palestinians be given the right of self-determination.\textsuperscript{932}
\end{quote}

In a cabinet decision at the beginning of April, Begin threatened to "consider postponing our final withdrawal from Sinai."\textsuperscript{933} He accused Egypt of many violations of the agreement, among them -- failing to stop small arms smuggling across the border of Sinai and making demands in violation of the accord. Mubarak and Begin met only once, at Sadat's funeral. After Begin's relatively frequent meetings with Sadat (they met eleven times in all), a "cold peace" would hereafter be sustained between the two countries. The Americans sent an official delegation to Israel. Sharon explained the violations to them and said that Israel would be crazy to withdraw from Sinai on schedule under such conditions. With Sharon alongside him, Begin could now take the 'good guy' role. He emphasized that Israel wanted to honor the agreement but needed assurances. A delegation from Egypt followed by a confirmation letter stating Egypt’s obligation to the Camp David agreement were sent. An additional letter demanded by Israel in which Egypt explicitly promised to stop the arms smuggling was also dispatched. Reagan also sent a letter to Begin with all

\begin{footnotes}
\item[931] Sharon, 1989, p. 399
\item[932] Temko, 1987, p. 266
\item[933] ibid, p. 267
\end{footnotes}
kinds of promises, but the Americans, said one official, were weary of what they saw as Begin’s formality. Begin praised Reagan’s letter as “one of the most important letters which was ever written by an American president to a prime minister of our country” and agreed to implement the final withdrawal from Sinai.

On December 20, 1981, a girl who lived in the Yamit bloc wrote to the prime minister:

To Mr. Menachem Begin:

I live in Ugda (Pithat Rafah). I think that [this place] must not be evacuated, because if Sadat z”l wanted true peace then we don’t have to evacuate the settlements. I only ask that you take action on this matter. Thank you very much.

Guni Sorek

Begin’s bureau chief Yehiel Kadishai wrote back:

Dear Guni:

The prime minister received your letter and he of course understands your feelings. Indeed, we all feel pain and sorrow over the need to cede our settlements in Sinai. Yet, you will surely agree that the agonies of peace are preferable to the agonies of war. And therefore, dear Guni, despite all the pain and sorrow, and for the sake of peace, we must fulfill all our commitments in the agreements that we have signed.

Best to you and all your family,

Y. Kadishai

Director of the Prime Minister’s Bureau

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934 ibid, p. 439
935 ibid, pp. 267-268
936 Iris Berlatzky, Menachem Begin Heritage Center Archive
The evacuation of the settlers, especially from Yamit – a flourishing town in the middle of the desert – was traumatic for many Israelis and almost certainly for Begin as well. For Begin, those settlements were once part of the Land of Israel and he planned to go and live in one of them when he retired.\textsuperscript{937} There was no precedent in the history of Zionism of such an evacuation of settlements, especially for a country that was developed by expanding settlements. The settlers were highly compensated, but that hardly compensated them for being extracted from a new place and a new society they had developed there. At the last stage of the evacuation, some hardcore right-wingers dug themselves in on the roofs of the buildings and refused to leave. The soldiers had to struggle with them in order to complete the evacuation. When the attorney general, Yitzhak Zamir, asked to sue the violent settlers, Begin just said "Do your job as you understand it."\textsuperscript{937a} They were later brought to court and punished accordingly. Some people said that Begin was wise to choose Sharon as his defense minister because only Sharon, with his reputation as the builder of the settlements, could execute the evacuation as it was done, without bloodshed.\textsuperscript{938} Begin rejected this claim.\textsuperscript{939} It should be recalled that, at the Camp David summit, it was also Sharon who had significant impact upon Begin's decision to agree to evacuate the Sinai settlements. Reagan wrote that he could tell from sadness in Begin's voice that the evacuation had been a difficult day for him:

\begin{quote}
My heart went out especially to Begin. I had many difficulties with him while I was president, but he was an Israeli patriot devoted, above all, to
\end{quote}

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\item[937] Neot Sinai, Choen, 2001
\item[937a] Zamir, 2001
\item[938] Arye Naor, on Channel 8, Israeli TV, Sept/Oct 2003 program on Begin
\item[939] Sharon, 1989, p. 400
\end{footnotes}

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the survival of his country. He passionately believed that the ancient lands of the Israelites rightfully belonged to modern Israel. A survivor and near victim of the Holocaust, he knew from personal experience the depth of the hatred and viciousness that can be directed at Jews simply because they are Jews, and he had sworn, he once told me, to assure that no Jew's blood was ever spilled again with impunity.\footnote{Reagan, 1990, p. 420-421}

Begin probably felt he was racing against the clock. His hip fracture had left him limping. “Pain was constantly etched on his face,” said Ambassador Lewis.\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 268}

Aliza’s asthma became worse and she could hardly breathe; she was hooked up to a machine. But she continued with her heavy smoking habit almost up until her death. How had she coped after losing her entire family in the Holocaust? Now she dreamt about Menachem’s upcoming retirement in about a year. He'd promised to retire when he turned 70, and then they would return to their good, old small apartment in Tel Aviv. But Begin still craved recognition from Labor and was also keen to counterbalance his legacy as the one who evacuated settlements. On May 4, 1981, he complained before the Knesset that the Labor Party still had not recognized the fact that he brought Israel peace.\footnote{Medzini, 1981-1982, p. 336} Then his proclamation that “never again” would settlements be evacuated won out:

In future negotiations on a peace treaty between Israel and its neighbors, any proposal to remove or dismantle any settlement in which Israeli citizens and Jews have settled and live will be rejected.\footnote{ibid, p. 339}
Another opportunity to right a historical wrong and obtain justice for innocent people who were accused of murder occurred when Israeli journalist Shabtai Teveth published an account of Arlosoroff's murder that was critical of Begin's party. Begin decided to appoint a commission of inquiry for this long-ago, traumatic event that had divided the 'Yishuv' and was never completely put to rest. He told his cabinet that the fact that the murder happened many years before was not significant since the categorical need to seek justice was the overriding consideration:

To argue that forty-nine years have elapsed since then and how therefore can we investigate now is to miss the point completely, to mislead the public, to blur the truth and to perpetuate a blood libel against a great Zionist movement and against innocent individuals, to perpetuate a wrong the like of which has never been perpetrated in Jewish history, save by the misdeeds of the Gentiles against the Jews.\textsuperscript{944}

Begin also asked that the transcript of the cabinet debate be published. But many people in Israel were astonished at the fact that the Prime Minister was still dealing with historic events that were practically unknown to them while there were so many current troubles. The committee did not find any new evidence and the question of who murdered Arlosoroff remained unresolved.\textsuperscript{945}

Meanwhile the cease-fire that had been achieved by the American envoy, Philip Habib, was maintained, but Begin argued that the PLO was continuing to amass artillery across the border and was also striking at Jewish targets around the world – in both cases violating the cease-fire, which was not limited to cross-border shelling.

\textsuperscript{944}Jerusalem Post, 15 March, 1982

\textsuperscript{945}Zamir, 2001
When an Israeli soldier was killed in Lebanon in Christian militia territory, the Americans argued that he should not have been there. Begin replied:

You advise us to exercise complete restraint and refrain from any action… Mr. Secretary, my dear friend, the man has not been born who will ever obtain from me consent to let Jews be killed by a bloodthirsty enemy and allow those who are responsible for the shedding of this blood to enjoy immunity.

Begin was feeling guilty for showing restraint for too long. He ordered the bombing of selected PLO targets and said that “if the PLO responds then Israel will respond much harder.”

Sharon and Rafael Eitan, the chief of General Staff, were convinced that they had a military solution for the PLO in Lebanon. They believed that Israel could destroy Arafat’s power base in Lebanon, which was the only country that had allowed him to operate from its territory against Israel, and in this way would also weaken his influence in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel would invade as far north as the Beirut-Damascus highway, encircle the capital and a friendly government would be established by Israel in Beirut headed by Bashir Gemayel, the Phalangist commander who had been cultivated by Israel since the mid-1970s. The plan appealed to Begin ideologically and temperamentally. Sharon also contemplated expelling the Palestinians from Lebanon to Jordan in order to co-opt King Hussein. He spoke of

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946 Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 55
948 Temko, 1987, p. 269
949 Silver, 1984, p. 223
950 Naor, 1993, p. 268
a 48-hour operation to get to Beirut,\textsuperscript{951} and said the army would need to stay in Lebanon for a week. When Yitzhak Rabin, the opposition leader, was informed of the plan, he estimated that the army would have to stay in Lebanon for half a year and asked Begin if he was ready for that. Begin said no.\textsuperscript{952}

During another session in which Rabin was told about the government’s plans, Rabin asked Sharon whether his plan included Sidon, about 40 miles north of the border. Rabin recalled that Sharon gave him three different answers.

It was clear that he did not want to tell the truth. He answered like this: ‘I think so.’ Then he said: ‘I don’t remember exactly.’ Afterwards he said: ‘I’ll go and check.’ And he left the room in the middle of the meeting to check whether Sidon was included in the plan or not. He came back and said: ‘It’s not included.’ After that he left again, came back and said: ‘Sidon is included.’

I asked him about Beirut but Arik [Sharon] gave the impression that Sidon was the limit. I asked if Beirut was included, and the answer was: ‘No.’ I was deceived, but I was not the only one. The cabinet was deceived too, perhaps to gain its approval.\textsuperscript{953}

In the following days, various ministers, intelligence personnel and military advisers warned Begin about Sharon’s push toward a wider war, about the plans to reach Beirut and about the danger of starting a war with Syria. Begin, as always without getting into military details, said none of these scenarios would happen.\textsuperscript{954} On one occasion he accused one of the objectors - former deputy defense minister

\textsuperscript{951}Schiff-Ya’ari, 1984, p. 59

\textsuperscript{952}Silver, 1984, p. 224

\textsuperscript{953}ibid, p. 225

\textsuperscript{954}Schiff-Ya’ari, 1984, p. 60

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Mordechai Zippori who was the only ex-(brigadier) general in this government besides Sharon - of being jealous of Sharon. ⁹⁵⁵

Around May, 1982, Yasser Arafat sent Begin a message through Brian Urquhart (the assistant undersecretary-general of the United Nations) saying:

I have learned more from you as a resistance leader than from anyone else about how to combine politics and military tactics... You of all people must understand that it is not necessary to face me only on the battlefield. Do not send a military force against me. Do not try to break me in Lebanon. You will not succeed. ⁹⁵⁶

Begin did not respond and probably dismissed the message as just another one of Arafat’s manipulations.

Azriel Nevo recalled how Begin told his wife, Aliza, that he was traveling north and would not return home for the night. Aliza called Nevo and told him she had a request. It was extremely unusual for her to ask anyone for something; she had never done it before. She asked that her husband be taken there by his personal driver, Arie Giladi, because he was like a member of the family and knew how to take care of him properly. He knew what Menachem liked to eat and drink and which pills he had to take because of his injury. She also asked that he not tell anyone about her request ⁹⁵⁶a.

Now Sharon’s grand plan was just waiting for a pretext to be launched. On June 3, 1981, the Israeli ambassador in London was shot and critically wounded by Arab gunmen. Begin summoned the cabinet and said:

⁹⁵⁵Schiff-Yaari, 1984, pp. 40, 59
⁹⁵⁶Schiff-Ya’ari, 1984, p. 95
⁹⁵⁶a Nevo, 2000
We will not stand for their attacking an Israeli Ambassador! An assault on an ambassador is tantamount to an attack on the State of Israel, and we will respond to it.\(^{957}\)

Sharon promised an invasion of 25 miles, the distance needed to put the PLO’s Katyushas beyond range of Israel. He also promised that it would take one day. Begin thought it might take longer but less than the three weeks of the 1978 Litani operation. In response to Zippori’s prediction that such a move would cause the Syrians to get into a battle with the IDF, Begin said that Israel would not attack them and also that he did not believe that the Syrians would get into a war because they knew how strong Israel was. In reply to another question, Begin said he had never thought about wiping out the PLO on the battlefield.\(^{958}\)

Begin won almost unanimous approval (with two abstentions) in the cabinet for Sharon’s invasion plan. This was Sharon’s modest version, which concealed his larger ambition. Sharon mused:

> Who knows? Maybe out of this operation – although not as a part of the goals of the war – the Lebanese will take part, and Lebanon may be changed, and we might even get the Syrians out and have a peace treaty with Lebanon!\(^{959}\)

At this time, not only a majority of the cabinet supported a limited operation in Lebanon; there was also broad consensus in Israel over the need to do something to stop the terror.

\(^{957}\) Schiff-Ya’ari, 1984, p. 97  
\(^{958}\) Ibid, p. 104  
\(^{959}\) Temko, 1987, p. 270
The Bad Years

The war started on June 6, 1982. Arafat, as usual, agreed at the last moment to Washington’s cease-fire proposal. Begin’s reply was: “He [Samuel Lewis] had the nerve to tell me they had turned to the Saudis, and the Saudis to the Syrians, and the Syrians to the PLO, and the PLO had agreed to a cease-fire!” He promised the Americans the operation would take no longer then three or four days and wrote to President Reagan:

The army has been instructed to push back the terrorists to a distance of 40 kilometers to the north so that all our civilians in the region of Galilee will be set free of the permanent threat to their lives.

When Sharon presented the war plans, Begin was highly enchanted by the idea of a deep flanking movement. He repeatedly made a circular motion with his hand to exemplify how the Israeli army would steal up on the Syrians from behind, and exclaimed: “A tactic worthy of Hannibal!” But he failed to notice that the Beirut-Damascus road, Sharon’s objective, was much farther than 40 kilometers (24 miles); at least this fact was not mentioned in the cabinet, to the Israeli people, or to the Americans.

