

Tel Aviv University
The Herzog Institute for Media, Politics and Society

‘No One to Talk To’
A Critical Look at the Linkage
Between Politics and the Media

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Ben Caspit, Raviv Druker, Daniel Bar-Tal, Daniel Dor

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A Word to the Reader

The July 2000 Camp David Summit is a pivotal event that even today – seven years after-the-fact – continues to occupy political leaders, decision-makers and opinion-makers of all stripes, journalists, political scientists and other academics, and it will no doubt continue to do so well into the future.

Yet, the content of this Conference entitled ‘No One to Talk To’ held in January 2005, that focused on the linkage between politics and the media, with its many new revelations and insights as to what took transpired at Camp David (and what appeared to have taken place) has become all the more germane today.

Now, despite the Hamas takeover of Gaza (and even perhaps because of it), and because negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians have practically been resumed, the question of ‘whether there is really a partner out there’ is no less critical than it was at the Camp David Summit in 2000. The better grasp we have of causes for the failures of this Summit, the better the chances that mistakes will not be repeated and opportunities missed. This is particularly true since the return of Ehud Barak to the political arena in such a pivotal role as head of the Labor Party and Minister of Defense.

The symposium provides an inside look at how spin – which has only grown to epidemic proportions in Israel on all news beats since Camp David and is very present in other countries, as well – operates among both spinners and spinned, not to mention its impact on the public and on politics as a whole.

Last but not least, the contents offer students of communication a very candid look inside the Israeli media – not only how the Israeli media functions (and the challenges any correspondent faces when covering a summit held ‘behind closed doors’) but also a rare peek at the ‘dynamics’ and the ‘tone’ of discourse among Israeli journalists and their sources (and other parties) that normally take place behind an ‘impermeable wall’ of the Hebrew language.

It was for all these reasons that it was decided to translate the contents of this symposium hosted by Tel Aviv University in Hebrew. The contents can benefit non-Israelis in a host of fields and positions, as food for thought for scholars and practitioners of news gathering and news management everywhere, and for ongoing discourse of the Israeli-Arab conflict and searches for a solution. Some of the comments made during the Conference about Syria have special significance, and in retrospect, appear almost prophetic regarding the outbreak of hostilities between Israel and Hizbollah during the summer of 2006 (the Second Lebanon War).

Prof. Yoram Peri
Summer, 2007

INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet contains verbatim text of a one-day symposium that took place on January 12, 2005 at Tel Aviv University, under the heading “‘No One to Talk To’ – a Critical Look at the Linkage between Politics and the Media”. The secondary heading of the meeting was “How was the Perception of the Failure of the Camp David Talks and the Outbreak of the Second Intifada Created and Disseminated and Implanted?”

The gathering was conducted at the initiative and under the organization of the Herzog Institute for Media, Politics, and Society and was chaired by the Institute’s director, Prof. Yoram Peri. The panel members were Gadi Baltiansky – former Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s spokesperson; political commentators Akiva Eldar (Ha’aretz), Ben Caspit (Ma’ariv) and Raviv Druker (Channel 10, who was at Camp David on behalf of the Military radio station Galei Tzahal); and Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal a political psychologist from Tel Aviv University who heads a research group that investigated the absorption of information regarding the Camp David Conference and the Intifada among the Israeli public. Dr. Daniel Dor from Tel Aviv University’s Department of Communication was not a member of the panel per se but contributed to discussion.*

At the epicenter of discussion stood the media spin – or conception that was dissimilated to the public first and foremost by Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and that ultimately deeply rooted itself in public perceptions at the close of the Camp David Summit. The spin held that the failure of talks was evidence that the Palestinian side was not interested in peace, that it was impossible to arrive at an agreement and that for the time being, there was no peace partner. According to this conception, Yassir Arafat had not come to Camp David to reach a settlement – the evidence being Arafat’s refusal of Barak’s very generous offer. On the contrary, Arafat came to Camp David in order to lay the groundwork to prepare his people for a violent confrontation with Israel. In the words that the former Prime Minister Barak habitually employed – Camp David “tore the mask off Arafat’s face”.

Examination of events shows that the anchors of this conception in factual realities are faulty, are not always correct or at least are highly debatable to say the least. (Was the most generous offer indeed the most generous offer? Was Palestinian violence indeed preplanned and organized prior to the Summit? And so forth). Nevertheless, the ‘spinned version’ of events was the one that deeply rooted itself in public perceptions. This was registered in the drop in public confidence in the very willingness of the Palestinian side to achieve a peace, in a significant change in political positions, and a subsequent change in the composition of the Israeli political system¹.

* Choice of discussants sought to bring together people who played an active role in the Camp David Conference, who fulfilled central roles in the creation, dissemination and absorption of media ‘spin’ to the public at the close of the Camp David Conference, as well as individuals who wrote about what transpired at Camp David. The makeup of the participants – an all male forum– is problematic from a gender standpoint. The organizers were aware of this shortcoming already in the organizational stage, but found no suitable solution. And perhaps at this juncture it would be fitting to note, even underscore: Indeed (as was raised in the course of discussion) Camp David was the work of all male players (except for Einat Gluska who fulfilled a secretarial role).

¹ See in this regard, the article by Daniel Bar-Tal

The questions at the center of discussion were, therefore – What was the source of the spin? How was one narrative sold and implanted in the public mind, and why this narrative in particular? And what led to the willingness of the media, and of the public-at-large to buy this spin that there was ‘no one to talk to’?

The discussants grappled with these questions, and discussion was conducted via interesting side issues, such as theoretical and normative evaluation of the ways news work was conducted: Was it carried out with unbearable frivolity, awesome reverence...or perhaps working under structural exigencies that required compromise? The ‘Amos (Malka) verses Amos (Gilad) Clash’² was viewed in retrospect, or perhaps without enough retrospect of what really happened. The role of news-gatherers in a situation where there is an absence of information was addressed, or in other words – How did things appear from the perspective of ‘our special correspondent to Camp David’?

In the course of discussion, again and again the core role of the concept ‘spin’ was raised in discussion of the media in Israel, and the word underwent further conceptual development employing terms such as ‘anti-spin’, ‘spinning’, and ‘spinology’. The discussants presented different approaches, at times very different from one another, on the question of spin.

Gadi Baltiansky, Barak’s spokesperson during the Camp David period, claimed that credit for the spin belongs entirely to Ehud Barak. The source of the spin was the ‘all or nothing’ principle which Barak brought with him to Camp David, and the approach that held: ‘If I don’t succeed in reaching an agreement, then no one can reach an agreement. That is – it’s a sign that the other side is not interested.’

After the Camp David Conference, parallel to the spin that held ‘there is no partner’, in reality contacts continued to take place between the parties. According to Baltiansky, the spin that said ‘there is no partner’ was not genuine spin at Camp David (in contrast, for instance, with the presentation of the Right of Return as if it was the core issue that brought down the Summit). In fact, the genuine spin began to trickle down and root itself only after Barak lost the elections. The perception that there’s ‘no one to talk to’ assisted Barak explain away his losses at the polls, and served the interests of Ariel Sharon who had been elected to head the Government in his stead. The media was ‘sucked into’ adopt this spin without asking questions. Subsequently, the public adopted the spin, as well.

Akiva Eldar clarified that spin has two polls – the spin doctor and the spin recipient. He held that spin would not have worked without the media surrendering. The media, which had supported Oslo and the peace process, felt ‘let down’. The media viewed Barak’s offer vis-à-vis Jerusalem as a revolutionary offer and Arafat’s refusal to accept it as gross ingratitude. The spin would not have succeeded had the Israeli public asked how it was possible that ‘Barak offered Arafat the most generous offer’ when not long after the Camp David Conference, two even better offers were proposed?

² see explanation on page 35

Ben Caspit explained that the word 'spin' had come to have a negative connotation, when in practice, everything in reporters' lives is, in the last analysis, spin. The prime minister's spin is news, what the prime minister wants to transmit to the public. The role of the reporter is to identify the interest behind the information released and to confirm the accuracy of the report. The media doesn't hide the truth, and there is no 'unbearable frivolity' in their work, he underscored; it just takes time for things to get out. The Israeli media has not learned to understand that there were several principles on which there was and there is 'a united Palestinian position'. Because of this blindness, concessions in Jerusalem were perceived by Israelis as far-reaching.

Raviv Druker noted the tendency to view certain processes as more sophisticated than they actually are. He claims that if one defines spin as transmitting an incorrect factual picture through the press to the public, then there was no spin at Camp David. What there was is that at the end of the Summit the public impression that was left was that 'there is no one to talk to'. Moreover, Camp David isn't Rashomon³. There is no dispute over the facts. The sources of the erroneous picture – the surprise among the Israeli media from the Palestinian response and the interpretation of the Israeli public – that says 'we offered the maximum we could' is founded on a prior assumption which turned out to be erroneous.

The Israeli media made mistakes at Camp David. It did not report on things that happened, because they didn't know enough, or due to a series of unfortunate coincidences. Nevertheless, the overall picture was correct. Druker argues that the Israel media doesn't have the machinery to learn from experience and give credit where credit is due and therefore the media will continue to make the same mistakes in the future.

Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal holds that there is a possibility that blaming Arafat for the failure of the Summit was planned and 'practiced' in advance, and that the collective memory – including the spin messages, was created immediately upon receipt of the information by the public. Thus, already in July 2000, 67 percent of the Israeli public believed that the guilt for the Camp David Summit's failure lay with the Palestinian side. The spin succeeded because it fell on fertile soil of the 'ethos of the conflict', and because it was voiced by the leader of the Peace Camp, who constituted what Bar-Tal labels "epistemic authority".

Bar-Tal argues that there is an erroneous conception in the way the public recalls events of the Intifada. The collective memory envelops primarily the suicide attacks within the Green Line. According to the narrative created, at the conclusion of the Camp David Summit, the Palestinians began to kill women and children through murderous terrorist acts. But Bar-Tal presents data showing that the Intifada had two distinct stages. In the first stage that went on for several months, Palestinian actions included ambushes on the roads in the West Bank on soldiers and Jewish settlers that were met by massive actions by IDF forces, and a ratio of 5 Palestinian casualties for every Israeli casualty. The suicide

³ Taken from the title of the 1950s vintage movie by Japanese film-maker Akira Kurosawa, 'Rashomon' or 'the Rashomon effect' signifies a situation in which the truth of an event is difficult to verify due to the conflicting accounts of different eye-witnesses.

attacks began months afterwards. Here as well, the data shows one picture and ‘the people go with another memory’.

Dr. Daniel Dor argues that the fundamental components of the spin, differences of opinion within Israel’s defense system and criticism within the Government on Ehud Barak’s behavior, was known to the correspondents. At the same time, as the upshot of a complex set of considerations, the media system chose to swallow the easily-digestible spin that held: ‘We offered everything, and there’s no one to talk to.’ Dr. Dor charges that the unbearable frivolity of new-gatherers’ work contributed its part to realities where thousands of people were killed. Journalism work is serious work and demands media people come to grips again with this comprehension. Structural elements make the possibility of changes in the way the media system operates very difficult, but there are other elements that are tied to the perceptions of people who head the system that nevertheless make room for some level of improvement in the performance of the media.

Among the participants there was general agreement that the Israel media at Camp David lacked understanding of the Palestinian side; the media did not cover the other side sufficiently, and did not understand why the other side was indeed prepared to be and able to be a partner (Baltiansky); the Israeli media was surprised by the response of the Palestinian side “because they were ‘programmed’ to live under certain basic assumptions for such a long time” (Druker). Akiva Eldar held that after the elections in the Palestinian Authority as well, the Israeli media were not connected to the other side, and that the lack of understanding of the other side results from a sense of superiority. On the other hand, Ben Caspit held that the current Israeli media is better than the Israeli media in the year 2000 – and ‘we’ve discovered the other side’.

Prof. Yoram Peri places the locus of discussion on the conception that was created in the wake of Camp David in a broader context – citing three concepts that led to catastrophic results, and at the close of the meeting, pointed out another conception now taking place vis-à-vis the Syrian track. Senior officials in the General Staff, and the Chief-of-Staff himself (i.e. in January 2005), believe that now is the time to reach a peace agreement with Syria; that there is no security risk from an agreement that may be possible and that it is possible to cut an easier deal due to Syrians present predicament. Such an agreement can impact on relations with Lebanon as well, and narrow Hezbollah’s ability to act against Israel. The conception that there is ‘no one to talk to’ on the Syrian track has not enjoyed any public discussion whatsoever, and this should be worrisome⁴.

