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TREADMILL NEGOTIATION: THE ISRAELI – PALESTINIAN PEACE PROCESS

SUMMARY

In the years since the 1967 War, there have been at least 12 serious official initiatives to solve the Israeli – Palestinian conflict, with the involvement of international entities. None have been successful. Despite the abundance of literature on the negotiation processes between the parties, little is known about the perspective of the Israeli National Security Elite (hereafter: INSE), which is a group of top intelligence and planning officers who shape the Israeli national security strategy. The study is based on in-depth interviews with 30 individuals, including 26 members of the INSE, comprising, among others, heads of the Israeli negotiation teams, heads of the Israeli National Security Council, and heads of the Mossad. The qualitative interviews, supplemented by questionnaires, explore the following core hypothesis: The INSE believes that if a Palestinian state is formed, it may become a national security threat to Israel, which is a risk that Israel should not take. Therefore, based on this professional opinion of the security experts, the Israeli governments haven't enabled negotiations to reach a compromise point in which a peace agreement could be signed and a Palestine state could be formed.

This hypothesis was explored as one logic syllogism and in pieces, and was contradicted by the results of the research. A large majority of the INSE believe that a Palestinian state is a risk that Israel can and should take, because if a Palestinian state isn't formed, the threat to the national security of Israel will be even greater than the possible threats posed by a future Palestinian state. In addition, the research results stand in contradiction to the claim that the Jewish settlements in the West Bank are a contribution to the national security of Israel. A large majority of the INSE hold the opinion that the Jewish settlements in the West Bank are a liability to Israeli national security.

The research also revealed that there was an intentional "dynamic stagnation" in at least some of the Israeli -Palestinian negotiation processes that can be defined as 'Treadmill Negotiations'. The parties appeared to be actively running, because the negotiation activity served a goal, but they were intentionally staying at the same place because they didn't want to reach another destination. Some of the negotiation processes were held to reduce international pressure to negotiate, using a "red herring" tactic to buy time and avoid progress.

The study may be of interest to policy makers and to researchers in the fields of conflict resolution, conflict management, negotiation, security, peace building, Middle East studies, and especially those who are interested in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Those may find the study significant, because it provides an opportunity to get a closer look at the thinking process, insights, and best judgement of the INSE. The study includes first-hand detailed quantitative and qualitative information on the security aspects of some of the key aspects of the Israeli – Palestinian conflict, and the negotiation processes within it.