Begin ended the cabinet meeting with an emotional speech. He said he recommended going to war with a heavy heart.

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960 Schiff-Ya’ari, 1984, p. 116

961 June 6; Haig, 1984, p. 337; Silver, 1984, p. 228

962 Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 112
They were sending soldiers into battle. Everything would be done to prevent casualties, but combat meant losses, and losses meant bereavement and orphans. The unacceptable alternative was Auschwitz.\footnote{Silver, 1984, p. 228}

At his suggestion, the war was named “Peace for Galilee.” As Begin flew north to the forward command post after the cabinet meeting he was heard murmuring, as if in prayer: “May there be no casualties.”\footnote{ibid}

Begin flew to Lebanon again, this time with Sharon, to celebrate the conquest of the Beaufort – a 12th-century crusader castle strategically situated at a point high above the Litani River – from the PLO. Begin, dressed formally as usual in a dark suit and accompanied by newsmen and photographers, handed the place over as a sort of gift to Lebanese Major Saad Haddad whose Christian enclave had been harassed by the Palestinians who were posted there. When Sharon declared that there were no Israeli casualties one of the soldiers could not restrain himself and blurted out "What are you talking about? Six of my friends were killed here. Six boys from my unit!" Begin and Sharon failed to inquire about it. Begin, who usually mourned every Israeli casualty so deeply, was probably carried away by the same euphoric mood as Sharon.\footnote{Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p.130-131}

On June 8, Begin said to the Knesset:

> From this podium I call on President Assad to instruct the Syrian army not to harm Israeli soldiers, and then nothing will happen to them. We actually do not want to harm anyone… We do not want any clash with the Syrian
army. If we achieve the 40-kilometer line from our northern border, the job is done. All fighting will cease.966

But by this time Israeli jets had already bombed two Syrian radar posts inside Lebanon and Israeli infantry had crossed the 40-km. line and fired at Syrian posts in the town of Jezzine. And to the west, Israel had fought the Syrians near the town of Ein Zehalta, beyond the promised 40 kilometers.

Two ministers (Zippori and Burg) were well aware that the army had gone far beyond the 40 kilometers and was already engaging in battle with the Syrians. Sharon ridiculed the critics, saying that from then on ministers would be attending cabinet meetings with a ruler. He said the army was under Syrian fire and as such did not have any choice. He also requested permission to attack the Syrians’ surface-to-air missiles because the army needed air cover for its mission. Begin did not intervene in Sharon’s assaults on Zippori. He merely asked Amos Amir (the air force deputy commander) whether there would be casualties. Amir said that he could not give any guarantees, but that if there were any casualties the number would be minimal. Then Begin approved Sharon's request.967

The Israeli air force's impressive success in destroying most of the SAM 6 missiles and in downing 80 Syrian airplanes while losing only one plane of its own enhanced Sharon’s stature in the government.968 It was hard to challenge the logic of the war amid this triumphant atmosphere.

966Medzini, 1982-1984, p. 13

967Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 165-166; Temko, 1987, p. 443

968Naor, 1986, p. 72, 80

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Senior reservist officers reported that they had been instructed by a senior IDF officer from the first day of combat that the aim was to cut across the Beirut-Damascus highway and set up a new regime in Lebanon. When asked, Sharon did not deny it.\footnote{\textit{The Jerusalem Post}, October 19, 1982} The chief of staff told officers at the beginning of July that the war had created “a once-in-a-generation opportunity to change conditions in our favor in the struggle over the Land of Israel.”\footnote{Silver, 1984, p. 229}

One of Sharon’s tactics, according to Minister Yitzhak Berman, who opposed him, was to seek approval for a small, tactical advance and then come back afterwards to ask for few more kilometers to secure the gains that had been made. Berman asked him:

> What area shall we be asked to approve the day after tomorrow in order to protect the unit you will station at the site you will capture tomorrow, following our approval today?

> “Sharon grinned sheepishly, like a man caught with his hand in the till. ‘Mr. Berman,’ he replied, ‘you have an excellent sense of humor.’”\footnote{ibid, p. 230}

When Reagan called for a cease-fire, Begin agreed to have it begin at noon the next day, after Sharon reported that he needed the time to gain control of the Beirut-Damascus highway. But when the Americans protested, through envoy Philip Habib, that the Israelis were continuing their advance, Begin repeated to them what Sharon

\footnote{\textit{The Jerusalem Post}, October 19, 1982}
\footnote{Silver, 1984, p. 229}
\footnote{ibid, p. 230}

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had told him: If the Palestinians shoot at us, we have the right to capture their positions.\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 274}

Begin had once said about Sharon: “It is better to ride a racehorse you can rein in than an old nag you cannot get to gallop.”\footnote{Silver, 1984, p. 232} Throughout the years, Begin had admired ambitious soldiers who needed to be restrained. But now he seemed unaware that he had let go of the reins. He declared on the radio that the army had not entered East Beirut and Israeli troops were subsequently interviewed in a live broadcast from East Beirut.\footnote{Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 193} US envoy Habib also countered Begin’s denial when he told him there were Israeli tanks next to the presidential palace in East Beirut.\footnote{ibid} But Begin was “more embarrassed than angry” at Sharon’s performance.\footnote{ibid} Had he been angrier at Sharon, he might have been able to stop him, but he was embarrassed for both of them.

On June 13, at the end of the first week of the war, ministers asked Sharon what Israeli troops were doing in East Beirut, at the international airport, and around Ba’abda, a suburb which housed the presidential palace and defense ministry. They received four kinds of answers:

1. Israeli troops were not in Beirut.
2. Ba’abda and the airport were outside city limits.
3. If they had entered, it was in response to Palestinian cease-fire violations.

\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 275; Schiff-Ya’ari, 1984, p. 193}
4. Sometimes the soldiers were instructed to open fire because the Palestinians had first violated the cease-fire somewhere else. The soldiers’ report that they had been ordered to violate the cease-fire stemmed from the fact that they did not have the whole picture.\textsuperscript{977}

Another persuasive argument employed by Sharon was that if the cabinet did not approve his proposed operations, Israel would have to withdraw and then the terrorists would take control of this area -- after we'd already paid for it in blood (the famous gambler's trap, i.e., “you've invested too much already to quit now”). One minister called such tactics “the rape of the government.”\textsuperscript{978}

But Sharon's character was not solely to blame for how things progressed at this time. This was the role Begin gave him, the role which, at Begin's suggestion, the cabinet agreed to grant him following a democratic vote, and it was the role the people of Israel wanted their government to fulfill in the early eighties, especially at the beginning of this war against incessant terror attacks. According to Shamir\textsuperscript{979} and Nevo\textsuperscript{2000} (Begin's military secretary), Sharon was diligent about updating the government at most of the necessary junctures. In group dynamics, we know that roles are suggested to people as much as they choose them. Yitzhak Berman says the war was presented and conducted in an open-ended manner and there was no discussion about its ultimate aims.\textsuperscript{980} All the ministers naturally were part of this atmosphere.

\textsuperscript{977} Silver, 1984, p. 230-231
\textsuperscript{978} Naor, 1986, p. 122
\textsuperscript{979} Aizakson, 2003, p. 135
\textsuperscript{980} Nevo, 2000
On June 15 Begin issued a cabinet statement:

IDF forces will not enter West Beirut… This job will be done by other forces… Our boys will not shed their blood in this matter.

Then he wrote to Bashir Gemayel:

Arise, and lead your warriors out to liberate your occupied capital!981

Begin flew to Washington and was welcomed by Haig, who asked him: "How is the knee, Mr. Prime Minister?" Begin replied quickly: "Painful, but unbent. Please remember that we, the Jewish people, bend our knee only to the Almighty."982 He was unaware of the Israeli air and artillery attack Sharon had ordered on West Beirut. The Americans presented him with an ultimatum: If the bombardments do not stop, there will be no summit. Begin phoned Sharon and ordered him to halt the operation. But Sharon argued that this would endanger Israeli soldiers and kept on shelling the Lebanese capital. Begin had also come to Washington to promote the common Israeli-US interest and told Reagan that their “strategic cooperation” was working against the Syrian-Soviet alliance. “The combination of American planes and Israeli pilots is an excellent commercial symbol,” he joked.983 He wanted Reagan to think well of him because he admired the president, who had equated communism with evil.

But expressionless, Reagan read off the American position from typed file cards; Begin responded with equal coldness. There was no exchange of pleasantries, no dialogue, no hint of the warm sympathy that had up to now characterized their relationship… In a heated outburst, [US Secretary of

980 Berman, 2000


982 Hurwitz, 2004, p. 262

983 Schiff-Yaari, 1984, 202
Defense] Weinberger attempted to scold Begin and received a tongue-lashing in return. 'Be Quiet! Begin said. 'You are wrong again.'

Reagan protested Israel’s violation of its promises in Lebanon. Begin had already once told Reagan to mind his own business. Now Reagan wrote that Begin "wouldn't give an inch." Begin rejected the Americans’ claims and flew back to Israel, where he described the warm and friendly meeting he'd had in Washington.

Moshe Arens, Israel's ambassador to the U.S. at that time, was impressed by Begin's determination. Still recovering from an injury, Begin had to use a walker be carried in and out of his car by security guards because he could not manage on his own. Yet his potency was undiminished.

On June 29, 1982, Begin addressed the Knesset. After talking about the widely agreed-upon aims of the war – to defend the citizens of Galilee – he explained what had happened to the 45-kilometer line:

I would like to ask those Knesset members who have pondering the question - what happened to the 45 km line? The army reached it, so why is the war still going on? For heaven's sake, why injure ourselves in the ears of the world, the cultured world, the enlightened world which does not seek our ill? Why present such odd questions? We ceased fire unilaterally. We did not ask, or wait for a reply. The enemy went on fighting. What should our army have done? What would any other army have done? We said in our resolutions that we would not fire unless fired upon. This was meant for the terrorists. We did not want to mention any names. We said two things regarding the Syrians: A. If they attacked us, responsibility for the grave consequences would be on the Syrian government, and B. If they tried to reintroduce surface-to-air missiles, we would attack them.... What self-accusation are you casting on the Israeli people and its army?...

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984 Haig, 1984, p. 344
986 Reagan, 1990, p. 419
987 ibid, p. 424
988 Arens, 2000

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We have the capacity to do this [get the PLO out of Lebanon]. I only ask that no one do anything either by word or deed that might lessen the chance a bit. A little patience, gentlemen. Another day, or two and we will get them out. They'll leave.

We have also destroyed the missiles. Here you mocked me - I once said: Philip Habib, if you do not remove them, we'll remove them. He in fact did not remove them, and you had a whole year to pock fun. All right, so you had your fill of mockery, okay. But the missiles are gone. I cannot give you [details] as to how we got rid of them, but I just want to say thanks to Jewish heroism and to Jewish brains, we got rid of the missiles. I remember – I was a cabinet member then – how it hurt, nearly every day one of our planes fell, sometimes two. Today that's not possible any more, because of the invention of the Jewish mind. This, too, is an achievement.

Mr. Speaker, the Jewish people can exist, with God’s help, only by the readiness to sacrifice on the part of our finest sons, only through willingness for self-sacrifice. If not for this, we would not have achieved independence, we would not have maintained it. Today, too, we paid the price, woe is me. I need not add a word. And we are unable to console the families who have lost their dear ones. Only God can comfort them, and will comfort them.

Begin concluded his speech by saying:

Happy is the nation who has such an army. Happy is the army commanded by a leader such as Raful, and happy is the country whose Defense Minister is Ariel Sharon. I say this with all my heart and with all my power of belief.  

When Haig, who was particularly sympathetic to Israel, was about to be replaced, Begin finally agreed to a 48-hour ceasefire with no movement on the ground, and ordered Sharon to stop the bombing. Haig told him: “If Israel went into Beirut, the United States would abandon her.”

On one occasion, Begin sent Arafat communication of his own: If the PLO were to surrender, its men would be permitted to leave Beirut unmolested. “Have you

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989 Medzini, 1982-1984, p. 90-103

990 Haig, 1984, p. 347
forgotten that we have you surrounded? Or is it that you believe you have Tel Aviv under siege?,” Begin asked. “In being beleaguered within Beirut,” the Palestinian leader replied, “I am imposing a moral siege on all capitals.”

Instead of implementing a cease-fire, as Begin had ordered him to do, Sharon tightened the siege around West Beirut, cutting off water and electricity to the city. Begin acquiesced, hoping for a quick American negotiation of PLO and Syrian surrender. The proposal Begin favored was a face-saving one for Arafat and the PLO: They would leave by sea for a country that was willing to accept them, while Israeli and Syrian forces simultaneously withdrew from Lebanon, supervised by international peacekeeping forces.

But Sharon was determined to humiliate Arafat and his men, who were dug in inside the besieged capital and not allow them a negotiated escape. He bombarded the city while the Americans tried to negotiate an agreement, and in mid-July went to the cabinet for permission to launch a ground assault. The cabinet was divided, with a slight advantage to Sharon’s supporters, Begin among them. Naor felt that ministers often supported Begin in order not to hurt him. As in the case of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, the decision was transferred to a smaller cabinet committee.

991 Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 207


993 1993, p. 286

994 Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 213
At the beginning of the war, there was broad consensus within Israeli society that a military invasion of Lebanon was justified in order to put an end to the terror. But now that sense of solidarity was broken. The ongoing war, with its deep incursion into Lebanon, siege of Beirut and many Israeli casualties, was not what most of the people of Israel wanted. Now there was no consensus within Israeli society about the necessity of the extended war. Some people argued that it was Israel's first war of choice. Life in Tel Aviv went on, people had a good time, while soldiers were about to sacrifice their lives with no clear answer to the question: For what purpose? It was also clear that invading Beirut and engaging in house-to-house combat would lead to numerous casualties. An entire paratroop unit refused to respond to a call-up order, something that had never happened before, and movements protesting the Lebanon War such as Peace Now, Soldiers against Silence and others started to flourish.