The discussion milieu was very serious, but also amicable, ‘layback’, and at times entertaining. In addition, during deliberations, discussants were extraordinarily candid ‘putting all the cards on the table’. This impression was confirmed in an exchange after the close of the conference when one of the participants commented to me: “This was the kind of discussion that sometimes takes place among media people, but not in front of an audience and an open microphones.” Perhaps this was because of the distance of discussion from the question – What really happened’ after thousands of pages have already been

⁴ As indeed the events of the summer 2006 and the Israeli Hezbollah confrontation have proven.

written on this issue; due to the ‘novel situation’ that had emerged that perhaps pushed things onto a ‘personal’ plane after all the details had become accepted facts; and perhaps also thanks to the time element with four and half years perspective from events – distant enough, but not too distant. And of course, one cannot ignore the death of Yassir Arafat in November 2004 (just prior to the January 2005 gathering) that perhaps introduced a more tangible historic dimension and reduced to some extent the diplomatic-practical dimension in discussion of the 2000 Camp David Summit.

The discussants did not read prepared papers. By nature, however, off-the-cuff discussion is less organized and precise than written texts (although sometimes it can have more vitality and be more fascinating). It had to be edited or ‘cleaned-up’ to make the text readable and unencumbered. In treating the verbatim text I sought to preserve the original tone and flow of conversation with very little ‘help’.

The discussion was conducted as a symposium and speakers appear in the published form according to the chronology of their original presentation. In closing, I would like to thank Hilat Kadouri for her assistance in preparing the text.

Yechezkel Rachamim

Prof. Yoram Peri, Head of The Herzog Institute for Media, Politics and Society:

Between July 10-25, 2000 representatives of Israel, the United States and the Palestinian people gathered at Camp David for an important discourse. The Camp David Summit, which lasted two weeks, left in its wake a heavy shockwave. The narrative of what happened there is one of the most prominent, dramatic and fascinating Rashomon stories I know. The story has been told – in many books, articles and interviews – and has taken on very different forms from one another, depending on the speaker and the intended audience. It seems that no other international event has been written about by so many people, with so many conflicting reports from one another, in such a short time span.

Beyond this, the story of the Camp David talks is also a first rate story of spin. It is one of the most fascinating spins of the past decade, and it's a spin that succeeded. The conception that developed immediately in the wake of the failure of the talks continues to this day. It's a conception that the vast majority of the public in Israel and in other places, certainly in the United States, accept. The conception was coined first and foremost by the former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who said that Camp David 'tore the mask off (at another point he used the word 'removed from') Arafat's face'.

This statement presented the thesis – and perhaps there is no need to rehash it, considering the forcefulness with which it was received – according to which Arafat did not come to Camp David in order to make peace. In essence, he did not want to reach an agreement, but rather to prepare his people for war, for an armed struggle in preparation for the juncture when according to the Oslo Accords' timetable a permanent settlement agreement was supposed to be signed. The 'take' was that Arafat, in essence, prepared and planned the Intifada, that he directed it and that he managed it.

The impact of this perception was devastating. Most of the Israel public since Camp David to this day – depending on the point-in-time when the research was conducted, and what type of question was asked – thinks that the Palestinians are the ones who are guilty of 'detonating' Camp David, and that they did not fulfill their part in the Oslo Accords. The number who accept this narrative range from two-thirds to 90 percent of the public.

If one turns to the question of belief in the willingness or unwillingness of the Palestinians to make progress towards peace, then prior to the Camp David Conference – in 1999, two-thirds of the Israeli public held that the Palestinians were interested in peace. In the wake of the Conference, the percentage dropped to less than 50 percent.

Approximately two-thirds of all Israelis are of the opinion that there is a possibility and a chance for signing a peace agreement with the Palestinians, and that, indeed, the armed struggle between the two peoples will come to an end. Of course this proportion dropped, like the previous question I presented. But the issue is not only faith or lack of faith in the Palestinians, but also the dramatic political change in Israeli society domestically. This conception had considerable political significance vis-à-vis internal political positions. If at the outset of the 1990s some 36 percent of all Israelis defined themselves as Left-wing, and

39 percent defined themselves as Right-wing; since the year 2002, at the height of Palestinian suicide bombings, only 19 percent defined themselves as Left-wing, and almost 50 percent – or to be more exact 48 percent, defined themselves as Right-wing. We know, of course, the political consequences – the election results, which candidate was chosen as prime minister and so forth. That is, there was a tremendous shock here.

So how does one explain this shockwave? Prof. Itamar Rabinovich, in his book *Chavlei Shalom* (Birth Pangs of Peace) that was released in 2004, speaks about four perceptions that dissect what occurred at Camp David. One perception is the orthodox one, the perception that I label the ‘spin approach’. This is the perception that most of the Israel public accepts. It is the core perception that fixates the large majority of us. This perception is represented first and foremost by Ehud Barak. President Bill Clinton supported this outlook along with no small group of important people like Dennis Ross in his book, and Shlomo Ben-Ami in his.

The second approach Rabinovich labels ‘the revisionist perception’ presented above. It places the primary guilt for the failure of negotiations on Israel and its policies, criticizes the conduct of negotiations by the United States and presents the Palestinian side in a more positive light. This perception was inaugurated by Rob Malley in his article together with Husein Agha [in the *New York Times Review of Books* in August 2001] and was continued by Ron Pundak, Shaul Arieli and other Israelis, as well. Danny Rubinstein presents this approach very well in his booklet *Camp David 2000: Ma Be-Emet Karah Sham?* (Camp David 2000: What Really Happened There?).

The third approach is the perception that Rabinovich labeled the ‘determinist school’. This was the perception of those who criticized the Oslo Process from the start. The dominant figure whose name is tied to this approach is, of course, Brigadier General Amos Gilad, but there were other people with clout such as Henry Kissinger and Norman Podhoretz.

The fourth approach Rabinovich labeled ‘the eclectic approach’ – because it is less defined. A bit more Israelis to be found there, such as Yossi Beilin, Gilad Sher, Menachem Klein and others.

So these are the four outlooks. Beyond that, one could cite the engaging and important supplementary ‘take’ on things of Daniel Dor from the Tel Aviv Communication Department, which isn’t mentioned in Rabinovich’s book. The first book that Dor wrote is *Itonut tachat Hashpa’ah* [Press under the Influence] and the second is *Me-achorei Chomat Magen* (Behind a Defensive Wall) which treats (as its name indicates) events of [the] Defensive Shield Campaign. I’ll read a passage from *Itonut tachat Hashpa’ah* on this topic:

“...The portrait of the Israeli press, as it emerges from this book is the image of a press under influence: a press operating under the influence of fear, and the influence of rage, and the influence of hatred, and the influence of ignorance, and first and foremost – under the influence of a massive propaganda system that Prime Minister Ehud Barak and the

⁵ See “Camp David – The Tragedy of Errors” at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/14380>

Defense System's people operated in the course of the entire month, and even afterwards. Under the combined impact of all these parties, the Israel press provided its readers with a one-dimensional biased and erroneous news picture, of the course of events – a picture that while it was in keeping with the propaganda objectives of Ehud Barak, and fed repeatedly the collective sense of distress of the reading public – reflected the face of things in reality only in a very feeble manner: According to this 'take', a rational and brave prime minister organized a scientific experiment, and examined once and for all the readiness of Yassir Arafat to arrive at a peace with Israel; and the results of this test were crystal clear, unmistakable, and clear to all for indeed, our worst fears were realized; we don't have, at this juncture, a peace partner. The Palestinians, and like them the Arabs of Israel as well, are still not ready." (pages 20-21).

In recent years, many new publications by Israelis have been released, the large majority of which support a more critical position, ask tough questions and cast shadows on accepted conventions. Thus, the questions we presented under the heading 'a critical look at the linkage between politics and the press' is: How did it happen? How did it happen that one perception rooted itself so well, was so well received and became so fixed in the Israeli public mind, in such a manner that other voices are heard only in small circles and nowhere beyond that?

The importance of the issue before us extends beyond examining the past four years. We've already been saturated once by preconceptions, preconceptions that developed in the wake of the Six Day War in 1967 and that led to the catastrophe of the Yom Kippur War in 1973. I'll close discussion with a word about a new preconception that exists today and still isn't talked about, and that is liable to wrought damage that will be no less massive.

Our deliberations today will deal with the conception that developed in the wake of this Rashomon. For this purpose, we have invited to this discussion people who were active participations in the conception – disseminated it, sold it, bought it and asked question later, as well: Gadi Baltiansky who at the time was Prime Minister Ehud Barak's spokesperson, and three commentators: Akiva Eldar from Ha'aretz, Ben Caspit from Ma'ariv and Raviv Druker from Channel 10. Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal, who sat for over two years in a forum of academicians who dealt with researching this phenomenon, will provide us with some findings from the ideas he and his colleagues in the group raised vis-à-vis the phenomenon.

The order of discussion will be such that each speaker will speak for 10 to 12 minutes, so we can create a discussion that goes round-the-table several times, and not just hear lectures. The first speaker will be Mr. Gadi Baltiansky. Be my guest...

Gadi Baltiansky, Spokesperson of former Prime Minister Ehud Barak:

Thank you Dr. Peri for your invitation. I think this is a very important and timely discussion – even a bit tardy. I won't tell Yoram why others didn't do this earlier, and why one needed to wait so long to discuss this, but I think that the more people who will follow his lead, the better off all of us will be.

I want to open with a preceding remark. It may be that those with sharp ears among the people present will hear a critical note in my talk towards my former boss, so I want to say to his credit that I am convinced that Camp David itself was not 'spin'. There are those who criticize Barak that he even ended up there, charges that he came up with the Camp David concept in order to prove from the start that we don't have a partner – that is, when one removes the mask one sees the rejectionist face of the Palestinian people. I deny this charge. I think that Barak truly wanted to reach an agreement, that he truly intended to reach an agreement and that he assumed that he had a reasonable chance of reaching an agreement. It may be that this assumption was based on things that are more germane or less germane, but his assumption was that he had the possibility and he had the ability of reaching an agreement, and of arriving at a permanent settlement as well, before a genuine existential danger to the Zionist Endeavor presented itself, and this was surely in Israel's national interest. I give him credit for this, without any reservations.

At the opening of my comments I want to return to a certain picture, a picture – literally and figuratively, that is a televised picture. On the last day of Camp David, on July 25th, 2000 – deliberations ended and the delegation left the Camp David facility and turned to the press. The correspondents gathered at the hotel where Barak's press conference was supposed to be held. I was busy there with last-minute preparations, including the logistics, and I remember that I went to some room to bring something. In the room the TV was on, and on the screen was the face of Saab Erekat, the Minister of Negotiation Affairs of the Palestinian Authority. They asked Erekat, about Camp David and he gave the following reply: 'It was an excellent summit. True we didn't arrive at an agreement, but who could assume that within two weeks we would arrive at an agreement on all the issues, including the issues with refugees and with Jerusalem, which nevertheless are issues that had not really been deliberated before this. There was no real preliminary negotiations and particularly not on these issues.' Erekat said: 'We didn't arrive at an agreement, but a significant breakthrough was achieved. Israel conceded for the first time on issues that were a total taboo for it in the past – and he meant the Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, in the discussion of division of Jerusalem, for example – and we, the Palestinians, also conceded things that for use constituted a red line, a taboo. Thus for instance, the Green Line of 1967 is no longer holy, the Palestinians are prepared to annex to Israel Jewish neighborhoods beyond the Green Line 'in East Jerusalem'. Under certain conditions, even Jewish settlements along the Green Line as well. Indeed, a breakthrough.' He added saying: 'An excellent start, a very positive development, we need to continue deliberations, perhaps in the direction of convening another summit to genuinely bring to an end the conflict between us' and concluded 'Let's continue the work.'

I watch these sights, and I hear the voices and I know that Ehud Barak is about to say five minutes from now. I say that easily this spin –Erekat’s spin – could have been ‘sold’ to the public had Barak said more or less the same thing, and if Clinton had said similar things. I assume that the press – and correct me here my fellow discussants, if I am wrong – would have embraced this. It sounded logical, not something groundless. There truly was progress. It really is too bad we didn’t reach an agreement, and foundations for progress truly were laid, and there truly was a breakthrough on certain issues...so ‘let’s go ahead’.

Ehud Barak chose to act differently. With all due respects, full or partial, to the spokespersons and press advisors, to Barak’s official spokespersons and his external advisors, I don’t think that any one of us deserves the ‘credit’ for this spin. There was only one spin doctor and his name is Ehud Barak, and he deserves all the credit – for better or for worse, let each person decide themselves, based on his or her own balance sheet. But, the credit is all his.

Ehud Barak didn’t invent this there. Thirteen months earlier – twelve and a half months to be exact – and there is an importance to the time dimension –immediately after he was elected to head the Government, Ehud Barak made a visit to the United States, his first visit as prime minister. He said: ‘I intend not to leave one stone unturned on the road to peace. Within fifteen months we’ll know whether we have an agreement or we don’t have an agreement.’ Why did he say ‘fifteen months’ in July of 1999? Because fifteen months from July, elections were taking place in the United States, and that would be the end of the Clinton Era. It would be all over. Slowly he arrived at the conclusion that fifteen months were a bit overblown because the Congress, in his opinion, wouldn’t be functioning right up until November 7, 2000 elections, and the President would become what is called a ‘lame duck [president]’, and therefore in the summer – more or less July-August – was the limit. That was where the timetable ran out.

They say about Ehud Barak that he’s an expert in taking apart watches and putting them back together. More than that, I think he was an expert in taking apart calendars and putting them together. Everything with him worked according to timetables if you remember – according to the calendar...and that was his calendar for the year. There, in essence, is the where the spin brought to the public was born, and began to reach the public in July 2000.

And here I want to say, in response to the question – How was the spin born?...that it was ‘born in sin’. This spin was born in sin – but not the sin of fraudulence, or a lie or a bluff. In my eyes, Barak did not try to deceive anyone and did not try to lie. Rather, he was guilty of the ‘sin of arrogance’. In essence, he was saying: ‘Look, I am going to try to reach an agreement. If I can’t succeed in reaching an agreement, it’s a sign it is impossible to reach an agreement. If this is what happens, it’s not a sign that the other side is not prepared to reach agreed-upon conditions with me, but rather – that the other side isn’t interested at all in reaching an agreement of any kind. It is not interested in reaching any agreement, under any conditions, because if it was prepared to do so I would have convinced the other side to reach an agreement.’ And this is in keeping with the perception that Barak always held that said: ‘Give me an hour with Arafat in a room and I’ll already make an agreement. Give

me a Summit with Arafat and I'll know not only if an agreement is possible, but whether he is at all interested.'

In advance, in the days prior to departure to Camp David, when we prepared the alternative messages in the prime minister's office – and one always prepares this kind of thing – there was a certain page that talked about what would happen if the summit succeeded. There was such a possibility and we prepared messages. How to 'sell' the agreement and the painful concessions to the Israeli public. There were detailed pages. And there were other pages that said what would happen if the summit failed. At no stage did Barak want us to prepare messages that said: It failed because on this or that point where there is a gap. This was not the gist of the intention, but rather – 'We have removed the mask'; 'It is impossible to reach an agreement because they are not interested in one. If Arafat had been interested, we would already have arrived at an agreement.'

The evening before the flight, we sat with Barak at home. We were a skeleton team, and we spoke about media matters – about what things could be done at the Camp David Conference and all sorts of things like this. Again Barak presented the 'all or nothing' doctrine, [that] either we reach an agreement...or we won't reach an agreement and so it's impossible to reach an agreement. I remember that I asked him what if it's in the middle? What if there will be progress? I remember that I said something that didn't materialize afterwards: 'And what if the Administration would send Dennis Ross for some sort of additional visit to the region, for a shuttle diplomacy trip.' Barak was holding a pencil at that moment, and he said to me: 'Look, I'm holding this pencil, you see? I'm holding it until the agreement. Until the Camp David Conference. If there will be an agreement, this pencil will sign it. If there isn't an agreement, I'll take my hand off it and the pencil will fall, and that's the end of things. There is no third route.'

That was in essence the 'spin' that he expressed at that same press conference at the end of Camp David when he said "There is no partner". Incidentally, no one asked him 'There isn't a partner for what?' So let's say we would have replied that 'Israel did not want to commit suicide, though I imagine a partner for this could be found'... The question is why there is a partner and why there isn't. He didn't say 'There isn't a partner for a united Jerusalem'. He didn't say 'There isn't a partner for the security arrangement we need'. He didn't say 'There isn't a partner for this particular arrangement'. He said 'There isn't a partner for peace, at all. 'There isn't a partner. Period.'

So the battle began between spin and reality. After Camp David, according to the spin, there is no partner and nothing can be done, but on the other hand there were realities. What did realities say? In reality, Barak hosted Arafat at his home in Kochav Yair for an intimate supper after Camp David. Arafat kissed Barak's daughter's forehead. They have continued the negotiations in Sharm el Sheikh and in Paris. There were also genuine talks, negotiations in the United States. Israel made more concessions than what it was willing to make at Camp David, and there was President Clinton. Barak almost met with Arafat the very day before the elections.

And in the midst of this reality, there was also the reality of growing and intensifying violence. There was violence and Barak was caught between the spin, and the realities in which he continued to make progress in political negotiations with this non-partner. And I come and argue that, in essence, the genuine spin trickled down and rooted itself after the Israeli elections when Barak became a former prime minister. He had to explain his loss, and it was surely convenient for the more hawkish Sharon who won the election. It fit well with realities, too – where there was a lot more violence with the suicide attacks that began. So the media were also ‘sucked into’ this spin that said ‘no one to talk to’ and they didn’t ask questions.

In conclusion of this part, I want to say one word as to the moral. The only charge I maybe have against the media on this issue is – it doesn’t cover the other side enough. The media doesn’t understand what’s happening on the Palestinian side. For our part, we made a generous offer. It doesn’t matter how generous it really was. In Israeli eyes it was generous compared to what we thought before. From a Palestinian perspective our offer was insufficient. It wasn’t enough for any Palestinian leader. We didn’t sufficiently understand what the other side thought, what the other side was prepared to do and why the other side can, indeed, be a partner. Maybe this became apparent after this, a lot later, when Amnon Lipkin-Shahak – who was at Camp David, and at the Taba Talks and who was very close to Barak –afterwards, together with others crafted the Geneva Accord Initiative⁶

Suddenly we saw what the Palestinians were ready to do. But in Camp David we didn’t know what they were prepared to do, and it was very easy to be seduced by the phraseology – ‘no partner’. The lesson for all of us here, first of all the journalists is not to ‘buy-into’ spokespersons’ spins so fast. But consumers of the media also need to ask the logical, simply logical questions. If there’s no partner, then one needs to ask – ‘partner for what?’ And if there is no one to talk to, then one needs to ask ‘no one to talk to about what?’ These logical questions can lead us to very different outcomes from the outcomes reflected on the pages of the newspapers and other media after Camp David.

Akiva Eldar, political commentator, Ha’aretz:

Gadi [Baltiansky] has thrown out the challenge to the media in his closing comments. He used the past tense in his criticism...that the media didn’t check what the Palestinians are saying, what the Palestinians were thinking and what the Palestinians were offering. I would change the tense and say that the media today, as well [doesn’t do this]. So this discussion is important after the presidential election on the West Bank and Gaza [because we] continue ‘[business] as usual’. The expectations that we build around the election of Abu-Mazen⁷ and around the pending Disengagement from Gaza scheduled for August 2005 remind me of the expectations we built around Oslo in 1993, and after Camp David and during Camp David. These things are linked because spin has two poles: There is the

⁶ A six-point ‘blueprint for peace’ in the form of a grassroots petition – the People’s Voice – initiated and formulated in Geneva by former GSS director Ami Ayalon and the president of Al-Quds University in Jerusalem

⁷ on January 9th, days before the symposium and three days before Mahmoud Abbas took office

‘spinner’ and there is the ‘spinned’. Barak couldn’t have done his spinning if we hadn’t agreed with, or capitulated to these spins.

I’m using the first person plural ‘we’ to be polite... Actually, I think that sitting here on this dais are three journalists who are exceptions in this thing: Raviv in his book *Harakiri*, Ben Caspit who published a very important investigative piece on how the Second Intifada broke out, and myself I think. I didn’t really talk to my colleagues, and I didn’t conduct heart-to-heart talks on this but...the three of us share the same frustration that we were unable to create the anti-spin. Despite the things we wrote and said, we somehow feel detached from the pack...and in the worst case we’re simply ‘self-hating Jews’ (that’s the kind of e-mails I get).

A few months ago, in June 2004, I published an investigation into ‘there’s no partner’ – how this sprouted, how this was born – and I interviewed Brigadier General Amos Malka⁸. Luckily for me, Amos Malka was wrong (and now I’m telling you this for the first time): For some reason he thought we were conducting an interview off-the-record, although the tape recorder was on the table. I was really lucky because if it hadn’t been so, I couldn’t have had a front page headline ‘Amos verse Amos’. True, I interviewed Matti Steinberg – the fellow who for many years was the Special Advisor on Palestinian Affairs, the individual who knew the most about the Hamas and the Fatah, and wrote his doctorate on the Palestinian National Liberation Movement, and worked with two heads of the General Security Services (GSS) – with Ami Ayalon and with Avi Dichter.

True, I also talked to Colonel Ephraim Lavie who was headed the Palestinian Desk at the Military Intelligence Wing (he wrote situation evaluations on the Palestinians) but during my research these two people said that this business ‘that Barak offered a generous offer that the Palestinians would have to accept but didn’t accept’ – never was. I won’t go into this – a large part appears in the booklet by Ron and Shaul Arieli that was mentioned here. Just a few days ago I saw that a booklet by Prof. Tanya Reinhart also just appeared called *Shkarim al Shalom* (Lies about Peace). You can read the details there, and also the things that we wrote.

But, all these testimonies wouldn’t have been sufficient without the testimony of the Chief of the Military Intelligence Wing Amos Malka. This interview with Amos Malka provided the headline and put the issue on the public agenda after it seemed that it had already been buried. In the wake of this Dan Margalit labeled me ‘Far Left’ – because Barak was ‘Deep Left’, so I was ‘Far Left’ – and others accused me of all sorts of allegations and attacked me. The media weren’t prepared to accept the story that I had exposed. Now I’ll tell you

⁸ “(Amos Gilad) is the one who provided Sharon’s predecessor, Ehud Barak, with the professional backing for the theory that ‘there’s no Palestinian partner’, the core of which is: Barak presented Arafat with a generous offer and when the latter refused to accept it, [this] revealed his true face – a terrorist who seeks to destroy the State of Israel (...). Thanks to the role he played and his salesmanship, Gilad’s conception penetrated every household in Israel. But behind closed doors of a few homes, including some of the senior officials in the Intelligence Wing, different appraisals even opposite ones were constantly being whispered. Amos Malka, who had been head of the [Military] Intelligence Wing in the middle of 1990 to the end of 2001, and was the direct superior of Gilad, was one of them. His ‘take’ was contrary to that of Gilad.” (Akiva Eldar, *Ha’aretz*, June 11, 2004)

something odd. I think that the media did this out of good intentions: The media want peace terribly, and Barak also wanted peace terribly. He wasn't planning to fail. He wanted to succeed as a prime minister, as a leader...but he also wanted peace – only he didn't know how to go about it.

I'll give you an example from a story Gadi surely remembers. I appeared on a similar panel at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, and I raised the question...this was before Camp David: 'What Barak stood to offer the Palestinians on the Jerusalem issue?' I said that to the best of my knowledge he was going to offer the Palestinians the neighborhoods populated by Palestinians in East Jerusalem. I didn't know about the Old City, but I said that these neighborhoods he was prepared to give over. Then the Voice of Israel thought it good and proper to quote me the next day on the 7 AM News, and Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert responded and went on the attack. So the radio turned to Gadi who at the time was Barak's media advisor and asked his response. If I remember correctly, Gadi was given an order to deny it...'that there was no such thing' – right? But somehow he extricated himself from this...

(Gadi Baltiansky: Yeah, 'there was no such thing'... [Laughter from the audience])

Right, 'there was no such thing'... Several weeks later, Dr. Menachem Klein – who dealt a lot with these issues – told me that he had spoken on the radio on a rather 'esoteric' program about the need to reach an agreement along those lines – that is, more or less on the same lines that Ehud Barak had presented: 'What was Palestinian to the Palestinians – What was ours to us' more or less... Menachem Klein told me (by the way, he is a signer of the Geneva Accord Initiative) that he received a phone call which I didn't remember if it was from Gadi, from Barak himself or from Gadi on behalf of Barak. They told him: 'Listen, it's very important what you are doing. Continue to do so.' But at the same time Barak continued to deny that he was willing to make concessions on Jerusalem. He faced a genuine dilemma (I find myself suddenly Ehud Barak's advocate here, which is interesting...).