Colonel Eli Geva, a field officer, chose to resign rather than invade West Beirut – a controversial act by a promising officer that cost him his military career. He was sent to see Begin, who asked him for his estimate of the number of Israeli casualties that would follow the invasion. “Dozens, for sure” Geva replied. Begin countered that chief of staff Rafael Eitan had predicted many fewer casualties and asked: “Do you dispute the chief of staff?” Geva answered that he did, adding that many women and children would die in such an Israeli attack. Begin asked: “Did you receive any order to kill children?” When Geva answered that he hadn’t, Begin retorted: “So what are you complaining about?” Geva was immediately fired from the army.

On August 1, while the Americans were still looking for a state willing to accept the PLO, Sharon unleashed the heaviest bombardment of West Beirut since the

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995 Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 216
beginning of the war. People around the world watched the destruction and the
casualties on TV. The next day, Begin wrote to Reagan:

Dear Ron

Thank you from the heart for your wonderful cable which is the greatest of
all the presents I received on the occasion of my 69th birthday.
To be a friend of the President of the United States, to be your friend, is
indeed an immeasurable honour. Now, may I tell you, dear Mr. President,
how I feel these days when I turn to the creator of my soul in deep
gratitude? I feel as a Prime Minister empowered to instruct a valiant army
facing ‘Berlin’ where, amongst innocent civilians, Hitler and his
henchmen hide in a bunker deep beneath the surface.
My generation, dear Ron, swore on the altar of God that whoever
proclaims his intent to destroy the Jewish State or the Jewish People, or
both, seals his fate, so that what happened from Berlin, without inverted
commas, will never happen again…

Yours in friendship
Respectfully and sincerely,
Menachem⁹⁶

On other occasions, Begin referred to Arafat as "the one with the hairy face" and a
"two legged animal"⁹⁷ and terrorists were called "menuvalim" – a Hebrew curse
which may be translated as something like "evil bastards."⁹⁸ so personal were his
feelings toward them. Reagan answered Begin by putting on his desk the picture of a
Lebanese infant injured in the Israeli attack. Begin replied by putting on his desk the
famous photograph of a Jewish child with his hands up and a fearful look being
marched from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Nazi death camps.

Begin developed a thesis about a “war of choice,” acknowledging that this was
Israel’s first war of choice. According to him, it was better to fight a war of choice

⁹⁶The Jerusalem Post, August, 4, 1982
⁹⁷Rubinstein, 1994
⁹⁸Sharon, 1989, p. 449
than a “war without a choice.” World War II was the classic example of a war without a choice and the price was well known, Begin said. He argued that Israel had in the past paid a heavy price for war without a choice, and his aim was to prevent that from recurring. Speaking to the graduates of the National Security College, he also said:

The problem will be solved. Even as early as today we can look at the situation after the fighting. The fighting will soon end and then, according to my belief, understanding and logical assumption, we will have a long period of peace. There is no country around us capable of attacking us…

On this occasion, Begin also explained why he gave up part of 'Biblical Israel' - the East Bank of the Jordan River - and the change in his attitude toward Jordan.

We, after the Holocaust, do not have power and therefore not the will to fight for conquering the East Bank of the Jordan. This is the reason Hussein can feel safe that Israel is not going to attack him and wants peace with him.”

It was the second time in Begin's life that he gave up some of his ideology out of a feeling of weakness. The first was his signing of the Camp David peace treaty, in which he agreed to evacuate settlements as a consequence of his understanding that the other option for Israel in the long run was to surrender.

Over a year earlier (in his campaign speech in what is now called Rabin Square), speaking about the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, Begin explained how the Likud differed from Labor in its approach to dealing with terror:

…We made a fundamental change in the method of defending our people against murderous terrorists. In the age of Labor governments, there was retaliation… [Now] there is no more retaliation. There is the preventive approach. We get to them,

999 Aizakson, 2003, p. 133

1000 Naor, 1993, p. 92
enter their bases and devastate them. We are no longer waiting for them to spill our blood…

For Begin, the Lebanon War also had another important role: to help overcome Yom Kippur War trauma.\textsuperscript{1002}

Sharon kept moving the troops forward, tightening his grip up to a few hundred meters from the Palestinian refugee camps of West Beirut. Reagan demanded an Israeli withdrawal and the termination of the bombardments. Begin backed Sharon, saying: “Jews do not kneel but to God.” But privately he told Sharon to halt the advance.\textsuperscript{1003} This time Sharon complied.

But on the weekend of August 6-7, Sharon ordered a large-scale mobilization of the reserves without saying anything to Begin and without cabinet approval. It was probably part of his plan to invade Muslim West Beirut. Begin heard about it in the middle of the night via a phone call from one of his ministers (Burg), whose son Avraham (later a Labor Party MK and Speaker of the Knesset) was also called up. The next day, Sharon argued that since it was clear that an invasion of Beirut was at hand, it was self-evident that the reservists had to be called up. This was apparently too much for Begin. “What do you mean by self-evident?” he asked. “You cannot take a step like that without approval. So many people know about the mobilization – and the prime minister knows nothing!” Sharon apologized.\textsuperscript{1004}

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\textsuperscript{1001}Aizakson, 2003, p. 152-159
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\textsuperscript{1002}Naor, 1993, p. 301
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\textsuperscript{1003}Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 221-222
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\textsuperscript{1004}Silver, 1984, p. 233
\end{flushright}
At the next cabinet meeting, Begin referred to the episode humorously, saying: "I know about all the actions, sometimes before they are carried out; sometimes afterward." Then he proceeded to defend Sharon against assaults from other ministers, telling them that as long as they were a minority in the cabinet nothing would help them. There is still the question of how some ministers who were against Sharon moves still supported him in the cabinet. Part of the answer lies in Begin's authority throughout the years and the fact that the ministers got used to accepting Begin's position. While Begin, for his part, tried to compensate for his growing physical and mental weakness by leaning on Sharon, whom he perceived of as a hero, and granting him more power than he had ever done in the past. The ministers were probably not aware at this stage that Begin was not his old self anymore (as Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Moshe Arens and cabinet secretary Aryeh Naor would later testify).

On August, 10, Peres visited Reagan. The President later wrote:

I found him less combative and much more reasonable than Begin... and unlike Begin, he encouraged us to continue befriending Jordan and other moderate Arab states in hopes they could help resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Americans worked hard to wrap up the final details of the PLO’s evacuation from Beirut and the entrance of peacekeeping forces, while Sharon resumed the bombardments. On August 11, Begin accepted in principle the American plan

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1005 The Jerusalem Post, June 10, 1983; Haaretz, August 8, 1982
1006 Schiff-Yaari, 1984 p. 223
1007 Reagan, 1990, p. 427
whereby the PLO fighters would depart Beirut by sea for various Arab countries that were willing to take them in. Arafat and some of his close commanders would leave for Tunisia. Working on the wording of the evacuation agreement, Begin told Elyakim Rubinstein – then an adviser to the foreign minister – "Soon it is four years since Camp David. You see we did a good thing there."\footnote{Rubinstein, 1994} The next day, Sharon, who rejected the evacuation agreement, carried out the heaviest bombing of Beirut since August 1.

Moshe Arens returned to Israel from the U.S. to advise Begin to agree to a ceasefire in Beirut. He warned Begin that Israel could lose America's support if it did not accept a ceasefire. Begin convened a small group of ministers that included Sharon, Yitzhak Shamir, Josef Burg and Simcha Erlich and asked Arens to give them an overview of the situation. "I saw that they were all looking at Arik. He didn't agree to it and they decided against it. I saw that Begin, at least on this issue, and on others, too, simply accepted Arik's decision."\footnote{Arens, 2000}

When the Americans used the expression "D-Day" in the departure agreement, Begin was hurt. This date signified the Allied invasion of Europe during the Second World War and now the American peacekeeping forces were planning to come and free Lebanon and to supervise the implementation of the agreement. Begin said there should be no hint that this would be a victory day for the PLO. "Call it E-Day" he said. He also said that he was highly offended by the use of the phrase "Palestinian forces" as it suggested they were a legitimate armed force. "Use 'PLO members,'" he argued.\footnote{Shultz, 1993, p. 66} When it seemed to Begin that relations with the United States might
deteriorate to the point of U.S. sanctions against Israel, he sent a highly emotional message to Secretary of State Shultz, saying:

Please understand the nature of our people and of me. Sanctions will never change our decisions. Please prevail over those in the president's entourage who seek to impose military and economic sanctions on Israel

At the next cabinet meeting, the ministers vehemently attacked Sharon for imperiling the evacuation agreement with his bombardments. Begin did not intervene and remained silent, as he had been doing lately, while Sharon tried to dismiss his critics. When Yosef Burg criticized him, Sharon – alluding to Burg's leftist son who was an army officer and also active in one of the anti-war movements - said: “Is your source by any chance a member of the family?” Begin interjected: “What kind of talk is that?” Then he turned to Burg, and said: “The defense minister apologizes to you.” Sharon tried to stave off the flood of criticism, saying, “We mustn’t cave in!,” Begin exploded: “I have caved in?! Do you know what pressure I have been subjected to, and I haven’t even bent. Three times I said nyet to the Americans!” Sharon tried to recover, telling Begin that he hadn’t meant anything personal, but just thought that with Arafat on the verge of defeat, “any decision not to advance is a bad one!” Begin said he had decided that Israel would not capture Beirut. Sharon wanted the floor, but Begin refused. When Sharon tried again, Begin said: “Do not raise your voice! I want it to be clear who is running this meeting.” This time Begin agreed that the bombardments did not serve any purpose and that they would harm Israel-U.S. relations. The cabinet approved his recommendation that there be no more initiative “to protect Israeli soldiers” without cabinet approval. This also stopped Sharon from conducting any attacks by land, sea or air without the prime minister’s authorization.

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1011 ibid, p. 68
1011a Kadishai, 1993
It was unusual for Begin to speak that way, said Kadishai, and some ministers saw it as a vote of no-confidence, but Begin did not disown Sharon. He left the cabinet meeting exhausted.

At the next cabinet meeting three days later, Begin suggested that they forget the past because they had to stand united to do the job. Then he declared: “Fortunate is the country in which Ariel Sharon is defense minister!”

Begin was awakened by a call from Reagan, who was unaware of the new restrictions on Sharon. He demanded that Israel stop the “unfathomable and senseless” bombardment of Beirut. Reagan said that if it did not stop he would dump his mediation mission and order Philip Habib back home. Reagan accused Israel of waging a “holocaust” against the defenseless city. Begin's face contorted with indignation, said his military secretary who was present at the time. “Mr. President,” he replied, “do not teach me what Holocaust means. Only the one who was in the Holocaust knows what it is.”

Meanwhile Sharon had stopped the attacks and Arafat and his men were ready to leave. On August 15, Begin told the cabinet that the fight had been difficult, but Israel had triumphed. On August 23, while Israel blocked access to the parliament building


\footnote{Silver, 1984, p. 234}

from Muslim West Beirut, the Phalangists won a majority from the eastern Christian side of the capital and Bashir Gemayel was elected Lebanon’s new president.\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 280}

Begin wrote to him:

Warm congratulations on your election. God will be with you, my dear friend, for the fulfillment of your important historic mission for the liberation and independent of Lebanon.\footnote{Naor, 1986, p. 143}

A week later Begin boarded a plane for a “vacation” in Nahariya, a coastal town north of Haifa. In reality, however, he was off to a secret meeting with the new Lebanese president. At the same time, Ambassador Lewis was rushing over with a message from Reagan. Begin tried to put the ambassador off because of his meeting with Gemayel, but without success. In the message, Reagan laid out the Middle East policy he intended to declare within days, in which he refused to accept “annexation or permanent control” of the West Bank and Gaza but supported Palestinian “sovereignty” there “in association with Jordan” and including East Jerusalem. Begin said to Lewis: “This is the saddest day of my life since I became prime minister.” Then he turned to his aides, saying: “The battle for the Land of Israel has begun.”\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 281; Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 233}

Then the Lebanese warlord, Gemayel, who told the Americans that Begin had demanded that he immediately come to their meeting\footnote{Shultz, 1993, p. 99} and then had kept him waiting for two hours, entered. Begin overcame his shock at the Reagan message, and the pain in his hip, and stood at attention. “Welcome, Mr. President!” he declared.
Begin asked Gemayel when Israel and Lebanon might sign a peace treaty. Gemayel said he wanted peace, but preferred to wait before taking any formal step. Begin kept on persisting:

We believe the first thing you must do as president is to visit Jerusalem, or at least Tel Aviv. Such a visit is of great importance in terms of assuring the people of Israel of your sincerity and desire for normal relations. Isn’t that why we went to war and paid the price of hundreds of dead?\textsuperscript{1019}

Gemayel remained noncommittal and Begin, ignoring this, suggested a target date – December 31, 1982, for signing the treaty. Gemayel had only promised that he would be the second Arab leader to visit the Knesset. Now Begin accused him of failing to take part in Beirut battle. “On and on Begin went like a schoolmaster scolding a delinquent pupil. Bashir (who also had had to wait outside Begin's room) was insulted to the depths of his being.”\textsuperscript{1020} Then Begin said that Israel would not abandon its allies and that Major Saad Haddad should be appointed as a commander in the new hierarchy. Bashir answered that Haddad would have to report to Beirut for trial although, according to him, it was just a formality. Bashir later told his father that Begin treated him like a child,\textsuperscript{1021} and he told the Americans that Begin wanted ”a puppet state.”\textsuperscript{1022}