Dialectically, I'll try and put it this way: When asking Barak, for example 'Why offer the Palestinians 66 percent at the beginning, then 77 percent' – he had this system where each time he raised things by 11 percent – 'why did you raise things each time?' After all, Abu-Mazen said to you: 'Come-on, offer from the top more or less of what exists between Beilin – Abu-Mazen and we'll close the deal, forget the Middle Eastern bazaar.'

Yet Barak had an explanation. He said: 'Listen, I had to demonstrate to my coalition partners that I made all the efforts, and I couldn't do it. That is, I had to put on a show that I'm trying to reach a better deal, and it didn't work.' One can explain it this way. The same goes for the Jerusalem issue. He couldn't play all his cards at the start, to ensure his coalition wouldn't fall apart. Also, vis-à-vis the Palestinians: He couldn't affirm that he was willing to divide Jerusalem in the way I described, because with that 'in their pocket' the Palestinians could then ask for more.

Just so everyone won't 'gang-up' on Barak – in order to keep things boring... I have to say: There were extenuating and understanding circumstances. And I'll say it again: All this was out of a desire to achieve peace. However, Gadi said that Ehud Barak said: 'Give me an hour and I'll sit with them and I'll finish things with them.' Barak said more than that: 'Give me an hour and I'll explain to them what's good for them...' It was not just a matter of cutting a deal, rather he knew better than Hafez Assad what was good for Assad, and better than Yassir Arafat what was good for Arafat. Barak with his 'timepiece dismantling' mindset, said: 'If Assad or Arafat is the one taking the watch apart, I'll put 'um back together this way, and therefore it just can't be that they won't understand.'

The problem – for many in the media as well, and the public, as well as Barak– is the same problem that Gadi spoke of. That is, the lack of understanding of the Palestinian side. It doesn't spring from stupidity or laziness. It arises out of a sense of superiority: 'We hold all the cards. They should say thanks that we give them something.' I think this attitude has accompanied us since 1967, if not prior to that.

Spin is nothing new. We wouldn't have gotten to 250,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank without the spins in their regard over all the years. Just now I published, together with Idit Zartal a book on the Jewish settlers where we tell the story. So 'spin' wasn't born yesterday.⁹

The most dangerous spin we face today is that Abu-Mazen will give us a better deal than Arafat. Then, when he doesn't offer us a better deal, we'll be disappointed and say 'all the Arabs are the same', and then there really won't be a partner... That is, the more they tell us there isn't a partner, in the end there really isn't a partner because after Abu-Amar [Yassir Arafat's nom de guerre], after Abu-Mazen, and Abu-Ala [Ahmed Qurei] who was once prime minister, 'we're out of Abus'... So don't let them tell you stories that Abu-Mazen is going to make concessions on the refugee issue. Read a lot. Perhaps the best antidote against spinning is to read and to learn. To read what's written in the Arab League's peace initiative of March 28, 2002. To remember that Abu-Mazen was sent by Arafat to present this initiative To read what it says! And it says "achievement of a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with [U.N. General Assembly Resolution] 194"¹⁰

The phrase "be agreed upon" is the key. That is, 'be agreed upon by Israel'. Abu-Mazen will not give up the Right [of Return]. He'll waive implementation of the right in the context of the State of Israel, within the borders of the State of Israel. Don't let them tell you stories and afterwards tell you: 'Abu-Mazen misled us.' There are decisions that are

⁹ Apparently referring to 'spin' such as application of 'military requirements' clauses as justification for requisitioning private Arab land for Jewish settlements in the early stages of Jewish settlement, and ongoing claims that settlers' presence fulfill a critical 'defense function' for Israel. See *Adonei H'aaretz: Hamitnachamim ve-Midinat Yisrael 1967-2004* (Lords of the Land: The Settlers and the State of Israel 1967-2004), Kenneret-Zmora-Bitan Publishers. Apparently referring to 'spin' such as application of 'military requirements' clauses as justification for requisitioning private Arab land for Jewish settlements in the early stages of Jewish settlement, and ongoing claims that settlers' presence fulfill a critical 'defense function' for Israel.

¹⁰ See <http://www.al-bab.com/arab/docs/league/peace02.htm>.

obligatory for the Palestinian National Council – the 1988 Algiers Resolutions¹¹ are binding for every Palestinian. There isn't a Palestinian who can turn his back on these decisions. If we are interested in peace, it's possible to get from the Palestinians the following deal – more or less: 1967 borders with exchange of territory 1:1. What the Palestinians are saying, 22 percent of Palestine – all of the West Bank and Gaza – must be theirs

Keep in mind one thing, and I'll conclude with this: The spin couldn't have taken hold if the public had asked itself all the time one simple question: 'How is it possible that we claim that Barak gave Arafat the most generous offer that no other Israeli has given when everyone who reads a newspaper knows that several months afterwards Clinton put a much better proposal on the table?' By simple logic, there was a more generous proposal than July 2000 at Camp David. There were even two. So what we suggest first of all is not to rely on the press, and if you already rely on the press, choose the most suitable papers.

Ben Caspit, political commentator, Ma'ariv:

I did some homework in preparation for the discussion this evening. I was at Camp David as a correspondent and yesterday I returned to 'the scene of the crime', to the Ma'ariv morgue, and leafed and browsed through three thick volumes from July 2000. I'll read to you a small sampling of headlines from the front page of Ma'ariv.

I labeled Ehud Barak as he set off for Camp David "a Japanese kamikaze pilot". Then items begin to appear in the press. In addition to Gadi Baltiansky – without questioning his credentials here, other gentlemen also got involved in Barak's spinology – Yossi Koren, Eldad Yaniv, Moshe Ga'on navigating things from Tel Aviv, and the others from Camp David.

On Friday July 14th I wrote, I think it was in the headline: "Barak Offered Free Passage to the Mosques on the Temple Mount." On Monday, the 16th of July, Camp David opened and 200,000 Right-wing demonstrators flooded – as could be expected – Rabin Square in Tel Aviv. At the demonstration Ehud Olmert warned: Barak is liable to divide Jerusalem. As we all remember, a year earlier Olmert declared in Barak's campaign broadcasts that Barak would preserve Jerusalem as a united city. Ariel Sharon, head of the Opposition, told Barak: 'If you don't come back with an agreement, we'll back you.' So everyone ends up at Camp David: 'Buzi' [Itzhak] Herzog, today the Minister of Housing, Abram Berg, Amram Mitzna – then Mayor of Haifa. Colette Avital, Yuli Tamir, Yoni Koren, Moshe Ga'on, Tal Zilberstein, Meirav Persy-Tzadok, Gadi Baltiansky, Eldad Yaniv. And all of them are stirring things up and creating the right spin at every given moment. And then in the midst of deliberations, Clinton is caught saying the sentence: "Oh my, it's so tough, even more than Ireland."

¹¹ The Algiers 'declaration of Palestinian statehood' on the basis of UN Resolution 181 – the 1947 Partition Plan

It's here that the headlines emerged that "Jerusalem is the kernel of dissension". On July 19, 2000 I publish in Ma'ariv the headline that lots of people have forgotten already. But I haven't forgotten it and that's because I'm already two decades in journalism. This was the most important of the headlines, the Ma'ariv headline saying: "Barak Offered Arafat Two of the Quarters in the Old City in Jerusalem." I could easily fit into everyone's theory if I would come out and say that this was spin that Gadi Baltiansky put out for me, in order to begin to prepare the public and afterwards to place the blame on Arafat...but it wasn't. The source was of all places in East Jerusalem, and of all things, Palestinian. This source told me on the phone that this was what he heard from Camp David.

Now, get a hold on what journalism amounted to at Camp David. We weren't at Camp David. We ran around the malls around Camp David and bought all sorts of bargains on clothes. Everything inside the Camp was under a smoke screen and the ambiguity of disinformation. And suddenly, someone I trust says to me that he's heard that 'Jerusalem is on the table': The Jewish and Armenian Quarters remain with us, and the Muslim and Christian Quarters will be transferred to Arafat's hands. And when I hear this, I can't believe my ears. And I can't forget the situation that followed: There I am, standing at the entrance to Kmart – and I think you know what Kmart's like because people here are cracking up with laughter – but that's what actually happened there. I call Yossi Beilin in Tel Aviv and I say to him: 'Listen, this is what I heard, Tell me whether this makes sense.' And Yossi Beilin says to me that it's not logical, but in the heat of battle and the heat of negotiations, he wouldn't fall off his chair if it became apparent in retrospect that that's what happened.

I pass the news on to Ma'ariv, and to my astonishment instead of 'sitting' on the story while getting more information Ma'ariv's editors publish it as the front page headline. And they even stick in an aerial photo of the Old City divided into four parts for good measure, as if, indeed, the only option still open to us was to 'cut and run'. And the next morning, no one denied the news report, which led me to understand that I was on the right track.

One day, on July 20th, five days before the collapse of the talks, Barak warned from within Camp David: "The Palestinians will bear the tragic consequences." He said "Arafat will miss me yet." (I think at least for now, this is true.) Barak said Arafat's conduct of negotiations at Camp David wasn't sincere. The Ma'ariv headline read: "Barak to Clinton: Arafat's to Blame." And this accusation Gadi Baltiansky does spread around. It's not hard facts: Barak has hunkered down in his cabin. This was when Clinton went to the G-8 Conference in Okinawa Japan and left Palestinians and Israelis for maybe three days high-and-dry. And Barak? It becomes apparent that it's impossible to enter his cabin. He's reading a history book. He's studying Ben-Gurion's philosophy. The 'suffering leader' is preparing us – for better or for worse – for one catastrophe or another.

On July 24th Ma'ariv's headline reads: "Waiting for Arafat's Answer." The headlines of all the papers speak of a situation where everyone is waiting for Arafat's answer: If he says 'yes' – we live, if he says 'no' – we die. And there is still the last proposal that begins to surface that same day, or the next: Offering Arafat religious sovereignty over the Temple Mount. And then there is this business of Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and Shlomo Ben-Ami

who pressure Barak to make further concessions. By the way, it was spin. Meirav Persy-Tzadok and Haim Mendel-Shaked took minutes. If you remember, they leaked it to the press, Gadi. So Barak tried to expel them from Camp David.

On July 25th things exploded. All the Israeli analysts and journalists were talking about how Arafat insisted on the Old City and that's why things blew up. And in reply to what we heard from Gadi at the start of this symposium about Saab Erekat - saying there had been a breakthrough - Barak announces that 'everything that had been agreed upon was null and void'¹². Barak didn't know that a year down the road his senior advisor Gilad Sher, would publish in a book everything that Saab Erekat promised: 'We'll sign the agreement by September 13th' and 'we've only begun'. Then something happens that in my opinion at least, is the key to the entire story: The Ma'ariv front page headline reads – "Clinton: Barak Went Farther than Arafat." In other words, Arafat is to blame. The ball is in Arafat's court. He'll decide if there will be violence or there won't be violence.

On July 27th, after the Summit adjourned, I published a two-page spread in Ma'ariv on pages 2 and 3 with all the secret details of deliberations. What Arafat was offered in Jerusalem: Two cities, Jerusalem and parallel to it – El-Kuds containing all the Arab neighborhoods, two of the Quarters [of the Old City], access to the Temple Mount. I'll never forget how they explained this to me: He'd (Arafat) travel from his little 'hole' in Ramallah up to the Temple Mount in a secure corridor... He wouldn't see even one Israeli policeman – or one single Israeli Border Policeman. And that is how more or less the story ended in that month of July – a month so pregnant with tragedy for all of us.

Now I'll move to a few comments in the wake of things said at the symposium. As for Press under the Influence – and I'm very fond of Danny Dor: Gentlemen, all of the press is 'under the influence'. There isn't any press that isn't 'under the influence'...and I want to be 'under the influence' as it is in Israel, and not like in the Palestinian authority, and not like in Cairo. And you know what? Not even like in the USA. We see the American press in the course of the Iraq War and after the attack on the World Trade Center. I think they could learn a thing or two from us, and that's being modest because we are very far from being perfect. Danny Dor spoke of fear, rage, hatred and ignorance that impact on the press as if these things are dominant in the press in Israel. Well, the main thing that impacts on the press in Israel – and I'm sorry to say this – is not to miss the next big scoop. Consequently, all of us ran around Camp David, all of us trying to bring to our editors the Next Big Thing. To find the next spin in line.

Now, something about spin: Everything is spin. Spin has somehow fallen into disrepute, become a curse word. Everything in the end analysis is spin. The minute it is the prime minister's spin – it's news. This is the Prime Minister's spin on things. This is what the Prime Minister wants to broadcast to the public today. Just as after every news item there is a source who leaks the story, and just as every such source also has vested-interests, the

¹² In the course of negotiations, the Israeli delegations had clarified that everything agreed upon to that date – all the Israeli concessions, would be null and void if Camp David ended without an agreement. It was 'take it or leave it' or a 'package deal' and in any future negotiations, issues would revert back to Square One. In practice, this was not so and there were more far-reaching proposals after the close of the summit.

role of the journalist is to identify the vested-interest, and most important – to verify whether the ‘leak’ is correct or not.

As for the core reason we are here today, let me say a few words: Ehud Barak’s original sin – Gadi said this, and I want to put it into sharper focus – was the inability to reach that conclusion that he should never-ever have gone to Camp David. Let me take you back now to the month of June 2000. The first headline that I found was published as deliberations opened. It read: “Arafat to Clinton: “I am not a negotiator, I’m a decision-maker.” To call Arafat for marathon negotiations of two, three or four weeks was a first rate folly – a step that only an arrogant man so filled with his own self-importance there’s no room for anyone else, such as Ehud Barak could do.

If Barak had only listened to Abu-Mazen who came to his home in Kochav Yair with Yossi Ginosar a week – two weeks (I don’t remember exactly) before Camp David and told Barak: ‘Don’t go to Camp David’... If he had grasped correctly that we were sailing towards this iceberg that Abu-Mazen spoke about, but there were a million things that could be done other than crashing straight into an iceberg. One could stop before reaching the iceberg. One could try to go around it to the right or around it to the left – to circle around it for twenty years ‘til Arafat would die. It was possible to negotiate with Arafat and wear him out with squirt-by-squirt Israeli withdrawals, half a squirt here and a quarter-of-a-squirt there. He could have let this man go peacefully and not sent him to Kingdom Come in a ball of fire. [Barak could have] have taken care that his legacy in the end would be as least damaging as possible to our common interests.

Actually, I think that Amos Gilad was right in general terms, and in essence: There can be only one deal with the Palestinian. Our problem is – and here lays the sin of the Israeli media – that we have not come to comprehend that there won’t be peace with the Palestinians if we don’t go back to the ‘67 lines with minor alterations, find a solution – very creative and very flexible – to the Right of Return, and give them a foothold in Jerusalem.

Ehud Barak believed, several months prior to Camp David, that we can finish the story if we give them 65 percent of the territory. He raised it to 70 percent. Haim Ramon talked for years about a formula of 80 percent – 10 percent – 10 percent. Give them 80 percent now, give them 10 percent afterwards and 10 percent would be annexed to Israel. There were all sorts of fairy tales that were sold through our auspices, due to the fact that we were not sufficiently plugged into the other sides veins. We didn’t understand the Palestinian struggle. We didn’t understand that from their standpoint...100 percent of the terrain of the West Bank and Gaza is really 22 or 23 percent Greater Palestine, and this is the ultimate limits of their concessions. Because we didn’t understand this, then when we dared raise Jerusalem for negotiation, and ‘gave them’ two-and-a-half neighborhoods, this was perceived as a insane Israeli concession, and then Arafat said ‘no’, and everyone understood that he is the one who influences the outcome of the negotiations.

Barak is analogous to an astronaut who departed for a lengthy journey into space and at a certain juncture – in the middle, he realized that the sun would burn him to a crisp. Rather

than find another route, he simply decided to return to earth and the friction with the atmosphere burned him to a crisp. We were partners in this thing and with this spin. The Americans were partners. There was a huge lack of understanding.

I can put your minds at rest. Today the Israeli media is better than the Israeli media was in 2000. It's better plugged-into the Palestinian situation. Look even at television – at the work of people like Tzvi Yechezkel, Saliman a-Shafi and Oded Granot, who go to interview Abu-Ala or Abu-Mazen. We are listening to the other side, as well. We have discovered the other side. It's too bad we discovered the other side after 4,000 or 5,000 people from both sides were killed.

Yoram Peri:

Thank you very much, Ben. At this stage, I want to clarify something in regard to the participants on the panel. When we began to build the panel, I was asked: 'You aren't bringing people from all sides of deliberations? You aren't bringing Barak himself, or other people?' Our intention was not to bring representatives of the four schools of thought, or even two schools of thought to confront one another. We are not sitting in judgment here of what happened or what didn't happen, or what was right and what was not right. Rather the issue was how one narrative was sold, and why it was this story that was sold to the press and the public and not other narratives. That is, the emphasis is really on the matter of 'spin', on the crafting of a conception, and therefore the panel is not a balanced one.

Raviv Druker, political commentator, Channel 10:

First of all, I want to apologize that I will be leaving early. So I'll go straight to my 'bottom line' and then take it from there. The bottom line is: I don't think there was spin at Camp David, not spin in the way I interpret spin. There weren't all sorts of bright Gadi Baltianskys who sold journalists a fallacious factual picture that the journalists marketed it to the public and that the public bought it. What's true? Indeed, at the end of the Camp David Conference the public impression that remained was that 'there is no one to talk to'. Now one can argue whether this impression is correct or incorrect – 'if there is someone to talk to', 'if there is something to talk about' and so forth.

I recently read a great op-ed by Doron Rosenblum that spoke about how we are constantly searching and trying to see what's happening behind the scenes, what's the truth behind what we're being told. There is sort of a tendency to see every move as a far more complex move than it truthfully is. I'll relate to you my most 'colorful' story on Camp David, that I personally experienced.

As Ben said, the radio announces that 'we're now taking you to our special correspondent at Camp David while in fact you are, in essence, most of the time in some mall or some hotel a half hour from Camp David. You don't see Camp David – not even with a

telescope, and you don't know anything to speak of. Once a day an American spokesperson comes to some place and talks for two hours about the menus – what people ate, and he doesn't say one word of substance. After a week, Razi Barka'i who was with me there and I – he was there for Galei Tzahal – decided that we were sick and tired of sleeping in Fredrick, the town near Camp David, and we'd spend one night in Washington. Nu....they say 'our our correspondent in Camp David'. What did it matter if you're broadcasting from a hotel in Fredrick or a hotel in Washington? There were Israeli correspondents who spent the entire Camp David Conference in Washington...

[It's possible from Tel Aviv, too, interjected one of the discussants]

Yup, we drove to Washington, and we ate a really good dinner and had a great time, and each of us wanted to go about his business... And then I get a telephone call from the newsroom at TV Channel 10 at 11 PM Washington time (6:00 AM Israel time) and they tell me that 'the roof has caved in' from a media standpoint. The two most senior journalists at Yediot Aharonot are publishing that the summit has failed. The headline reads, word for word: "Barak Returning without an Agreement." And why has the roof caved in? Because Ben Caspit from Ma'ariv has a full day to get a handle on this piece of news until his own paper comes out the next day. The television has until the evening news broadcast to get a handle on this piece of news. And the genuine wretches are those from the radio, who in a few seconds will be put on the air and they will be told: 'Yediot Aharonot published this morning such-and-such. What do you have to say about that?' And the truth is – I have nothing to say...

So I contact Gadi – who was outside Camp David for reasons I can't detail here – and I ask him. 'What????' he says 'I don't know anything about such a thing, but I don't know...' Something like that. In other words, he gives me a feeble denial, not a blatant denial.

Now what's going on in your head? Your mind is saying 'this is just spin'. After all, there's nothing but spin. That's the word (I think if you try and check on Google what's the most common utterance in Israel since Camp David in social-public discourse, it's not 'OK' but rather 'spin. And it runs through your mind that – alas, Barak is pulling his 'pack-the-bags crisis' in order to pressure everyone. But on the other hand, there is Nachum Barnea and Shimon Shiffer – two top-notch journalists, and they have no reservations about this. There's no 'maybe'. There are no 'sources'. There was a column of commentary that already sums up the Summit, and already talks about a post-summit coalition.

So out of desperation, when you don't know what to do, we said to one another: We'll call Camp David. What could we lose?! That is, we really didn't have any real sources of information who could tell us what was going on in there. And we only had the telephone number of the switchboard, and each delegation had only one line. So we called. And you know what – sometimes the Americans are too orderly, some secretary – someone who sounded like a switchboard, a Vietnamese in my opinion or something like that answered...and we told him: 'Can we speak please with Prime Minister Barak?' And he says: 'Hold on please'...and lo and behold, he transfers us [laughter in the audience]. In the end we get to Einat Gluska. You don't know who she is, but she's the only woman on

the Israeli delegation to Camp David. She's responsible for writing everything that has to be written down. She tells us: 'That's real sweet. Good try, but get-out-of-here...'

We pull the same trick another time, but this time we ask: 'Can we speak with Minister Amnon Lipkin-Shahak?' And [the switchboard] pass us on from one-to-the-next, and at the same time we're already broadcasting on the radio about the drama at Camp David, that 'the lights are on all night...' [laughter in the audience]. Razi Barka'i is looking out the window of the hotel in Washington and says to Ilana Dayan – 'I can see from here the vehicles going up and down, [laughter in the audience]... For a split second, instinctively, I look out the window too, and I know that there isn't a chance in the world of seeing the yard, not to mention Camp David. And we get to Amnon Lipkin-Shahak.

We build-up the drama and then he picks up the receiver, totally asleep and says something like – 'What do you want?....' 'I don't believe it's that way....It's not right.' And we say to him – 'Listen, Yediot Aharonot – and the whole thing is being recorded, of course – Yediot Aharonot said this-and-that...We're under pressure, you can make it short.' And he replies: 'No. It's really tough here, but no one's leaving. The scoop is a dud. Everything's OK and we're staying here.'

By the way – just a little anecdote: In the room with us was Shlomo Ben-Ami's spokesperson, and we noticed the sour look on his face that Ben Caspit and Akiva Eldar knew how to interpret, although maybe you wouldn't do as well. This sourness was not because they were not picking up and leaving, but because Amnon was being interviewed, not Shlomo. We called the next day and Shlomo was very surprised to receive the phone call, and we had another interview. So why am I telling you this? Because when I wrote my book *Harakari*, I went to investigate this colossal spin – Barak's 'pack-the-bags' crisis. Without going into details – just as Ben Caspit relates in the book how he arrived at his scoop, that led in the end to that sort of headline in the paper that the newspapers themselves are sorry about to this day.

What do I want to say? First of all, that the Camp David Summit was not a Rashomon in my book, because one of the surprising things about Camp David is that there isn't almost any controversy about the facts. Everyone knows the Israeli position. Everyone knows what the Palestinians said. If we had the time, I would describe the summit to you day-by-day. Dennis Ross wrote about this at length in his new book. Shlomo Ben-Ami and Gilad Sher and everyone – we have descriptions of the summit day-for-day. On the Palestinian side we don't have a precise description, but we know more or less what transpired.

There are a lot of erroneous myths about Camp David: That it failed due to the Right of Return – is not true. There are other erroneous myths about Camp David, but we know what happened there, there are no divisions as to the facts. So how is nevertheless that such a worldview, was created? It's very simple. It's not a question of Barak's spokespersons. It's not the work of Gadi Baltiansky, Eldad Yaniv, Moshik Ga'on and the others. It's because all of us were in a stupor, amazed by the concessions that Ehud Barak made. You'll say rightly so, or wrongly so. In my opinion, that was the sense that enveloped most of the Israeli public, including members of the press. To this day, when I speak to Razi

Barka'i, he admires Ehud Barak – perhaps the last journalist who does. And what does he admire? You say to him: 'Barak is this way. Barak is that way' and Razi says to you: 'But at Camp David he dared to 'go for' Jerusalem and to divide Jerusalem – something that perhaps today sounds logical. At the time, for those who remember, this was unconceivable. In my opinion, they didn't deny Ben's news because they assumed that no one would believe it in any case. The genuine guilt for the fact that such an erroneous worldview was created is because we all were 'trained' to live under certain assumptions for such a long time, and when someone broke the taboo, when someone slaughtered so many holy cows, we 'knew', were 'programmed', that the other side was supposed to respond differently than they did.