Gemayel intended to end Lebanon’s civil strife after the departure of the PLO and the Syrians, and a peace treaty with Israel wouldn’t help. He asked Begin to keep the

\textsuperscript{1019} Schiff-Yaari, 1984, p. 234

\textsuperscript{1020} Schiff-Ya’ari, 1984, p. 235

\textsuperscript{1021} ibid, p. 236

\textsuperscript{1022} Shultz, 1993, p. 99
visit a secret, and Begin promised to do so. But Begin was deeply shaken and hurt. He
told one of his aides that Israelis had died for Bashir Gemayel; and then, when
everything was in his hands, he refused to make peace, finding all kinds of excuses.
Begin called it a breach of faith. In reprisal the Israelis leaked the summit to the
press.\textsuperscript{1023}

Yitzhak Shamir, Begin’s foreign minister at the time, said:

\begin{quote}
The Maronite Christians presented themselves as allies, but they weren’t. The truth was that they were not ready to fight at all. They wanted us to fight for them…. After Bashir Gemayel was elected president he distanced himself from us and did not want to continue the alliance. He was looking for relations with the Arabs, Syrians or others. He said he was now president of all the Lebanese. As long as he was only [head of] a party, he wanted to get all possible help from us; but from the moment we helped him get elected he no longer wanted to be our ally. It was a serious blow to Begin. When Begin approached him suggesting a pact – Begin’s dream – Gemayel hedged and refused. From this moment on, Begin was not the same man.\textsuperscript{1024}
\end{quote}

Two of Begin’s principal aspirations were shattered the same day: the belief that
the American president would accept Israeli sovereignty in the occupied territories,
and the belief that Israel could make peace with Lebanon by using force. He asked
Lewis for a few more days before Reagan’s announcement of his Middle East stance,
so he could consult his cabinet. “He believed,” said Lewis, “that if he could only talk
to the president he could straighten things out.” Instead Reagan moved up his address
by one day.\textsuperscript{1025}

\textsuperscript{1023}Temko, 1987, p. 281, 446

\textsuperscript{1024}Aizakson, 2003, p. 135

\textsuperscript{1025}Temko, 1987, p. 282
Begin telephoned his American supporters and told them that what was happening was like the ancient Jewish story of Haman, who thought to destroy the Jews in Persia. The United States was Haman, but Begin was planning to be like Queen Esther, who tricked Haman into giving the Jews the victory. The ancient story is celebrated every year at the holiday of Purim, when Haman's fate is symbolized by eating pastry called hamantaschen, or Haman's ears.1026

Begin convened the cabinet and complained that Israel had just handed the Americans the PLO, Syria and Lebanon while they, like Gemayel, had desecrated the graves of the Israeli soldiers who had died. He announced a plan to build an additional eight settlements in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip and promised to stick to the Camp David agreement and secure Israeli sovereignty in those areas.

Feeling that everything he had built since becoming prime minister had collapsed, Begin wrote to Reagan about how Israel had sacrificed 340 of her sons' lives and 2,200 wounded to destroy 405 Soviet-Syrian tanks, some of them – the T-72s - considered invulnerable, down 102 Soviet-Syrian MIGs – one of them a MIG 25 - and eliminate the deadly Syrian missiles. In his diary, Reagan recounted Begin's reaction: "In your letter to me and in your speech to the American people you did not, Mr. President, even mention the bravery of the Israeli fighters or the great sacrifices of the Israeli army and people. One could have gotten the impression that Mr. Philip Habib with the help of expeditionary units achieved the results. Mr. President, I was struck by this omission, but to state a fact, I do not complain."1027

Begin ended his letter saying:

Mr. President: You and I chose for the last two years to call our countries friends and allies. Such being the case, a friend does not weaken a friend, an ally does not put his ally in jeopardy. This would be the inevitable consequence were the “positions” transmitted to me on August, 31, 1982 to become reality. I believe they won’t. For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest (Isaiah, chapter 62).

1026 Shultz, 1993, p. 96

1027 Reagan, 1990, p. 433
On September 5, Reagan wrote back to Begin, telling him that he was hurt by his continuing public castigation of what he had regarded as serious and realistic peace proposal and by his public statements suggesting that the United States, and by implication Reagan himself, was betraying the friendship between the two countries.\footnote{The Jerusalem Post, September 6, 1982}

Peres, the Labor opposition leader, endorsed Reagan's plan.\footnote{Reagan, 1990, p. 436} Reagan also said that Peres was more realistic than Begin in his recognition of the need to solve the problem of the Palestinian refugees and in his understanding of America's need to establish close relations with moderate Arab countries.\footnote{ibid, p. 439}

Meanwhile there was continuous disarray in the cabinet sessions, in sharp contrast to the way Begin had handled such sessions in the past. Shamir describes it:

\ldots For some reason he [Begin] did not establish a ministers’ committee for security issues, as the law instructs, probably owing to coalition difficulties. It was hard for him to decide who would be part of it and who would not, especially who would not. Then the whole government was convened as a ministers’ committee on security issues. There were arguments and a need to get down to detail – it was very difficult. There were some differences between Begin and Arik Sharon. Some said that Sharon did not consult with Begin about everything, and also did not tell him everything on time. Sometimes Begin said there had been things he knew about only after they had been done. The truth is that Sharon took care such things didn’t happen, and that everything was based on a formal government decision.\footnote{ibid, p. 493}
But Shamir also said that he had reservations about Sharon because of "his inconsideration of the need to be precise." He also recalled: "Arik worked by himself and cooperated neither with Begin nor with others. Begin felt it and in this period relations between them were not good." 

At the beginning of September, the PLO left Beirut. Then, on the night of September 14, 1982, Bashir Gemayel was killed when a time bomb demolished his party offices in East Beirut. Even before his death was confirmed, Begin gave Sharon the order for the army to immediately seize control of the crossings between the Muslim, western side and Christian eastern Beirut in order to separate the neighborhoods and prevent possible civil war. Late that night, when it became clear that Gemayel had been murdered, Begin also ordered Sharon to take up strategic positions in West Beirut itself.

Sharon and chief of staff Eitan decided to use this opportunity to clean out the remaining PLO from two Palestinian refugee camps, Sabra and Shatila, on the southwest edge of the city. Begin had prevented Sharon from invading West Beirut and Gemayel had also refused to let the IDF in, but now Sharon was free to do so. The next day Begin was in phone contact with Sharon, who did not mention the Palestinian refugee camps and his plans to allow the Phalangists in. Begin told the

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1033 Haaretz, p. 8, February 2, 1994
1034 Shamir, 1995


1036 Silver, 1984, p. 234-235
Americans that everything was under control, especially the Phalangists, and that there would be no bloodshed.\textsuperscript{1037}

On September 16, Phalangist militiamen entered the two refugee camps, purportedly to hunt down guerrillas. The Israeli army assisted them with flares and covering fire. Late that night, the Israeli forward command post received a message saying that around 300 Palestinians were dead, some of them children, women and civilians.\textsuperscript{1038}

Begin convened the cabinet that evening. Sharon and Eitan came from Beirut by helicopter. Nothing was yet known about the massacre. Sharon told the ministers that the Christian militia was operating inside Sabra (he did not mention Shatila). Chief of Staff Eitan said they would operate “with their own methods” and that Israeli soldiers would not be involved in the fighting but only supervise it. When Eitan noted that the Phalangists were thirsty for terrible revenge on account of Gemayel’s murder, David Levy (deputy prime minister) said:

\begin{quote}
When I hear the Phalangists have already gone into certain quarters – and I know what vengeance means to them, the kind of slaughter [that would be involved], no one is going to believe that we went in there to maintain order, and we will bear the blame…\textsuperscript{1039}
\end{quote}

Begin did not hear Levy. He was busy composing the cabinet communiqué, a reply to American accusations that Israel had advanced her forces into West Beirut following Gemayel’s assassination. He explained that Israel’s move was to make sure

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1037}Kahan Commission report, 1983, pp. 15-16
  \item \textsuperscript{1038}Silver, 1984, p. 235; Kahan Commission report, 1983, pp. 20-21
  \item \textsuperscript{1039}Schiff-Ya’ari, 1984, p. 263; Naor, 1986, p. 163
\end{itemize}
no bloodshed took place there. He also argued that around 2,000 terrorists with heavy weapons still remained inside the refugee camps in violation of the evacuation agreement.\textsuperscript{1040}

As before, Sharon sought retroactive authorization for Israel’s move, claiming that the deployment had already been authorized on June 15, three months earlier, when it was decided that the Lebanese army and the Phalangists, and not the Israeli army, would take West Beirut.\textsuperscript{1041}

On Friday, September 17, Eitan reported to Sharon on the massacre, saying he had ordered the Phalangists to leave the camps at dawn on Saturday. It was the Jewish New Year and Begin, who was in synagogue, could have been informed, but no one told him; nor did they on Saturday. On Saturday evening, Begin was listening to the BBC news as usual when, to his surprise, he heard the report of a massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila by the Phalangists while the Israeli army stood guard outside. Protests from all over the world were soon on the rise.\textsuperscript{1042}

Begin phoned Eitan and Sharon and heard that the Phalangists were no longer in the camps. The next day, September 19, he convened the cabinet and declared: “Goyim [Gentiles] kill goyim, and they blame the Jews!” But other ministers were more critical. They asked how they could reconcile the declaration that Israeli forces had moved into West Beirut in order to protect lives with the fact of the massacre…

\textsuperscript{1040}Kahan Commission report, 1983, pp. 24-27, 65

\textsuperscript{1041}Silver, 1984, p. 235

Begin answered that Israel’s genuine, pure intention had been to save lives and reminded the ministers that his first order after Gemayel’s assassination was to move the forces in immediately to prevent bloodshed. Another minister then asked why Israel had let the Phalangists enter the camps. But Begin kept on defending Israel. Then he drafted an announcement expressing sorrow that the Lebanese unit had invaded the camps, far from where the IDF was positioned, and had killed people. He denied all Israeli responsibility and emphasized that Israel had forced the unit out; had it not done so, the number of casualties might have been still higher. Then he added that the accusations of culpability were:

A blood libel at the Jewish State and its Government, against the Israel Defense Forces… No one will preach to us moral values or respect for human life, on whose basis we were educated and will continue to educate generations of fighters in Israel.1043

Begin told an old comrade - Yehuda Lapidot - that one minister (Burg) had complained about the fact that the cabinet had not been informed about the Phalangist invasion of the camps and how he could be held responsible for things he had not known about. Begin then said:

As a cabinet member everyone shares responsibility because one always has the option in case he disagrees to resign. I also did not know about the attack on Dir Yasin. But as the commander of the Irgun I carried the responsibility for it.

The comrade, who was sure that Begin knew of that attack, as he knew about other military operations, was shocked. He made an investigation and discovered that Begin really had not known about the Dir Yasin operation. At that time Jerusalem was under siege, Begin was located in Tel Aviv and wireless communication was primitive and

1043Kahan Commission report, 1983, p. 43-44
could be detected by the enemy. Therefore Begin permitted the Irgun commander of Jerusalem to take action without informing him. But throughout the years he still accepted responsibility for the operation, without mentioning the fact that he had not known of it beforehand.\textsuperscript{1044}

When Secretary of State George Shultz updated former President Carter about what had happened, Carter replied: "You have to throw the book at Begin. Tough talk is the only talk Begin understands."\textsuperscript{1045}

Begin rejected any idea of appointing a commission of inquiry. On September 25, 400,000 Israelis gathered in what is today Rabin Square in the center of Tel Aviv to express their sorrow over the killing and protest Begin’s attitude to it.\textsuperscript{1046} It was the largest demonstration that had ever taken place in Israel, and it was hard to ignore. On September 28, Begin reluctantly agreed to appoint a commission of inquiry. In the beginning, he tried to limit its power to summoning individuals and collecting documents; but in the end, under additional pressure from the legal establishment, the Kahan Commission, composed of two judges and a retired general, was granted full judicial status. Begin saw himself as “fully responsible” for Israeli actions in Beirut at the time the massacre was taking place in the Shatila and Sabra refugee camps. But he repeated his conviction that “Israel does not bear any guilt for murders perpetrated by Arabs against Arabs. We have nothing to hide.”\textsuperscript{1047} To one of the friendly American

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\textsuperscript{1044}Lapidot, 2000

\textsuperscript{1045}Shultz, 1993, p. 106

\textsuperscript{1046}\textit{The Jerusalem Post}, September 26, 1982

\textsuperscript{1047}\textit{The Jerusalem Post}, September 30, 1982
Senators who criticized Israel, Begin wrote: “The whole campaign of the last ten days of accusing Israel, of blaming Israel (for the massacres), of placing moral responsibility on Israel – all of it seems to me, an old man who has seen so much in his lifetime, to be almost unbelievable, fantastic and, of course, totally despicable….The first horrific truth is that Arabs murdered Arabs. The second simple truth is that Israeli soldiers stopped the carnage.”

Begin did not express any condolences publicly. Israel’s president, Yitzhak Navon, did it for him. He went on TV and conveyed the nation’s sorrow to the bereaved families, some of whom, he noted, were Israeli Arabs or Palestinians living under Israeli rule in the West Bank and Gaza. Ambassador Lewis felt that the Sabra and Shatila incident played a big part in pushing Begin downhill. He discerned a new pain in Begin’s face. Before, even during the most difficult hours of the war, Begin had seemed to love his job. Only a few days before the massacre, Begin had fought forcefully against Reagan’s peace plan. “He was tired,” recalled Lewis. “But he was up – he was angry, strong!” But after Sabra and Shatila, “You could see he found no pleasure of any sort in the job. Everything seemed to come apart.”