The 92 percent sounded like a whole lot to us, a figure that would at least engender a worthy Palestinian reply. By the way, Saab Erikat's reply was not caught by the Israeli public. What did the Israeli public hear? Arafat gets off the plane to a cheering crowd, who receive him like crazy people and chanting 'Chawakat al-Uda, Chawakat al-Uda' (The Right of Return). That's what the Israeli public 'caught'. On one side Arafat gets off his plane, is hysterically embraced and sets off on a tour of 40 countries. He travels as far as Vietnam to celebrate the great victory that he hasn't capitulated to the Zionists. On the other side, Ehud Barak gets off his plane, embraces his wife Nava with a mournful expression that says 'we have no peace partner at this time'.

I'll close with one last thing that emerged when I tried to investigate the Camp David spin: An awful lot of people around Barak (and not Gadi) took credit for the phenomenon of what transpired in the course of Camp David on things regarding the division of Jerusalem. I don't know if everyone remembers, but the result of Camp David was that since there began to be news of dividing Jerusalem and so forth, all sorts of public figures were taken on tours of Jerusalem to show them how much the neighborhoods of Kalandia and Shoafat aren't part of Jerusalem. Even vocalist Yoram Ga'on – as the symbol of Jerusalem or at least one of its icons – came out with an article, and all sorts of public figures came and expressed their views and changed the position of the Israeli public.

With the departure for Camp David, according to surveys, let's say 25 percent agreed to divide Jerusalem, and with the return from Camp David 40 percent agreed. (I'm talking in rough numbers.) I went to investigate this huge change in public opinion and I found that Barak's people hadn't a hand or a foot in this. Yossi Beilin didn't go out on his 'tour' of Arab neighbors in East Jerusalem because Barak sent him. Ehud Barak called Beilin to say 'thank you. Yoram Ga'on wrote his op-ed piece because Yediot Aharonot asked him to, and not because someone called him from the Barak camp, and so forth and so on. Realities simply overtook everyone. There was no 'planned conception' of Barak's people.

And a word or two more, so it won't sound as if I'm saying that the press is totally guiltless. We made a lot of mistakes at Camp David, as well as in other places. We reported on dialogues that didn't take place between Barak and Arafat. There are newspapers– and I won't name individual correspondents who reported – "Barak: 'Such-and-such'." Arafat replied to him: 'Such-and-such.' In reality they never talked at Camp David. Except for chit-chat, we never reported that Barak's 'going into isolation at Camp

David to make a decision' was, in essence, depression. We learned this much later. We didn't report that Arafat put out his hand to shake Barak's hand and Barak didn't put out his hand to accept it, and he walked away. We didn't report that the Israeli delegation hunkered down for eight or nine hours while the Palestinians waited, and they were not willing to go out, and everyone felt humiliated, including the Americans, and including Clinton who was 'pacing the corridors'. We didn't report these things.

Why didn't we report them? Because we didn't know they were happening. So we didn't report this demeaning behavior. There are a lot of things we did and sins we committed in the course of Camp David. There were a lot of reports that weren't accurate, but the general factual picture broadcasted from Camp David was correct. The Israeli public translated this picture, and said: 'This is the maximum we can offer, and if they say no to this, then there's no accord'. This was a translation that began before hand in the mindset of each of us.

Yoram Peri:

Thank you Raviv. One question before you go. The American media, in the wake of what happened in the Gulf War, underwent a hard, serious process of examining itself, and large and lengthy articles were published – including in the most important papers such as the New York Times, The Washington Post – expressed remorse for their sins. Do you think that next time there is a Camp David – God Willing – the Israeli press will not operate in the same manner? Will you behave differently?

Raviv Druker:

Unfortunately, we'll make the same mistakes, because there is no machinery for learning from experience, and there is no proper reward in the Israeli press. No one takes anyone to task for publishing a news item that isn't true. You get credit for correct items – first and foremost because you take pains to make sure everyone knows you published this... But no one takes you to account if you run a report that is incorrect or inaccurate. The fact that we don't go back and we don't check is the Israeli media's worst sin.

I'll close with a short story that I only learned about a few months ago. When we were in Paris, in October 2000 – the beginning of the Intifada. (By the way, if you open the papers of the day after the Paris Summit, you'll see there headlines about an agreement, agreement...for a cease fire, and in the end there wasn't any agreement). There was this great 'incident' that I believe was fantastically suitable for the narrative we have of Yassir Arafat. Some reporter – I think it was Reuters or AP – called someone from the Palestinian delegation exactly when Arafat left the castle of the American ambassador in Paris where the deliberations were held. He left them in a rage and took off at a run in the direction of the gate.

American Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was running after him – or to be more correct tottering after him. Try and imagine the scene. Arafat running away with Albright in his wake, and he's shouting. He gets in the car and yells at the guards to open the gate, and

Albright is yelling to close the gate. And all this is recorded on the telephone of the lucky correspondent who had just called someone. That is, it was impossible to deny this. So he broadcasts this and we all broadcasted it. Not one of us asked, or at least not one of us received an answer to the question – What got Arafat so hopping mad? It seemed in line. This Arafat was a mashuginer. He told blatant lies (which is true). He accused us of using uranium artillery shells to kill Palestinian children. He's a nut case, he's not normal. So he ran out with Albright in his tracks.

A couple of months ago I realized what the answer was. Everything that happened there began with Ehud Barak. I tried very hard not to say a bad word about Ehud Barak today, but what happened there, what 'triggered' the incident, was that the American delegation requested an immediate reply from the two delegations to the proposed agreement. The Palestinians gave an answer, or were willing to give an answer. Barak convened his own delegation again for an hour and a half. And they sat for an hour and a half while all the others – imagine the situation – are sitting and waiting. Arafat who was a person for whom 'honor' was no stranger, was sitting and waiting. At some point he had 'had it' with waiting, and after they probably sent a few notes to the room, and Barak didn't consider them, Arafat simply took his things and left. That's the kind of things that I hope we will ask ourselves, at least, next time around.

Yoram Peri:

Before we go to Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal, I want to ask Gadi one question. In the context of spin, the story emerged that a central point in the failure of Camp David was the issue of the Right of Return. It took quite a long time until a number of people began to say that this was not a central issue at all. I had a number of discussions on this matter with Martin Indyk. At the beginning he didn't address this matter clearly. Now I know that in the book he is writing he admits that it was not the Right of Return that brought down the talks. So Gadi, how was it that this story about the Right of Return being a central issue that detonated Camp David came out?

Gadi Baltiansky:

This is an example of spin. What I tried to say before is that there really wasn't spin by Barak's spokespersons or by Barak himself as if 'there was no peace partner' and there 'was no one to talk to' at Camp David. It sunk in slowly until it took root – in my opinion, after the elections. But the Right of Return story is definitely a spin, because the refugee issue, like the issue of Jerusalem, wasn't discussed in earnest, in an official manner between the parties in detail prior to Camp David. What Akiva Eldar related earlier about Menachem Klein and others, is exactly what Ehud did. He took people who are on the sidelines to do the work – as if it was only an academic or theoretical exercise, so that if something came out of this in the end, it would be OK. If nothing came of it, then he couldn't be blamed because it was done 'off the court'. It wasn't him. He didn't plan to give anything, he didn't offer half of East Jerusalem. If professors did so, that was perfectly OK. This is an acceptable tactic, even legitimate.

The Right of Return was not discussed in earnest down to the nitty-gritty... how one can put a square peg through a round hole between 'Right' and between 'Return' so that they won't have to give up their Right and we won't have to give up our opposition to a Return. When the Camp David Summit was over, and the way it ended, I think it was easiest for both leaders to concentrate on one issue that really wasn't discussed truly and substantively...and that issue is the refugees and the Return.

Why? Because when Barak returned home and said that he wanted to unite the people now, in preparation for approaching conflict, in preparation for 'collision with the iceberg', what could unify the people most of all? Is there any more consensual issue than Israelis' opposition to the Right of Return? It's national suicide! 'If we would agreed to the Right of Return, we would all be committing suicide, so it's clear you're 'with me' in your opposition to this because I Barak prevented the catastrophe.'

For Arafat, the same was true in reverse: The most loaded, the most symbolic, the most holy, the most principled issue from the Palestinian standpoint is the refugee issue, the Nakba and solution of the refugee problem. When Arafat went back home and said: 'I stood heroically firm and defended the 'holy-of-holies', and therefore Camp David failed. It was not because I didn't agree to 91 percent and insisted on 98 percent of the Territories, nor exchange of territory, not due to a particular neighborhood in Jerusalem. Rather, it was because of the issue that is the heart of the matter for us.' It's the easiest sell. And therefore this spin that the two leaders needed in the face of approaching violence, served them well. It was not the product of realities. In contrast with other issues, it was indeed – from beginning to end – spin that simply served the political needs of two leaders at the same time.

Prof. Daniel Bar-Tal, political psychologist, Tel Aviv University School of Education:

What does an academic do after reading Ben Caspit's investigation published on Yom Kippur 2002, and after reading the June 2004 investigative piece by Akiva Eldar with the exposes from his interview with Amos Malka? First of all, such an academic has to immediately recommend them for a Pulitzer, but there is no such prize in the State of Israel... Secondly, he should gasp for breath. He should gasp for breath because he understands the tremendous broch, the terrible mess, this has wrought on Israeli society. I'm really not prepared to accept the unbearable ease with which several correspondents have related to these events, because I think they are far more serious. In my opinion we're talking about a very serious social symptom, indicative of the way Israeli society operates.

As for the United States, they have already done their soul-searching. They had the story of the spin on Iraq, and they have already investigated it and are aware of their own weaknesses. And here, this big story of Amos Malka comes, Ben Caspit's big story and what was the reaction of Yuval Steinitz, or Shaul] Mofaz? They brand it 'another Left-wing tale', and all sorts of utterances like this. So this is the second thing that happens to me: I really can't sleep well, especially after I hear something like this can repeat itself. So I delved into the story, dove down into this story from different angles.

There are several possibilities for a researcher to approach and examine this thing. Of course one way is to check if it was this way or wasn't this way – to check what actually happened. This is the work of the historian, of the political scientists, while I'm a political psychologist, so this perspective isn't so suitable.

Another orientation to look at the things...one could say that what was forged here is what social scientists call 'collective memory'. And in contrast to what is claimed here – I'll show you data – it wasn't created later on, but immediately after this 'information' reached the public. So why was it so well received? There's an excellent research question here for a doctorate. How did it spread? How did various social agents operate? Consider, for instance, Amos Oz's letter in the New York Times, and several other ways this 'information' was disseminated. That is, it's really not the original spin. It is spin that fell on very very fertile soil, on 'a collective ethos of hatred towards the stranger' that meshed well with what happened...and Akiva Eldar correctly warned that this can happen again.

How do I view this story? In essence, I divided the story into several parts in order to understand it. We have a composite of 'events' – things that actually took place: Camp David took place – there's no controversy. The Intifada broke out – we all understand that it broke out. But there is another element – 'information' that provides the framing of events. People weren't at Camp David. People don't know what transpired there 'inside'. Over time what we call a 'narrative' was forged, and this narrative holds firm. If one would ask the average man-in-the-street, there is a good chance that the person would repeat this narrative.

So let's take a look at what transpired. The first story was that one 'had' to go to Camp David. This was already discussed. I only want to make one comment: Today there is a dearth of material that when Barak went to Camp David, at the time Amos Malka (and Oded Eran too) as well as other people in the Military Intelligence Branch, and also in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said to him: 'What are the parameters within which you can solve the conflict?' He said – as was already stated: 'I'll go, and I'll convince Arafat.'

Afterwards, we have the story of Camp David, and it's a story of its own. Look what happened to what I call 'major information'¹³, after what happened at Camp David. Already in July 2000, 67 percent believe that in essence the Palestinian side is guilty for what happened at Camp David. Sixty-seven percent is indeed a very high number.

Now another thing also happened that almost no one relates to, that is the second spin: The Intifada breaks out. I'm talking about the second event, that I want to restrict to October 29th 2000 and the month of March or April 2001 after Sharon's election – because this is the first stage of the Intifada. What happened afterwards is an entirely different story. I'll relate to you a personal experience. I hear Gilad Sher being interviewed on the radio by

¹³ Definition of 'major information' in Bar-Tal's work: Information provided by an authorized epistemic source on a relevant and important topic to members of society and society-at-large. Information that reverberates, engages members of society, grabs a central place in public discourse and forces members of society to reassess and change their psychological repertoire.

Oren Shachor. And he says this: ‘Listen, it was possible to end Camp David this way or that, but...’ (and I’m quoting him almost directly because it was clearly engraved in my memory) “...but one cannot forgive the Palestinians who immediately after that began to kill our women and children.” And that’s not the way it was, and these were not the facts.

So I want you to see what the Intifada was...and I’m speaking about the first part. During the first four days 39 Palestinians were killed and 5 Israelis. By the end of October 141 Palestinians were killed and 500 wounded, and 11 Israelis were killed and one was wounded. During the months November and December – and these are the numbers of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Red Cross – 186 Palestinians were killed and 540 wounded, and 31 Israelis were killed and 84 wounded.

It’s important that you know what was going on. On one side was the massive operations of the Israeli Defense Forces (and Ben Caspit wrote the story how one million bullets were fired in the first days, the helicopter operations and extermination squads)...and I want you to know: This is not the way it was remembered in terms of the terrorism. During this period – I’m talking only about this period – there indeed were ambushes, primarily on the roads in the West Bank against soldiers and Jewish settlers. There was a bomb explosion in November[near the Machane Yehuda open market in Jerusalem, there was an explosion of a bomb in a service taxi in Wadi Ara in March, but the first suicide bombing was only on March 28th. Ask Israelis and they will tell you an entirely different story. Nobody remembers these things, because it didn’t make any difference: The Israeli people follow an entirely different memory.

What is the information that most of the public carries with it? That the Palestinians planned this thing, and that the objective is, in essence, to destroy the State of Israel. If indeed one looks at the data – and I’m talking about November 2000 – then 80 percent of the Israelis blame the Palestinians. In March 2001, 53 percent of the Israelis believe that the objective of the Intifada is to harm Israel, not to improve the Palestinian own negotiating position.

I’m willing to go out on a limb and say – from my own investigation: neither the GSS nor the Mossad, neither Military Intelligence, nor the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held this opinion. That is, all four of these bodies unequivocally assessed that the Intifada was not planned in the manner that Israeli leaders told the Israeli people. 14

And I have the quote that I took from Akiva Eldar, which is genuinely a key sentence in this story Brigadier General (Res.) Amos Malka, Chief of Military Intelligence at the beginning of the Intifada said: “I say this with full responsibility – that during my entire tenure as Chief of Military Intelligence there wasn’t even one document of the Research

¹⁴ Brigadier General Ami Ayalon, head of the GSS during the first 6 months of the *Intifada*: “The El-Aqsa *Intifada* was at its outset a popular, unplanned phenomenon that didn’t operate according to defined political objectives... In my opinion, deliberations whether Arafat controls things on the ground or not, and whether he wants to achieve control, is practically insignificant. The Chairman of the Palestinian Authority [Arafat] is on the leading edge of this violent vortex that in order to stop it he must first create political expediency.” (May 2001, in one of Bar-Tal ’s lecture slides)

Division that expressed the appraisal that Amos Gilad claimed he presented to the Prime Minister. As required by operational regulations, no document can leave the Research Division without receiving the approval of the Chief of the Division.”

I want to present you with another important quote that in my opinion explains what happened. Ben Caspit writes about this in his outstanding piece of investigative journalism. One of the things that was said was voiced by Shlomo Ben-Ami’s, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the fall of 2000. Ben-Ami was part of this story, and he made a very harsh statement: “In the Palestinian side of the Green Line as well during the Intifada, there was a great distance between the directives of the political echelon and interpretation on the ground. We are talking of a structural failure that was expressed on the political-military axis and the political-police axis.” There was little resemblance between the Government’s directives in the face of Palestinian violence, and what turned out to be the release of an already taunt enraged spring mechanism.... within the IDF that led to harsh responses, and in many cases to overreaction towards the Palestinians.”

I’m a bit surprised by what has been voiced here. Because from what I understood, this spin was planned. Raviv Druker wrote this his book, and Prof. Gadi Volsfeld in his book, as well – that all sorts of possibilities as to how Camp David would end were planned for. One possibility was that Camp David would end in failure. They practiced alternatives of how this would be handled and what would be imparted to the people and the press. Therefore I’m rather surprised that this exercise is treated offhandedly. In this exercise, it was decided to blame Arafat. And the story with Clinton isn’t so great, because as those in this room surely know, Clinton had promised Arafat – who didn’t want to go to Camp David – that if the talks failed, he wouldn’t blame, him and Clinton broke his promise.

In closing, I want to say something about Barak. The question was asked, why this spin stuck? I want to say this: If Sharon had voiced this spin, it wouldn’t have stuck. This spin stuck because it was voiced by the leader of the Peace Camp. It stuck because Barak was what I label – ‘an epistemic authority’ for them. One must take into account realities – that Arafat was already ‘a burnout’, or ‘non-partner’ in the eyes of 30-40 percent of the the Israelis, in the eyes of the hawkish portion. Today, this is the same portion that opposes the pending Disengagement from Gaza. Think back to what was Ariel Sharon’s position– it was measure-for-measure, what was Bibi Netanyahu’s position – it was measure-for-measure. But when this position was voiced by the head of the Peace Camp – the very leader who had come to power in 1999 as Yitzhak Rabin’s successor – it constituted a death blow.

Of course, the analysis we carried out showed that in the wake of the Intifada there was a tremendous ‘earthquake’ in Israeli public opinion. There is data from pollster Mina Tzemach and from other people such as TAU academics Ephriam Yaar and Asher Arian. We found in our research that approximately 22 percent of the public claimed they changed their opinions in the wake of events. When you look at things in-depth, you find that this is germane vis-à-vis 43 percent of those who voted for Barak! That was where the biggest change occurred. And when you ask – ‘What changed your position?’ 53 percent tell you: ‘Because Arafat chose violence instead of ‘give and take’.’ Where did they take this idea

from? After all, they don't know – they weren't there. 24 percent changed their opinion because the Palestinians rejected Barak's generous offer.

In my opinion, this symposium that Dr. Peri organized is extraordinarily important because it exposes, in but another instance, the state of the political culture in Israel. Look how society relates to very severe events and very stark information. In my opinion this wouldn't happen elsewhere in a well-functioning democracy. If one looks at Asher Arian's books – and its constant throughout all the years, one arrives at a picture of Israel in which democracy is shaky. We heard this can happen again, and it's very sad that this can happen.

Yoram Peri:

Before I open the floor for discussion, I want to ask Akiva Eldar about the 'Amos [Malka] verses Amos [Gilad]' affair. It came to light relatively late – after two years, two-and-a-half years of Intifada. On the face of it, it should have created an earthquake. This is an amazing disclosure of the internal discord within the defense establishment regarding issues on the public agenda, yet except for one newspaper – Ha'aretz, and several articles, it passed relatively quietly. How do you explain the fact that this didn't engender shock, comprehensive debate and more in-depth attention?

Akiva Eldar:

That's an important and an interesting question, because beyond public debate, if Amos Malka is right – and I assume he is right for I don't have any reason to assume he isn't... He didn't seek me out, I came to him. That is, it's not that someone was looking to 'even a score'....

[Request from within the audience: 'Perhaps you can say a few words about what was involved in 'Amos verses Amos?']

Right. It's about an investigative piece I published about the Chief of Military Intelligence, Amos Malka who claimed that the Chief of Military Intelligence Amos Gilad said that Arafat never planned – not in Oslo, not after that – to reach a 'two-state' settlement. Rather, Arafat schemed to bring millions of Palestinian refugees here and to demolish the State of Israel as a Jewish State. Amos Malka claimed that Amos Gilad only began to say these things after he understood or assessed that a change of Governments in Israel was in the air – that is, in February 2001.

He thus presented Military Intelligence's Research Division's position to the public in a biased manner, and did the same before those at the helm. This is a very serious accusation, and one indeed needs to ask – beyond controversial issues of the day – after the death of Arafat, if it's solely an 'academic question' whether Arafat intended to reach an agreement or didn't intend to? This matter has ramifications because Arafat's successor Abu-Mazen, in my opinion, is 'the same old thing under a different cloak'. Therefore it is important to investigate this to the core, today as well.

I think the media wasn't prepared to look at itself in the mirror, and shatter the myths it created. The media was the one who handled it. Amos Gilad also became a media celebrity, and the mainstream of Israel media – Ehud Yaari, for example – adopted this approach that 'there is no partner'. Somewhere, the explanation for this was that the media was offended – that is, 'What did Arafat do to us?!?' After all, we the media supported Oslo. We supported the Two-State Solution.' Again, I think this stemmed from the media not going to the bottom of things, not learning things from beginning to end, as was noted here – the Palestinian side.

The media also said: 'This is really a proposal' - as it was described earlier by Ben Caspit in a very colorful manner - that the Barak proposal regarding Jerusalem was revolutionary. Indeed, no leader had proposed this in the past, and therefore there was a sense of ungratefulness – 'Here, we're giving Arafat a proposal and he's spurning us.'

As for the Palestinians, it's not that the Palestinians didn't contribute to the failure of talks. It shouldn't come out of our deliberations that they are innocent of fault, and that they didn't contribute a few mistakes that they made. But first of all, I would 'second' the sentiments of Prof. Bar-Tal that the deliberations today provide a sort of 'artificial respiration', resuscitate, this very important controversy which has also been written about in books. Perhaps it is high time today that we get to the bottom of debating this question by freeing ourselves from issues of ego.

It's very hard to say these things – that 'I wrote these things, and how can I live with what I wrote? I blamed the Palestinians, and I said there isn't a partner. I 'bought this' – that is, I was wrong twice: First of all I was wrong when I believed Arafat, and then I said to myself – 'OK, I'll correct the mistake and I'll say there isn't a partner.' Now let me say it again: I was wrong the second time, and in essence, Arafat is indeed a partner. So this dissonance – after all a psychologist is sitting right here beside me, perhaps he can elucidate – this dissonance, it would seem, lays heavy on our shoulders.

Yoram Peri:

Rest easy – not only the media didn't recognize and didn't learn enough about the Arab world. So several years ago, the Ford Foundation provided big money to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem so the Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace would open a course for the public-at-large to become familiar with Arab society. They did this at the Van-Leer Jerusalem Institute – a course for the public-at-large, and it lasted a year or two years. When the Second Intifada began, the Truman Institute decided that this was not the appropriate time to learn about Palestinian society and they cancelled the course. So not only the media, but also academia did things like this. The floor is open. Please.

Question from the Audience:

I have a question for Akiva Eldar that bothered me at the time, when this business became public. If I'm not wrong, during the same period Amos Malka was Amos Gilad's boss – not the opposite. So how did he let this thing happen without saying anything?

Akiva Eldar:

When we finished the interview, I said to Amos Malka: 'Amos, you're in trouble...do you know that? Where have you been until today?!' He claimed – and the truth is, I need to check this out some time... He said the same things in various and sundry forums, including the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. When things like this are said they usually leak out and are published. He told me that to the best of his memory, he even said this to the media before he told me this in a very frank manner, he said these things to the decision-makers.

In retrospect, I think that the real explanation is that Amos Malka wasn't sure enough of himself, because he had to deal with Amos Gilad, a person who had spent his entire life in intelligence. Gilad's entire career was spent there, while Amos Malka came to Military Intelligence from the outside. After he received the appointment, a 'private joke' circulated among the people at the Military Intelligence Branch that 'at the MIB there was Amos Malka (malka means 'Queen' in Hebrew) and there was Amos haMelech (Amos Gilad, the King). I think he sensed some sort of insecurity in the presence of Amos Gilad, who was considered an Intelligence Branch person par excellence.

Gadi Baltiansky:

If I can add something on this issue, because the focus was on the things said by Amos Gilad just before the change in Government, and most certainly afterwards. I want to say to Amos Gilad's credit: These are the things he said prior to departure to Camp David when he would come to meetings of the Government, and Cabinet meetings and I remember exactly the words he used... [Akiva Eldar: And today he denies this...] I'm not depending now on events heard secondhand, I was in the room. I heard him...and he warned Barak, he said to Barak: 'Listen, you are going to Camp David, you think you can bring a settlement.