Over the last year, Aliza’s health had deteriorated on account of her asthma. She had difficulty breathing and was intermittently hooked up to a respirator. A friend described meeting the Begins just before Sabra and Shatila:

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1048 ibid, October 3, 1982

1049 Silver, 1984, p. 237

1050 Temko, 1987, p. 285
The two of them sat in the park. Aliza was in a wheelchair. I was shocked at how she looked. He, too, was still recovering from the hip injury. But she looked terrible.\footnote{Temko, 1987, p. 285}

An old comrade told the story of how Aliza used to protect Menachem more than Menachem protected himself.\footnote{Alis Sheraga, 2001} Aliza thought of this comrade as one of those who joined Shmuel Tamir's rebellion against Menachem in 1966 and afterward stopped visiting Menachem. Before the Six-Day War, during the difficult waiting period when Menachem was appointed to be a minister, the comrade called Menachem and asked to visit him in order to hear about the situation. Menachem invited him to come. The comrade rang the bell, Aliza opened the door and when she saw him she slammed the door. The comrade rang the bell again and Menachem opened it this time and invited him in. After Menachem discussed the gloomy situation, he took out a bottle of wine and said, "Let's drink \textit{le'haim} ("to life") for our reconciliation." The comrade suggested that Aliza join them. Menachem went into the kitchen, came back and said: "You know how women are, leave it," and they drank without her. The comrade came to visit Menachem again on Menachem's birthday on August 1982. By this time Aliza was already very sick. But she still recognized him and said, "Time went by. I am sorry for the misunderstanding that was between us."

Israel Eldad\footnote{1993/4}, an old comrade who used to play chess with Begin during the time before he was arrested by the Russian police, and who later became a right-wing critic of his, told a similar story. He came to visit Begin the prime minister. Aliza told
him Begin could not see him because he was sick. Begin heard this, came down and invited him in. But Aliza remained angry.

After Sabra and Shatila, Aliza revealed to a friend her fear that Menachem wouldn’t snap out of his deepening sadness. She said that he wept the entire night because of soldiers that died and asked not to be called during the night to be informed about casualties.\textsuperscript{1053}

During the winter and early spring of 1982-83, Reagan kept trying to persuade Begin to withdraw Israeli forces from Lebanon as a part of a peace plan in which all foreign forces would leave that country. But Begin, says Reagan, insisted that Israel had to keep its troops in Lebanon or risk losing the advantage it had gained over the PLO and Syria in a war that had cost hundreds of Israeli casualties. Reagan instructed his envoy Habib to tell Begin that Israel's intransigence might cost it its special relationship with America, adding that he was keeping his fingers crossed. Reagan also resorted to reassurances. If Israel lived up to its agreement to pull its forces out of Lebanon, the United States would not allow it to be disadvantaged, he promised. Begin, however, wouldn't budge.\textsuperscript{1054}

In the beginning of November, Aliza was hospitalized again. The doctors inserted a tube in her throat and she was unable to speak and could only write notes. Begin told Lewis: “I must devote myself to her, in whatever time she has left,” and briefly contemplated resigning.\textsuperscript{1055} He also used to say that he did not intend to be like

\textsuperscript{1053} Naor, 1993, p. 319-20

\textsuperscript{1054} Reagan, 1990, p. 440-441

\textsuperscript{1055} Temko, 1987, p. 285
Winston Churchill who would doze off in Parliament when he was old. Begin said that a leader should know when to retire — at the zenith, not during the subsequent decline.\textsuperscript{1055a}

The Kahan Commission was chaired by a Supreme Court justice, Yitzhak Kahan. The other members were former attorney general Aharon Barak, who had recently been appointed a judge and whom Begin knew well from his Camp David days, and another general. When Begin received notification that he was to keep himself available to appear before the Commission, he was distressed and told friends that he would resign from the premiership.\textsuperscript{1055b} Kadishai believes that this was the most traumatic event for Begin.\textsuperscript{1055c}

When Begin appeared before the commission, he looked weak and spoke in a halting monotone. \textit{He told the commission that he had first heard about the massacre} on the BBC (on September 18) and “could not imagine” the Phalangists doing anything like that. If that's so, then what kind of bloodshed were you talking about preventing after the Gemayel assassination? – the commission wanted to know. Begin answered that he had been afraid of Christian and especially Phalangist revenge resulting from the assassination of their leader. Then why didn’t you raise the question of whether to let the Phalangists enter the camps, he was asked. Begin said that the only thing he could do was repeat his previous answer: None of them had thought the Phalangists would not restrict themselves to fighting terrorists. But Begin himself had warned Chief of Staff Eitan against the Phalangists, the commission insisted. Yes, said Begin, but no one had told him about the Phalangist entry into the camps. Then Begin was asked if Sharon had made a mistake in not informing him about that. "No," answered Begin. He had told the defense minister to keep order in
Beirut, and the Phalangists had entered the camps to fight 2,000 terrorists who were there and to spare Israel additional casualties.\textsuperscript{1056}

Begin testified in a highly disorganized way. He was surprised to be confronted with transcripts of cabinet meetings and conversations with the Americans, not knowing that the commission had asked for and received those documents. Although he was testifying less than two months after the massacre, he did not remember details of conversations, including Eitan’s statement that the Phalangists were “sharpening their knives” for revenge after Bashir Gemayel’s murder.\textsuperscript{1057}

One reporter wrote that besides the contradictions in Begin’s testimony, the impression was of a prime minister who did not go into details, who was somehow detached and relied on the defense minister and chief of staff but did not urge them to update him.\textsuperscript{1058}

A few days later Begin had to fly to the U.S. to meet with Reagan. Aliza was in Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, where Begin would visit her every day, sometimes twice a day. At the hospital he told Aliza that he intended to cancel the flight and stay with her. She scribbled on a notepad: “You should go! It is a meeting with Reagan!” Begin consulted with the doctors, who told him that he could surely leave. On November 13, Aliza died unexpectedly. Her son, Binyamin Ze’ev (Benny), informed

\textsuperscript{1056} The Jerusalem Post, November 9, 1982
\textsuperscript{1057} Silver, 1984, p. 236
\textsuperscript{1058} Amnon Dankner, Haaretz, November 9, 1982
Kadishai, who was accompanying Begin and was with him in their Los Angeles hotel. Kadishai called Begin’s heart specialist, and together they told him the news.

He broke down and uttered only three Hebrew words: "Lama azavti ota" ("Why did I leave her?"). And he repeated those words over and over, throughout the journey back to Israel and for weeks afterwards. He never forgave himself for having left her, and from then onwards he was enveloped in profound sadness\(^{1058a}\).

They flew back to Israel immediately. Kadishai said that Begin hardly came out of his sleeping quarters during the sixteen-hour flight from Los Angeles to Tel Aviv. He remained alone with his grief.\(^{1059}\) When the plane landed, he reminded Kadishai about his will and asked him to make sure a gravesite was ready on the Mount of Olives near the graves of Feinstein and Barazani, who had blown themselves up instead of going to the gallows.

Begin buried Aliza and sat in his home throughout the traditional shiva (seven-day mourning period) receiving condolences from visitors. He also kept the tradition of not shaving for a month. During the shiva he could often be heard murmuring about not having been at Aliza’s bedside in her last hours, saying: “I will never forgive myself\(^{1059a}\)". An aide described Begin’s condition:

After Aliza’s death, he became a lonely person. He is not a talkative man, even if he can be a spellbinder with words. He speaks to people rather than with them. As a dominant personality, he never shifted responsibility to others. The only person he could talk with and share his responsibilities and problems with was his wife. They were very, very close. After she died, he would come home and there was nobody to talk to. He was in a war, people were dying, and he had nobody to share it with.\(^{1060}\)

\(^{1058a}\) Hurwitz, 2004, p. 225

\(^{1059}\) Silver, 1984, p. 249

\(^{1059a}\) Personal communication – Dr. Goldman - Grosbard

\(^{1060}\) Silver, 1984, p. 249
During the same period, says Bathia Eldad (a psychiatric social worker and the wife of Israel Eldad, who was close to the family), Begin also had a psychosomatic condition – an outbreak of sores on the skin. And Menachem, whose appearance was always so important to him, was embarrassed to go outside... "He was incapable of a personal confession, and this is the reason why he didn't seek the treatment that he so needed. If he had been in treatment then, I believe that he could have been helped." But he wasn't conscious of his condition, and Aliza also wasn't aware that there was a mental problem. They saw all of Begin's slumps over the years as instances of reactive depression that would pass and not as a characteristic part of the manic-depressive personality that was evident in him over the years, in which his moods came in waves of ups and downs and derived from something inside him and not only from an outside stimulus, and required treatment.\textsuperscript{1060a}

"It was painful to see him sitting in his customary seat in the Knesset, head bowed, deep in thought," says a friend. "His Knesset appearances became less frequent, and he spent fewer hours at the office."\textsuperscript{1060b}

Meanwhile, the outcry over the Lebanon War was growing louder with each day’s additional toll in Israeli casualties. Protestors stood silently at the entrance to Begin’s home with a large board showing the number of Israeli soldiers killed up to then. The number climbed above 600 and rose higher every day. It disturbed Begin greatly to see this demonstration every time he came and went, even to glimpse it through the window, said Zamir, the attorney-general. But interestingly, Zamir added, even though Begin probably knew that in other democracies there was nothing like this – people being allowed to demonstrate a few meters from the prime minister’s door – he refused to request that the demonstration be moved further away. Finally, for reasons of security, it was relocated by the General Security Services to 20-25 meters from Begin’s residence.\textsuperscript{1061}

\textsuperscript{1060a} Eldad, B. 1994

\textsuperscript{1060b} Hurwitz, 2004, p. 225
When his adviser repeatedly tried to stress to him that there is no such thing as a war without casualties, reminding him of Ben-Gurion and Latrun in the War of Independence, and Golda Meir in the Yom Kippur War, Begin answered: "I am no Golda Meir."\textsuperscript{1061a}

Almost certainly depressed, Begin identified deeply with these casualties, as he had with similar losses throughout his life, and did not want them to be removed from his door. But this time he lacked the ability to overcome and keep functioning. He was drawn deeper and deeper into depression. His behavior might also be understood as self-inflicted punishment, the willingness to suffer that is common in depression. To an aide he said about the protesters, who were probably from the leftist parties: “What will I tell my grandchildren if they visit? How will I explain why I am here, inside, while they are out in the cold?”\textsuperscript{1062}

On February 8, 1983, the Kahan Commission published its findings. The report said:

The decision on the entry of the Phalangists into the refugee camps was taken without consideration of the danger – which the makers and executors of the decision were obligated to foresee as probable – that the Phalangists would commit massacres and pogroms against the inhabitants of the camps, and without an examination of the means for preventing this danger.

Similarly, it is clear from the course of events that when the reports began to arrive about the action of the Phalangists in the camps, no proper heed was taken of these reports, the correct conclusions were not drawn from them, and no energetic and immediate actions were taken to restrain the Phalangists and put a stop to their actions.”

\textsuperscript{1061} Aizakson, 2003, p. 160
\textsuperscript{1061a} Hecht, 1992
\textsuperscript{1062} Temko, 1987, p. 287
About Begin it said:

It may be assumed that a manifestation of interest by him in this matter, after he had learned of the Phalangists’ entry, would have increased the alertness of the Defense Minister and Chief of Staff to the need to take appropriate measures to meet the expected danger. The Prime Minister’s lack of involvement in the entire matter casts on him a certain degree of responsibility.

Finally, the commission recommended no action against Begin, but against Sharon:

We have found, as has been detailed in the report, that the Minister of Defense bears personal responsibility. In our opinion, it is fitting that the Minister of Defense draw the appropriate personal conclusions arising out of the defects revealed with regard to the manner in which he discharged the duties of his office – and if necessary, that the Prime Minister consider whether he should exercise his authority under section 21-A(a) of the Basic Law: the Government, according to which ‘the Prime Minister may, after informing the Cabinet of his intention to do so, remove a minister from office'.

The Chief of Staff, General Eitan, was also censured, with the commission hinting that if he had not been so close to the end of his tenure it would have recommended his dismissal. Additional senior intelligence officers were criticized, as well as foreign minister Shamir.

Harry Hurwitz, Begin's adviser on Diaspora affairs, says that by the time the commission concluded its work Begin had undergone a dramatic personal transformation. He became "somber and despondent. The spark had gone out of his voice and the sparkle from his eyes".

Now many of the ministers called for Sharon’s resignation, but he resisted. The ministers’ demand intensified. Nevo, Begin’s military secretary, described Begin’s difficulty in firing Sharon:
… After the Lebanon incidents and the Kahan Commission Begin had some problems with Sharon. Begin accepted the recommendations of the Kahan Commission and then people gathered in his room and he said: ‘So, what do you think? What do you say?’ Everyone said a few words, among them, ‘You have to fire Arik.’ Then Begin sighed deeply, and said: “Oh, kinderlach ["children" in Yiddish, Begin's mother tongue], how easy it is for you to say.” What he meant was: ‘You can say it, but I have to execute it’.

Begin said he would rather quit himself than fire Sharon; so strong was his attachment. He finally agreed to fire Sharon – but only from his post as defense minister, leaving him in the cabinet and also as a member of the cabinet defense committee. To the Knesset he said: “This man stood firm in all of Israel’s wars, and in all of them led our army to victory with bravery and initiative.” To Labor’s protests he answered that the commission had allowed him to “consider” firing Sharon, and that is what he had done.

Although Begin protected Sharon from the cabinet ministers, the Knesset and the public assaults, he was tough with him in encouraging him to resign sooner, in a way that deeply insulted Sharon. At some point later, when Begin and Sharon were alone, Sharon told Begin:

Menachem, it was you who handed me over to them. You are the one who did it.

References:
1062a Kahan Commission Report, 1983
1062b Hurwitz, 2004, p. 223
1063 Aizakson, 2003, p. 135
1064 Temko, 1987, p. 288, 448
1065 Sharon, 1989, p. 521
1066 Sharon, 1989, p. 522
(The reference is, of course, to the Saison when the Hagana extradited Irgun fighters to the British).

In the marketplaces and Sephardi development towns, the Kahan Report evoked shouts of support for Begin and Sharon. On February 10, 1983, during a cabinet meeting, a Peace Now demonstration in Jerusalem was assailed by Begin supporters. Suddenly a Likud supporter threw a grenade into the Peace Now crowd, killing one of the peace activists (Emil Grunzweig) and wounding some others.

By the end of the cabinet meeting Begin was in a highly emotional state. “How could something like this happen?” he kept on asking. But he refused to go out and make a statement to the TV cameras. He said that he had not shaved the whole day and could not appear like that in front of the cameras. His aides urged him to say something to the people. He agreed to speak, but only on the radio. Only after additional pressure did he go down to face the cameras. “I had never seen him so distressed,” said an aide. A grey, drawn prime minister finally addressed the country, condemning “this horrible tragedy” and asking all citizens of all political inclinations to stay calm and prevent further violence. “God forbid that we should embark on the road of violence,” he said.\(^\text{1067}\)

Before, Aliza was the one who would help Begin out of his depression. Now Begin said, "I do not need to apologize. It is just a mood." And also, "You cannot force a person to smile or dance if he does not feel like it." When someone tried to catch his eye, he looked up. Begin was aware of his condition and did not try to do

\(^{1067}\) Silver, 1984, p. 240
things he could not do. But he still believed that he would overcome it as in the past.\textsuperscript{1068}

The war continued to exact its toll. Nevo recounted how unbearable it became for him to enter Begin’s room to tell him about yet another Israeli soldier killed in Lebanon. There was something in Begin’s reaction that made it impossible.\textsuperscript{1069} Suddenly, he would say, “What to do with the dead?”\textsuperscript{1070}

Another Likud Knesset member recalled telling Begin that Israel needed to get out of Lebanon because the people could not bear the war any more. Begin looked at him and said: “What do you think, my son, that I do not understand it?” He had tears in his eyes and looked utterly dejected.\textsuperscript{1071} Another comrade believed that Begin was in a deep depression. He was passive, did not try to formulate new ideas, did not tell jokes and did not smile.\textsuperscript{1072}

One of Begin’s aides said that his intellectual ability remained intact, but he had started to lose weight. He spoke less and less in cabinet meetings and in public hardly at all. He was less involved in what went on around him. He listened but would not read any documents before meetings. His aides tried to cover up for him. Yona

\textsuperscript{1068}Naor, 1993, pp. 333-335

\textsuperscript{1069}Channel 8, Israeli TV, Sept/Oct, 2003 program about Begin

\textsuperscript{1070}Naor, 1993, p.345

\textsuperscript{1071}Aizakson, 2003, p. 199

\textsuperscript{1072}Lapidot, 2000
Klimovitzki, his secretary, described his decline by saying that he had lost the sparkle in his eyes.  

Towards the end of April 1983, the Americans conducted negotiations between Lebanon and Israel. Amin Gemayel was now the Lebanese president, having replaced his assassinated brother. The desired aims of the negotiations were an IDF withdrawal from Lebanon back to the international border, the creation of a security belt for Israel in eastern Lebanon, Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon and normal relations (or "almost peace") between Israel and Lebanon. American Secretary of State George Shultz traveled back and forth between Beirut and Jerusalem and managed to usher the agreement to the finish line and have the parties initial it. Some argued that the withdrawal would be dangerous for Israel and that the IDF should continue to maintain positions in Lebanon. Before the cabinet meeting in which the agreement was supposed to be confirmed, Moshe Arens – now serving as defense minister in place of Sharon – and Yitzhak Shamir went to see Begin at his residence in order to persuade him to support the agreement. "It was difficult, very difficult," Arens said later. "There was no active, vehement resistance, but rather a kind of passivity, a feeling that maybe this wasn't the right thing. It was hard. It was hard to bring him to it." To Arens' surprise, Yitzhak Shamir did not say a word during this meeting, either for or against. At the end, Begin agreed, and the cabinet also subsequently approved the agreement. "But I saw that it was without any enthusiasm, that [his agreement] was very passive." Such a move should be led by the prime minister and not the defense minister, Arens maintained. "This was supposed to be one of the positive achievements of the war," he said. "But in the end nothing came of it because the

1073 Channel 8, Israeli TV, Sept/Oct 2003, program about Begin
Syrians torpedoed the agreement and wouldn't let the government in Beirut approve it.”

Elyakim Rubinstein, who was then an adviser to Foreign Minister Shamir and dealt with the legal wording of the Lebanese agreement, went to consult with Begin. "Twice I came to Begin and twice I was shocked. I remembered how he was during the negotiations with Egypt – he was blooming. Now he just said, 'Okay, okay,' with little spirit. I came out of these meetings depressed. He approved my suggestions but it was clear that he was not interested.”

At times, said Samuel Lewis, Begin would still try to pull himself together and show spurts of energy, as when Reagan publicly offered Israel U.S. security guarantees. Begin protested that after the Holocaust Jews could not rely on mere guarantees. Shultz described how Begin's chin periodically jutted forward in defiance during their discussions, though he appeared to be paying little attention. In April 1983, he also delivered the traditional prime minister's speech on Israel’s Independence Day, saying that the country could be proud of its achievements and calling for Israel to secure the “fruits of victory in the justified, defensive war against the terrorist organizations.”

Begin had started losing weight a few months earlier, at the end of 1982. Now, at his favorite table in the Knesset dining room, a meager plate of vegetables was enough for him. He stopped ordering the chicken and soup that used to be his main

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1074 Arens, 2000
1075 Rubinstein, 1994
1076 Shultz, 1993, p. 204
1077 Temko, 1987, p. 289
fare. His clothes began to hang loosely on his bony frame. His face and neck became hollow and scrawny. “I do not have an appetite any more,” he told aides who urged him to eat.¹⁰⁷⁸

Yitzhak Navon (Israel's president from 1978-1983) described Begin's mental dysfunction at this time:

I heard from the ministers that Begin was having difficulty functioning: He fell asleep in the middle of meetings, his head would droop, he wasn't focused and so on. And one day he came to give me a report and I'm listening to him talk and noticing that he's mixing up dates and people and places and his loyal aide, Yehiel Kadishai, is constantly correcting him – 'No, it wasn't like that. Don't you remember?,' trying to obscure the problem, but it couldn't be obscured. I was really worried. I said – This man is not functioning, he's not focused, he's forgetful, he's confusing dates and subjects. And afterwards I received confirmation of this from the ministers, and one day, after a meeting with him, which was tough in this respect, I remember I had a hard time sleeping. At around three in the morning, I got up and my wife Ophira asked: 'What's wrong?' and I said: 'I can't sleep. Look at what's happening. The prime minister can't function and all these ministers aren't saying anything, and he has the country in his hands. What will be?' And I thought that if things don't change, if the ministers don't do anything, or his party, or if he doesn't resign of his own accord, I'll have to come out publicly and call for his resignation – in the gentlest way possible, but it will still be a terribly difficult thing. So I said

¹⁰⁷⁸Silver, 1984, p. 250
– Let's see what's happening. Let's find out just what his medical condition is.

I called Katzir. I'd thought about speaking to the doctors myself, but I decided it would be better if he did it, so it wouldn't be an official inquiry from the president but an unofficial inquiry from a former president, and he was from the Weizmann Institute and had connections with doctors. I called Katzir and described the situation to him. I told him that I was very concerned and asked if he would speak to Begin's doctors and tell me what they said.

A day or two later, he called me. He'd spoken with the doctors. They said – Yes, he's in a serious state, but it can pass. It won't necessarily last. He can come out of it. When I heard that, I had no choice but to hope that he would come out of it soon. But I couldn't take any dramatic step if the doctors were saying it would pass. And it did pass. At that time, I was extremely concerned and if not for what the doctors said, I would have come out with a public statement. It's quite overwhelming – to feel like you're responsible for the entire country.\textsuperscript{1079}

Former Israeli President Ephraim Katzir was probably referring to the same event when he recalled how one day in 1983 he was told by one of the doctors who took care of Begin that Begin had a clot in one of the blood vessels leading to the brain and that he was also depressed. Katzir went to the head of Hadassah Hospital – Dr. Man – and asked him if it was possible for the prime minister to appear outwardly normal.

\textsuperscript{1079}Navon, 2000. Although Navon relates this event to an earlier date by associating it with Dayan's involvement in the Egypt-Israel negotiations, he was not sure about it. The details of Navon's account match Katzir's account from 1983.
but be unable to judge things properly and make clear decisions. He thought that if this was the case he should inform the right people in order to find a substitute for Begin, because Israel could not have an incapacitated prime minister. Dr. Man asked him to wait a week, and at that point told Katzir, "There is a good chance that everything will be fine."  

Nevo was one of the few people who were close to Begin in this last period. He recalled:

He [Begin] expressed it in very simple words. He said: ‘I cannot go on.’ It fell like thunder on a clear day. People knew there was a problem. I also knew because on the Jewish New Year (September 1982) he had gone into his house, isolated himself and did not come out until the day he decided to resign (September 1983, a year later). He disconnected himself from the whole system and only three people were in touch with him during this period: Dan Meridor, Kadishai and myself. It was a difficult period because there were some things he did not want to deal with any more and we could not decide who would deal with them. He was the Prime Minister, he was [still] active, and no one had decided officially that he was not active any more. It was a huge dilemma.

At the beginning of his isolation he stopped shaving. He had a rash and said he did not want to come to the office unshaven. Then he remained at home. He stopped shaving and material sent to him from the office was returned without comment. Sometimes, when there was something I had to do, I spoke with him on the phone. He would tell me: Listen, exercise your common sense. If this way looks okay to you, then it is okay.”  

In June, the Paris Air Show was held at Le Bourget. Various countries, including Israel, presented their latest aviation designs. Arens was planning to go there, like the defense ministers who preceded him had always done. "Begin wanted to convince me not to go," he later wrote. "I felt as if I was speaking with a child, that he didn't want his mommy to go, that he didn't want to be left alone. 'I don't know what will happen with Lebanon,' Begin said, 'or what will happen here.'" Arens finally was able to

\[\textit{Katzir, 2000}\]

\[\textit{Aizakson, 2003, p. 203}\]
reassure him that he wasn't going that far away and that there was nothing to worry about because, if needed, he would come immediately. Arens was dismayed: "I was sad to see how much he suddenly felt dependent on me and on my presence there."

When admirers urged him to make a “comeback,” Begin said, simply, “I cannot.” Every day, more Israeli soldiers were losing their lives in Lebanon but Begin, as was widely noted, neither attended the military funerals nor visited the wounded in hospital. He said he lacked the strength to “go to the people.” He was always very sensitive about his appearance, taking care never to be seen in pajamas, always shaven and wearing a jacket and tie even when those around him allowed themselves more informality. Begin was always aware of the fact that he was a symbol and that his appearance was part of that. But now he looked skeletal and refused to appear in public. But he remained ahead in the polls, with no rivals anywhere in sight, let alone in his own party (In a survey done by the Jerusalem Post at the end of July, shortly before Begin's resignation, Begin got 42.1%; Ezer Weizman came second with 8.7%, and Ariel Sharon fifth with 1.9% - as the top choice within the Likud party).

Samuel Lewis described Reagan's attitude to Begin:

Everybody in the administration was very angry with Begin by the end of the Lebanon War except Reagan - he got angry against Khruschev, and he got angry against Communists, he didn’t get angry about Israel. He got very upset, he was annoyed, he got concerned why are they doing these things, why can’t they, why can’t Philip Habib get this straightened out, but Reagan was always an admirer of Israel, even at

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1082 Arens, 2000

1083 Maariv, June 6, 1983

1084 Temko, 1987, p. 290

1085 ibid, p. 449
the worst moments. Begin himself, I think, never lost Reagan’s respect, though many Israeli actions caused him a lot of anguish.

He was looking forward to see Begin who hadn’t come to the States since his wife had died, while he was there on that visit that never took place, in November, and that was the visit that was supposed to get our relationship back into a better framework after the Lebanon War… The fact that Begin did not see Reagan after the Lebanon War meant that their relationship was very distant. They exchanged letters, but they never really talked or saw each other. So, in the spring of 1983, we were looking forward to a visit, Begin seemed to be looking forward to a visit, but Reagan was very interested in getting Begin back to Washington, so we started to extend the invitations along in May, I think, and he kept saying: Yes, I want to go, but I don’t know exactly when, and he was in a very bad depression, had been for months. He didn’t have much energy and the fact that he kept putting off this visit to Washington, accepting a date and then saying: Well, I need to think further about that, gave us the first indication that maybe he was thinking of resigning. Then he accepted the invitation, they had a date set in June I think, or maybe it was early July, and then one day I got a call, or maybe I saw him, I don’t remember which, and he said: I just don’t think I can go right now, it’s really a personal matter, it’s not official.1086

Ministers reported that, in cabinet meetings, Begin’s dominance was gone and his contributions had lost their creative spark. He no longer sought new approaches, but drifted off, saying little, thinking, if at all, in macro more than micro terms.1087 "You couldn't get through to him," said Arens, describing how Begin seemed to be enveloped in an impenetrable fog.1088 "It was very hard for many people to accept Begin’s depression… he was the prime minister and had always been so strong," Naor explained.1089 In retrospect, Arens also understood the delusion: "We lived under the

1086 Lewis, 2002
1087 Silver, 1984, p. 250
1088 Kaz, 1993
1089 Naor, 1993, p. 336
impression of the Begin we had known. A powerful man with great ability" and so
couldn't conceive of his deterioration.\textsuperscript{1090}

The secret that Begin's aides had tried to hide came out when one minister compared the cabinet to “a ship without a captain.”

It was unimaginable for someone who was not present at the cabinet meeting to believe what was really happening there, what chaos, what ‘ping pong,’ what an absence of seriousness. Three out of the nine hours they sat thinking how to decide instead of deciding. At the end they did not know what had been decided. All of the ministers, including the Finance Minister, stood in line at the Cabinet secretariat to look at the minutes in order to know what they had decided… He himself was afraid to go to the restroom because a decision could have been accepted in his absence… No one gave permission to talk, I have never seen such chaos in all my life.\textsuperscript{1091}

Reuben Hecht, Begin's comrade and adviser, tells about Begin's last days:

Shortly before Begin resigned, he was supposed to receive the German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl. Begin and I had the same concept about the Germans, but as Prime Minister of Israel his duties and obligations came first. One evening, a few days before Kohl was scheduled to land in Lod, Yechiel Kadishai called me on behalf of Begin, to ask whether it would be possible not to play either of the national anthems at the welcoming ceremony, not 'Hatikva' and not 'Deutschland uber Alles,' which Begin abhorred. I told him that I was not Chief of Protocol and that he should ask him if the custom of playing the anthems of both countries when receiving heads of state could be dispensed with. Kadishai said that Begin had already asked the Chief of Protocol, who had told him that both anthems must be played. Therefore he was asking for my opinion. I was surprised and said that in that case, there really was no alternative.\textsuperscript{1090a}

On August 28, 1983, after confiding in his closest colleagues just before the cabinet meeting, Begin convened the cabinet, and declared: “I feel I cannot carry on shoudering my responsibilities, with things as they are, the way I would like to, and

\textsuperscript{1090} Arens, 2000

\textsuperscript{1091} Haaretz, August 29, 1983, Yoel Marcus cites Aharon Uzan; translation Silver, 1984, p. 251

\textsuperscript{1090a} Hecht, 1992
the way I ought to." The ministers begged him to stay. The deputy foreign minister told Begin that he was like a father to them and couldn't resign. Some ran after him to try to dissuade him – including Sharon, who told Begin that the people of Israel needed him. Begin thanked them all and then said quietly, “I cannot go on.” For a moment it was the old Begin, who, after listening to everybody, decided alone.

Sharon would later say: "Along with the other cabinet members I had watched the changes in him. But like most of the others I had seen Begin go through similar episodes in the past and recover from them." A few minutes later, in his office, Begin took the hand of his friend and adviser Hurwitz and said: "I'm sorry for what I'm doing to my friends but, you understand, I cannot go on." Hurwitz recounts:

Suddenly, he looked out the window and the slightest sign of a smile appeared at the corner of his mouth: 'So, now this too is resolved,' he whispered.

Begin, who was expecting the official visit of Germany's Chancellor Kohl the next day, was watching the two flags - the German and the Israeli one - flying side by side from his window. He knew that such a visit meant welcoming the guest at the airport, listening to the German anthem and 'Hatikvah' being played one after the other by the Israel Army band, dining together in his visitor's honor and seeing the streets of

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1092 *The Jerusalem Post, August 29*

1093 Naor, 1993, p. 240

1094 Sharon, 1989, p. 528

1093a Hurwitz, 2004, p. 229

1093b Hurwitz, 2004, p. 253

1093c Hurwitz, 2004, p. 255
Jerusalem decorated with the two flags. Kohl canceled the visit because of Begin's resignation and the German flags that had been set out to welcome him were removed. It might be the case, says Hurwitz, that the exact day of his resignation was chosen in order to spare Begin this unbearable pain.

Noah Mozes, editor of Yedioth Ahronoth, Israel's largest newspaper, wrote: “We are a cruel people that devours its leaders.” Begin's resignation could not have passed without arousing guilt feelings within the people of Israel.
The Depression

Begin withdrew inside the prime minister's residence, saying only, “I cannot go on.” Ministers, comrades and party members kept asking him to return to work. Samuel Lewis believed that Reagan "was genuinely sorry" about Begin's resignation. The crowd outside his residence chanted, “Begin! Begin, King of Israel!” But Begin, isolated inside, refused to say anything to the nation, to give any explanation at all. He remarked to an old comrade, Bathia Eldad, "How much more could I abase myself?" He had not yet sent his resignation letter to the president and therefore, according to the law, was still prime minister. But he was no longer involved in anything political. He did not appoint an heir. He used to say that Herut was a democratic party and not a monarchy. When the Herut central committee chose Yitzhak Shamir as Begin’s successor, Begin did not send him any congratulations or advice. On September 15, he sent a letter of resignation to the president by messenger.

Begin did not attend Jewish High Holiday services that month; and in November, on the first anniversary of Aliza’s death, he did not attend the memorial service at the Mount of Olives cemetery. He did not leave home. Finally, in December, some close comrades found him a nice apartment in a quiet location overlooking the Jerusalem Forest, and moved him there from the prime minister’s residence. Some Israeli news photographers managed to snap a photo of him – He looked skeletal. In his new

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1095 Lewis, 2002
1096 Eldad, B., 1994
1097 The Jerusalem Post, September 16, 1983
residence he lay in bed with his pajamas on and the curtains drawn. Yehiel Kadishai and his unmarried daughter, Lea, helped him with his basic needs, the things Aliza had always done for him. He refused to have someone hired to tend to his more personal needs, but was content with a housekeeper who cleaned and cooked for him. He was the kind of man who neither had a driving license nor knew how to use a gun. He would not make himself a cup of tea and needed someone to do it for him. Apart from some family and few of his closest friends, Begin refused visitors.

People speculated about what had happened to him. Some said that the death of his wife, to whom he had been so attached, was the main cause of his deterioration. Others blamed the Lebanon War, the casualties to which he was so sensitive. They recalled how, before any Irgun operation, Begin would ask more about the withdrawal plans than about the attack; how Begin - so unlike Ben-Gurion - could think of halting the Jaffa conquest because of eleven casualties. Still others blamed the Kahan Commission, which had faulted him, or his relationship with Sharon, in which he probably felt betrayed. Some noted that he had been depressed as far back as the Altalena episode, then later after the 1951 election and again when Tamir challenged him in the 1960s. Even as prime minister, he had exhibited clear mood swings. And, as always, there were some who speculated that the whole thing was just a trick designed to pave the way for an eventual comeback.

1098 Arens, 2000

1099 Kaz, 1993

1100 Nevo, 2000; Hurwitz, 2004, p. 231

1101 Temko, 1987, p. 292, 450

1102 Eldad, I., 1993/4
Bathia Eldad, (a psychiatric social worker and the wife of Israel Eldad who lived with the Begins prior to Menachem’s arrest by the Russian police) was close to the Begins throughout the years. She relates:

He did not want any psychiatric treatment. I begged the family to get him some. He did not want it. He really wanted to die. He could not act out his anger (depression by definition is an anger directed at the self). He could be ‘high’ in his speeches but he had never expressed personal anger. In this he and Ala were similar. He never spoke about his personal difficulties. The nation, the people were always in the center for him and also for Ala.1103

When Shamir’s coalition fell apart in the spring, new elections were scheduled for July 1984. Begin’s admirers tried to encourage him to make a comeback, but it seemed beyond him.1104 Begin quit the “fighting family” like a father who suddenly abandons his kin, leaving them to wonder what they have done to make him leave, said some of his acquaintances. They felt guilt, but others now started feeling anger. They said a leader – a prime minister – couldn’t just abandon everything without saying anything to the nation. He bore responsibility for the people. Others felt that Begin could not look his children in the eye, probably out of shame.1105

Begin read the newspapers Kadishai brought to him in the morning. He now talked more on the phone with comrades and admirers and commented on issues of the day to Israel Radio – in a weak voice, but with an evidently sharp mind. He rejected the idea of seeing a psychologist but was helped by a physiotherapist friend, who helped

1103 Eldad, B., 1994
1104 Temko, 1987, p. 292
1105 Channel 8, Israeli TV, Sep/Oct 2003, program on Begin
him get out of bed for the first time in months and start walking again – very, very slowly. 1106

At campaign rallies, Shamir was greeted by chants of “Begin! Begin!” and Begin knew the party needed him. But when Shamir asked him to accept the symbolic 120th slot on the Likud election list, he declined. 1107 A comrade repeated to him what she had been told by an acquaintance: “Please, tell Begin we are waiting for him like the Messiah!” When Begin heard this he smiled, and said: “It is amazing.” 1108 No doubt he really was amazed by the people’s abiding attachment to him, after he had detached himself from them.

Some of Begin’s close aides urged to help Shamir by appearing on TV or, if he did not want to be seen, by giving a radio interview. They told him that Labor was leading in the polls and that the future of the Land of Israel was at risk. Begin said he knew he should intervene, but simply could not bring himself to do it.

Two days before the election, when the law still allowed the broadcasting of campaign propaganda, one of Begin’s admirers told him:

Look, you are in perfectly good shape. Your mind is sharp. You must have taken a neder (religious vow) not to participate in the campaign! Otherwise I cannot understand why you are not helping Shamir. It’s beyond me.

Begin looked him in the eye and said: “No, I did not take a vow.” “Why, then?” the man asked. Begin did not answer. But at the last moment he endorsed Shamir through

1106 Temko, 1987, p. 293

1107 ibid, p. 292

1108 ibid, p. 293
a reporter who had phoned him. However, Begin’s message reached the TV station too late and was not broadcast.\textsuperscript{1109}

Due to his depression, for Begin the 'fighting family' and the Land of Israel suddenly lost their appeal. The huge amount of libido he had once attached to the Land of Israel was now invested in himself, probably in memories, nostalgia, and all kinds of feelings Begin did not allow himself to experience throughout the years when he let his individuality be subsumed and felt he was the embodiment of the Jewish people. The outside world ceased to interest him as a participant. He remained an observer, attempting to understand through empathy rather than to muster the determination necessary to try to effect change. He returned to himself - as happens in depression - where he left himself: at the age of three or four running barefoot with his friends in the forest. To the time before he was separated from his mother by his ambitious father's Zionism and before he gave his life to the Jewish people.

Kadishai described Begin as the man who never used 'I' but always 'we.' Other politicians were always saying, 'I proposed this' and 'I did that' but Begin always spoke about the Knesset, the government, the fighting family and of course the Jewish people and Israel in terms of togetherness. He would express suggestions through an emissary if he thought they stood a greater chance of being accepted that way and was unconcerned with taking credit. The way he relinquished his individual self and was ready to forgo any narcissistic affirmation no doubt made Begin unique. But in his depression he returned to the 'I', and to his primary relations with his mother. Begin never regretted his resignation, Kadishai reported.\textsuperscript{1110}

\textsuperscript{1109} Temko, 1987, p. 293

\textsuperscript{1110} Kadishai, 2002
Begin did not go to vote on Election Day. His son, Benny, said it was because of “personal reasons.” On one occasion, Begin told a reporter that Shamir should remain prime minister. When Peres and Shamir were forced to form a national unity government because of the narrow margin in the election results between Labor and Likud, Begin told a reporter that he supported it. Some people in his party were very angry at him, feeling that a few words endorsing Shamir could have brought victory. Others said he had tried. It is not hard to imagine how hurt Shamir and other comrades must have been by Begin, who, when he finally did them a favor by saying a few words to the media, always did so reluctantly and too late. Begin simply was not invested in the Likud’s ideas any more. Depression paints the world in different colors and things that were once of the utmost importance can seem dull. Just as Begin had lost his appetite earlier, he now lost interest in everything that had once occupied the center of his world.

In late September 1984, Begin underwent successful prostate surgery. For a short time he seemed to be gaining weight and he saw more people. On November 23, he attended the memorial service on the second anniversary of Aliza’s death. He shook hands with his comrades from the fighting family, and thanked them all. But this was the only time during the entire year that Begin would leave his apartment.\footnote{Hurwitz, 2004, p. 232} At home he read, received political figures, talked politics on the phone and contemplated writing his memoirs. Once he planned to write several volumes of The Generation of Holocaust and Redemption, but he never did.\footnote{Temko, 1987, 294-295} When he was urged to just speak into a tape recorder, he also refused.\footnote{Hurwitz, 2004, p. 245} Perhaps, being in a state of depression in
which self-criticism is the rule, Begin felt dissatisfied with his accomplishments as a leader and therefore did not want to sum up his life for publication. He also declined Hurwitz's suggestion that he publish his exchange of letters with Sadat.  

Begin responded to letters from Israeli schoolchildren with especially careful attention and wrote thoughtful replies. But after half an hour or so, he would lose patience and turn to the newspapers on his bed. He read a lot of books as well as newspapers from different countries. A friend commented that at one point "it looked as though he was sleeping in a library."  

On one occasion, he asked Nevo, his former military secretary who was now Peres's military secretary, to come visit him. Begin asked Nevo only one question concerning the secret operations to bring the Ethiopian Jews to Israel. As prime minister, he had considered it a very important issue and asked to be updated on it by the Mossad quite often. Nevo told him some details about the continuation of this mission and that was enough for Begin. Though Begin had lost his vital energy, he remained very sensitive to humanitarian issues, even in his depression. Kadishai, who was his closest aide over the years, says he is sure that, if he were around today, Begin would enthusiastically support the immigration of the Falashmura (Ethiopians who consider themselves Jews, but about whom there is some controversy in Israel) to Israel.  

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1114 ibid, p. 246  
1115 ibid, p. 232  
1114a Nevo, 2000  
1116 Kadishai, 1993
Begin also met with Arik Sharon and wished him well in his libel case against Time Magazine concerning the Lebanon War (Time magazine wrote that, before the funeral of assassinated president elect Bashir Gemayal, Sharon discussed with Pierre and Amin Gemayal "the need for the Phalangists to take revenge for the assassination." At the beginning of 1985, the verdict handed down was that the Time Magazine report had been false and defamatory about Sharon, and that certain Time employees had acted negligently and carelessly, though not with deliberate malice, in regard to Sharon. Begin sent a telegram to Sharon in New York, saying: "Congratulations on your great moral victory." Sharon phoned Begin the next morning to thank him. On Israel Radio, Begin cheered the verdict as an “absolute moral victory.”

But Begin’s recovery stopped. He started losing weight again, went back into his pajamas and stopped thinking about writing his book. In March 1986, he failed to attend the first Herut convention since his retirement.

Some of his close aides found it hard to understand how a man who had won wars against all odds, against the British Empire and the Labor establishment, and who had given the Sephardim back their honor – to mention just a few of his achievements – could not at least do justice to himself and to history by revealing what had really happened in the Lebanon War and who was responsible for the deaths of so many Israeli soldiers. Dan Meridor (the government secretary during the war and one of the

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1119 Temko, 1987, p. 295
few who remained close to Begin after his retirement) said: “I will say nothing as long as Begin does not speak about it.” Zippori (the ex-general and cabinet member who had confronted Sharon during the war) suggested that Begin “lay the facts” of the war before the public.1120 When Begin did not reply, Zippori said: “Begin knows who led whom astray… He knows who was responsible for what happened in that wretched Lebanon War.”1121

Why was Begin so insistent on protecting Sharon? The answer might be dependency. Begin was ashamed of his dependency on Sharon. Exposing all the facts of the war, laying them on the table, as some of his comrades suggested, would have revealed not only how Sharon misled Begin – on which there is broad agreement – but also how blindly Begin relied on an omnipotent Sharon. It would have laid completely bare Begin’s total weakness, his helplessness and depression, which led to the expansion of the war. He had once criticized Golda Meir for her responsibility as prime minister in the Yom Kippur War. What could he say now about his responsibility for turning the 'Operation Peace for Galilee' into the 'Lebanon War'?! Begin’s son, Benny, who was also a member of the Likud (and later a Knesset member and minister), supported the Shamir camp in the Likud and not the Sharon camp. And he later quoted his father as telling him in 1987 that Sharon had “widened... without basis the aims of the operation.”1122

1120 The Jerusalem Post, July, 17, 1984
1121 Temko, 1987, p. 296

Meir Porush, a minister from the religious Agudath Israel party, also recounted how he once heard Begin angrily repeating: "Why, Why he did it to me?" But when a Begin admirer told a reporter that Begin could not bear to hear Sharon’s name mentioned, Begin denied it in a radio interview.

In July 1987, one of Begin’s comrades described his condition as a combination of mental acuity and physical surrender. “He is still up-to-date on every last detail of the political situation, here and overseas. He is mentally the same Begin…” but he refused to change out of pajamas into clothes and encounter the outside world.

But another minister from the Likud who visited him said it was impossible to consult with him about relevant political issues because he would respond in a vague, accepting tone without really saying anything.

Shamir describes his relations with Begin at this time:

Begin was happy to accept my visits and listened with sympathy, but neither of us was the type to pose personal questions or to try to intrude on private territory. I never tried to find out what his true feelings were about the way he was living or about his abrupt and acute detachment from society – and he never showed any inkling of desire to talk to me about that. And there were other unspoken agreements between us: I never asked for his advice (even though I sometimes felt powerfully tempted to do so), and he never offered it. He chose a path that led him far from any active participation or any trace of responsibility… for any aspect of the major issues facing the nation… His intellect, his sharp mind and his curiosity were all intact even after the tragedies and the depressions that had descended upon him…

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1123 Channel 8, Israeli TV, Sept/Oct 2003, program on Begin
1124 The Jerusalem Post, July 17 and July 18, 1984
1125 Temko, 1987, p. 451
1126 Korfu, 2000
1125a Shamir, 1994, p. 110-111; Shamir, 1995

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Begin's ideology and personality, which were essentially one and the same, had collapsed into a state in which he did not wish to struggle anymore and only wanted to have warm relations.

Kadishai tells how Begin did not express his opinion on anything. If Kadishai said something that went along with Begin thoughts, he would nod his head and say "Yes, yes." If he thought differently, all he would say was: "Yes, but..." and not intervene any further. A state of passivity had overwhelmed him.\textsuperscript{1127}

Yet when Moshe Arens (at that time a minister without portfolio) decided to resign following the government's decision to halt the Lavi Project (building a sophisticated and expensive Israeli combat plane), Begin called him and tried to persuade him to change his mind. Arens felt that Begin was interested in what was happening and was intellectually active.\textsuperscript{1128}

At the end of the 1980s, Carter visited Israel. Rubinstein\textsuperscript{1127a}, then the government secretary, dialed Begin for him. Carter and Begin spoke for a minute but Begin refused to meet him. It happened once more that Begin refused to meet Carter after his resignation.\textsuperscript{1129} To a comrade he explained that it was because of Carter's clearly pro-Arab views, which were reflected in his memoirs.\textsuperscript{1130} This signified another closure of a circle: At the beginning of the peace process, Begin had compared Carter to Jabotinsky, but by now he most likely was deeply hurt by Carter's pro-Sadat bias.

\textsuperscript{1127} Kadishai, 1993
\textsuperscript{1128} Arens, 2000
\textsuperscript{1127a} Rubinstein, 1994
\textsuperscript{1129} Kadishai, 1993
\textsuperscript{1130} Hecht, 1992
Another close comrade, Harry Hurwitz, told how Begin in his retirement years was particularly fond of talking about non-local issues; how he kept studying an exchange of letters between Roosevelt and Churchill. Begin was interested in the collapse of the U.S.S.R, which he had predicted in his book *White Nights* some 40 years before. He also predicted that the first intifada, which broke out while he was in retirement, would not remain a local issue between Israel and the Palestinians. "Whatever they are doing to our people now will extend to the rest of the world within ten to fifteen years," he said. He was also very interested in the end of apartheid in South Africa and respected Nelson Mandela as ex-prisoner like himself.¹¹³¹ Begin’s interest in apartheid might raise some questions, such as whether he was aware of the fact that Israel also kept a large group of Palestinians in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip deprived of some basic rights.

Geula Cohen, a woman comrade from the Lehi and later a Knesset member who criticized Begin from the right, saw Begin's condition as a self-inflicted punishment; that he had eternally banished himself to his home prison in order to isolate himself from society.¹¹³² Her description fits what we know about depression, in which guilt feelings are a manifestation of self-directed aggression.

Kadishai said he doubted if anyone ever heard an insulting word from Begin. He never fought with anyone at a meeting and when stopped for a question by a reporter, hardly ever dismissed or ignored the person. If the reporter said, "Shalom, Mr. Begin," he would stop and ask: "How are you?"¹¹³³ Bathia Eldad also described


¹¹³² Cohen, 2001

¹¹³³ Kadishai, 1993
Begin's inability to let out aggression and how he held it inside over the years. He could express anger only in the political domain but not in the personal one. But in his depression, in which he abandoned his friends, he exhibited concealed aggression toward them by letting them feel bad.

Begin's adviser, Hecht, tells how Begin understood this part of his nature:

Once, I asked Begin why it took him so long time to dismiss those members of his Government who obstructed him on several key, important occasions, and why he was so nice to them? Begin then told me about a principle which he had learned from his parents. He said that his father, who was murdered by the Germans, was the bravest man, but very short-tempered; when he was furious, his anger immediately burst out. His mother, quite on the contrary, taught him that if he was angry, especially while evaluating a person, never to make a decision immediately, but to think it over and wait until receiving enough proof, and only then, having enough facts to know to make the right decision and to know it is final and not to be regretted later on, make it and stick to it. So, in my opinion, when Begin said: "I cannot any more!" this was, in accordance with his mother's advice, the final and definitive decision.

Begin deeply identified with his mother's cautious, restrained style of interpersonal relations. Begin adopted her tender, self-sacrificing nature in interpersonal relations, while his aggression was expressed through ideology and politics -- his way of identifying with his father.

Hecht also tells the story of how, one day, he brought Begin a book and Begin thanked him heartily, saying it was just the book he'd wanted to read. As Hecht was leaving, he noticed the same book in Begin's library and realized that Begin had not wanted to disappoint him. Hecht also says he cannot think of another example in history of a prime minister resigning wholly of his own volition. This was Begin restraining himself, following his mother's example.

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1134 Eldad, B., 1994

1135 Hecht, 1992

1136 Hecht, 1992
In the Gulf War in the early months of 1991, the U.S. led a large coalition in a war against Saddam Hussein's regime in order to free Kuwait from Iraqi conquest. Meanwhile, Iraqi Scud missiles hit Israel. Begin was in the hospital at this time, going from his room to the shelter wearing his gas mask and not being recognized by anyone. Kadishai brought Begin newspapers from Israel and abroad that praised his order to destroy the Iraqi nuclear reactor and acknowledged what a calamity could have occurred had Saddam possessed nuclear weapons. In response, Begin only smiled and said "That's how it is." Then his former finance minister, Yigal Hurwitz, collected one hundred signatures of Knesset members (out of 120) for a statement praising the operation (Peres, Weizman, most of the Arab Knesset members and a few Knesset members who were abroad did not sign) and had it delivered to Begin. It read: "Today, when Saddam Hussein is launching his missiles at the Israeli rear, we can imagine with terrible dread what would have happened were it not for this operation which brought about the elimination of the Iraqi nuclear program, or its setback by a decade. Therefore, we now wish to congratulate and thank you for this action and for the wisdom and courage you demonstrated then."

Begin sent Hurwitz a letter of thanks.

As a rule, Begin did not discuss political matters or party affairs with anybody and refused all requests of television or radio interviews. But on July 22, 1991 he gave a rare interview to Israel Radio in which he said that he strongly objected to trading the

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1135a Kadishai, 1993
1137 Nakdimon, 1993, p. 377
Golan Heights in a peace deal with Syria. The withdrawal from Sinai is not a precedent, he argued.\textsuperscript{1138}

Several months before his death, Begin met with Bader, an old comrade and a Likud Knesset member who was older than Begin and knew him from his student days in Warsaw. It was like a meeting of two lovers, says Kadishai. The two men embraced happily\textsuperscript{1137a}.

One last time, shortly before his death, Begin was shown on Israel TV coming out of the hospital wearing his robe. He looked very skeletal. Asked why he had secluded himself at home for so long without going out, he answered, stammering as he had never been heard to in the past: “It is true that I did not go out of my house, for personal reasons.”\textsuperscript{1139}

A month before his death, Begin wrote an introduction to Shlomo Nakdimon's book "First Strike," about the process that led to the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear reactor: "The book sets out to document the rescue mission carried out by our wonderful air force on the eve of the Shavuot holiday in 1981… Right after the operation, Israel stood alone in the face of a wave of criticism from the entire world… Three days after the collapse of the death reactor, the New York Times wrote: "The sneak attack on the reactor was an act of inexcusable and shortsighted aggression." Similarly, the Washington Post wrote: "The Israelis have committed a grave act." And

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{1138} Hurwitz, 2004, p. 234
  \item \textsuperscript{1137a} Kadishai, 1993
  \item \textsuperscript{1139} Channel 8, Israeli TV, Sept/Oct 2003, program on Begin
\end{itemize}
the Boston Globe called it: "a foolish act of a desperate politician." Nations that had cooperated in Iraq's construction of the nuclear reactor behaved the same way. Italy and France, on whose land Hitler's troops did as they pleased against the Jews, compounded this sin with their condemnation of Israel. Very few showed any understanding for Israel. Ten years had to pass for the world understood the importance of this action. All of a sudden, after the invasion of Kuwait… Had Israel not done what it did on June 7, 1981, the world would now be facing an Iraq armed with nuclear weapons…"

It was the same Menachem. Ideologically and intellectually, he had not changed; only the old spirit was missing. In the month before his death, he also wrote a letter to the prime minister's bureau chief, Yossi Ahimeir:

Dear Yossi,

Attached is a letter from Mrs… She is crying out for help. Please do whatever you can to help this suffering woman.

Yours, in friendship,
M. Begin

Begin died on March 9, 1992. Kadishai opened and read his will in front of Begin's three children -- Benny, Hassia and Lea. It contained just three lines. Having known for years what was in the will, Benny decided to hold the funeral the same day. It was not an official ceremony. It was a simple Jewish funeral without eulogies, a military honor guard or lying in state. News of Begin's death was broadcast at around seven or eight in the morning and information about the funeral was given at about noon. Despite the short notice, thousands of people came spontaneously from all over

\[\text{1140 Nakdimon, 1993, pp. 1-2}\]

\[\text{1141 Aizakson, 2003, p. 142}\]

\[\text{1140a Kadishai, 1993; Hurwitz, 2004, p. 238-239}\]

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the country. At Begin's funeral, there was a feeling of unity in Israel. Many people felt as if they had lost their father.\(^{1142}\)

Menachem Begin and his wife are buried, as he had requested, by the graves of Barazani and Feinstein on Jerusalem's Mount of Olives. He did not ask to be buried on Mount Herzl, near Jabotinsky, Raziel and other leaders of the state. His choice was to be buried near two Jewish fighters, one a Sephradi and the other an Ashkenazi, who had embraced each other and placed the grenade between them at their chests in order to deny the British the chance to carry out their execution, thus achieving a final victory of the united Jewish People.

\(^{1142}\) Naor, 1993, p. 347
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