I don't know... I only want to tell you that there are things that for the Palestinians are die-in-the-wool issues. They won't concede on 1967 borders more or less – maybe minor adjustments, maybe exchange of territory one-on-one, but this needs to be the foundation. And we will have to give them a foothold in Jerusalem. And we will need to find a solution to the refugee issue that will satisfy them – even if there won't be a Return. If you are not prepared to do this, I say to you: Don't go because you won't have what it takes to achieve an agreement.'

Haim Ramon – originally spoke about 10-10-80 percent. And also Shimon Peres and others in the Government who said ‘Come on, let’s go to Camp David and we won’t try and achieve a permanent settlement that will bring an end to the conflict. Let’s hear what Amos Gilad said. He said that for an end to the conflict we need to pay a price that right now we are not willing to pay, so let’s ‘make do’ with less. We’ll receive less, but we will give less.’ These ministers based their proposal on the same things said by Amos Gilad, but for Ehud Barak – who coined the phrase ‘a termination of the conflict and an end to Palestinian demands’.

An End to the Conflict was the name of the game, and he chose not to adopt these things voiced by Amos Gilad. It should be said to Amos Gilad’s credit that he was right in his assessment before Camp David. That he totally changed his assessment afterwards is hard to fathom... There’s a political psychologist present, so perhaps both aspects of political psychology, both the psychology and the politics are at work, but that’s another story...

Ben Caspit:

On the same issue of ‘Amos verses Amos’: Right. Now that everyone is spilling the beans, I can reveal that the selfsame Amos Malka was the same ‘unnamed senior officer’ that I spoke about in that story about the collapse of Oslo (ah, it was, in fact, in another investigative piece afterwards) that the headline read: “It wasn’t ‘a state-with-an-army, but rather an army-with-a-state.” [Malka revealed] that three weeks after the beginning of the Intifada he had arrived to conduct an inspection at the [IDF] Central Command¹⁵ and Amos Malka asked ‘Kuper’ – that is Yossi Kuperwasser – who at the time was the senior Intelligence Officer at the IDF Central Command: ‘Tell me, Kuper– how many bullets have we fired in three weeks?’ and Kuperwasser tells him “I don’t know.’ So Amos Malka says: ‘Take a minute to check it out – how many bullets the IDF fired...check with the Quartermaster, the requisition forms, whatever. After a half hour they came to the conclusion that the IDF had fired a million bullets. A million bullets in three weeks.

The ‘Amos verse Amos’ Clash was common knowledge among all of us – both journalists and military. It was an old story, and the antipathy between the two ‘Amoses’ was lethal. They were two people who hated one another. If one said ‘white’, the other said ‘black’. The clash didn’t leak out to the public. At any given time, I can tell you about generals at loggerheads, but Akiva has illuminated a coincidence, where there was his tape recorder on the table and it got out...and it got out ‘on the record’ and opened-up the debate. I agree with the question: Too little got out, and too late.

Yoram Peri:

There is also the issue of linkage to the moral dimension, not just the personal one. In all three cases where the State of Israel found itself in catastrophic circumstances, the Minister of Defense, the Chief-of-Staff and the Chief of Military Intelligence were macho personalities who ‘know-it-all’ who are totally convinced they are right. In the Lavon

¹⁵ This Command is responsible for Israel’s border with Jordan and all of the West Bank

Affair – the Minister of Defense was Pinchas Levon, the Chief-of-Staff was Moshe Dayan and the Chief of Military Intelligence was Benyamin Jibli. All of them were willful personalities who thought they ‘knew the truth’. No one else knew better.

In the Yom Kippur blunder – the Minister of Defense was Dayan, the Chief-of-Staff was ‘Dado’ David Elazar and the Chief of Military Intelligence was Eli Ze’ira. And again in regard to Camp David – the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense is Ehud Barak – and in this case the tone was set not by the Chief of Military Intelligence but rather the Chief of the Research Division of Military Intelligence whose professional standing was stronger than the standing of the Chief of Military Intelligence.

In contrast with these three cases, stands the case of 1967: Three ‘weaklings’ – Levi Eshkol as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Yitzhak Rabin as Chief-of-Staff, and Aharon (‘Areleh’) Yariv as Chief of Military Intelligence. All of them were skeptical, hesitant, cautious and prudent. The result was the brilliant victory of the Six Day War and great political gains. It is better that we have cautious and prudent and hesitant people at the helm rather than self-assured he-men know-it-alls.

[One of the discussants: Let them be women...].

Right. Let there be more women.

Dr. Daniel Dor, Tel Aviv University, Department of Communication:

I want to respond to some of the things voiced here today. There is a tremendous gap - almost unfathomable - in all democratic countries and certainly in Israel, between the way a professional, a journalist, views himself and his work, and how the public perceive what he does. Raviv related here – to the amusement of all of us – a typical but significant event. Such stories are truly funny and anyone who turns out to have spent a few years in this kind of work, in journalism, knows it. I am familiar with this work from up close – the sitting in a Washington hotel without any idea of what’s happening, caught in the middle of this ‘frightening’ live broadcast. When they called from the radio and asked Raviv to say – right now (!) – if Nachum Barnea and Shimon Shiffer were right, I imagine he didn’t say in the course of that broadcast: ‘Listen, I haven’t a clue. I just came back from shopping and I haven’t any idea what happened.’ He probably related something.

I think that the core of this kind of work is carried out in a way that people within the newsroom – and naturally the newsroom as a central component in ‘professional identity’ has good reason to take issue with what I am about to say – this anecdotal story contains a fact of life that when serious and significant investigations get out – such as Ben’s, or Akiva’s – systematically, they don’t enjoy the headlines, but are run on the inside papers of the paper.

In the press, in news broadcasting, there are very clear interests in the way the array of news is arranged – what appears at the top of the news broadcast and what afterwards, what receives significance, how things are interpreted and so on and so forth. All these little

matters ('The spokesperson told me this', 'I didn't know what to say', 'I said something else', 'Someone else got the scoop' before me and so forth) are taken in an entirely different manner by the public – in terms of substance and extreme. They are taken as the most authoritative information it is possible to obtain at a given moment in regard to the complex substantive nature of the issue.

For instance, if Ben tells us just a moment ago that there are conflicts between generals about what's going on in the Middle East, and this goes beyond the framework of deliberations – and if it doesn't end up as the headline the next morning, what it means to Ben is 'another day in which I can't 'tell it all', and I can't do anything about it.' What goes out from the public's standpoint is 'this was another day in which the IDF demonstrates a united 'take' in the way they see things.' All the facts raised here in the course of this evening appeared more or less in the book that I wrote a year after the beginning of the Intifada.

I didn't come here to talk about my work but rather about the fact that journalists knew all these components noted in the book – including fierce differences of opinion within the Defense Establishment – including very scathing positions held by people in Government about what Barak did at Camp David, including all the fundamental components of this spin. All of them were known to the press. As the upshot of a set of very complex considerations – we don't have time or room to go into this now – the newsroom/ news-gathering and news dissemination system chose, in last analysis, to 'go' with the clear, simple, easy-to-digest story that said: 'We offered everything' – 'there's no one to talk to'. And in the end, in fact, due to the unbearable overabundance of 'corner-cutting' in news work, thousands of people were killed in a bloody war – on both sides, not just our side, and mostly on their side.

A core component of the story – and we need to somehow to 're-engage' with it – is the fact that news-gathering and news-dissemination work is very serious with terribly-terribly huge significance in terms of human lives. And this sense – that 'everything is spin' as Ben said – that 'the Prime Minister wants to transmit this message, so we transmit it' – resulted in the last analysis – due to a host of shortsighted considerations – in the formulation of a very genuine reality and involved the fate of many lives.

I think we are now at a fork in the road – where on one hand Arafat is dead, and on the other hand Barak stands to return to the political arena, and thirdly Abu-Mazen is being glorified as a Palestinian its possible to talk to, as Akiva said – to such an extent that when Abu-Mazen utters statements that are more extreme than Arafat ever said: 'a small jihad and a big jihad' and so forth, it's pushed onto the sidelines because now he's 'our best friend'. This means that in another few months, we'll be disappointed, again. And as I said, these things are fateful, these things have significance for human lives. And I think that we need to find a way back to a professional understanding that journalism is a serious business – because this has partially gotten lost in the shuffle.

Yoram Peri:

[To Daniel Dor:] As a person who was a journalist in the past, and today is a media scholar, do you believe it is possible to change things? Or is this 'built-into' embedded, in the profession? And if it is possible to change, then how is it possible to change, beyond preaching?

Daniel Dor:

I think that there are deep and fundamental aspects – structural such as an array of interests of the media organizations – that are impossible to change. Ben Caspit, Akiva Eldar and Raviv Druker are people who do their serious work, their investigative journalism, on their own. But if people like Chanoch Marmari and Yoel Esteron were sitting here - Ha'aretz's editor-in-chief and his deputy - during the period that Akiva tried in every possible way to 'throw a monkey wrench' into the picture of this story – that would then be closer to home because Chanoch Marmari and Yoel Esteron accepted Barak's picture of things 'hook, line and sinker', without argument. The paper, as a news-gathering and news-disseminating system has interests that are far more complex than the work of this or that correspondent within the story. That's the sad part.

Then there are structural aspects... Akiva Eldar: "Where did you get this information?" What? That Esteron and Marmari.... Akiva Eldar: I'm not confirming or denying... [Laughter in the audience].

You don't have to confirm or deny. I think you know as well about their complex set of relationships with the publisher...and with people at the paper and so forth, and perhaps the relationship circled one way or another around this question. I think this is a story that people inside Ha'aretz's newsroom are aware of.

There are aspects that can be fully fixed, but there are other aspects which concern people at the head of the news organization: That if a person such as Ben Caspit, for instance, relates in an investigative expose how the Israeli leadership at the outset of the Intifada mismanaged things, it's not a story that should be buried someplace inside the paper. It's a story that has significance.

By the way, this story here... After all, some time soon Barak will return to politics – with this spun story – in a way that won't change a bit, because Barak after all doesn't like to admit mistakes about anything. I think that the things we are dealing with right now are not 'a trip down memory lane' about a question of what happened years ago. In and of itself, this should be the headline in the papers next week. 'How We Told Ourselves Fairytales in Recent Years and Lost Much Life and Many Opportunities.' I think this is terribly important. And in principle – yes, I think it is possible to change to a certain extent.

Yoram Peri:

Thank you very much. I hope we haven't created the impression here today that today's symposium is an anti-Barak gathering. That wasn't our intention, and had it been another prime minister, the story would have been the same story. What's important is to deal with the primary issue, the matter of principle. The personalities involved are a secondary matter.

Ben Caspit:

I rebel a bit – even to a great degree in the face of what Danny Dor said. There is no 'unbearable ease' with which journalistic work is conducted. All right, Raviv told us an amusing story that in my book wasn't so amusing because I don't think I would have sat in a hotel in Washington and related how 'I can see the cars at Camp David'. [Akiva Eldar: And if you would have done it, you wouldn't have run straight to tell your cronies?!] In the front of an open mike it's another thing, Akiva...but the press in general and the press in Israel in particular is an arduous task. We relate to it with awesome respect. And before I publish this headline that I talked about earlier – about dividing Jerusalem, in my desperation I even called Yossi Beilin with my stomach churning. It's clear that this is a matter of human lives at stake and the importance of this story is very clear.

I don't think there is a situation here where the media hides the truth. For instance, the picture given to the public [of events at Camp David was a certain picture seen from a certain perspective, and it took time for things to get out. This is not only at Camp David and in Israel. This is so in every process at any given time in the media in the world. Stories are only now coming out on what happened in the United States in regard to the Iraq War. I don't know how many people read Plan of Attack or Bush at War – Bob Woodward's two books published one after the other¹⁶. Thus, if we had known in real-time how things were being managed at the White House and the Pentagon, who knows what we would have thought.

It takes time for things to get out. There is no such situation where I sit in my home and wait for my cell phone to ring and someone will give me a headline story. Every headline is putting together as a puzzle, from intelligence and pulling strings. Half is on hunch, and cross-referencing input, and manipulation and threats – yup, threatening sources, and debating the issue 'into the wee hours, censoring and story-telling.

Now, in regard to the way things are published: Yes, it's true, they didn't run that investigative expose of mine as the main headline. We have to understand Danny that the papers in Israel, and I say this painfully, almost all the media channels, are commercial channels. Here is some more 'inside tidbits' for the information of Akiva Eldar. Since the outbreak of the Intifada, Ha'aretz has lost readership – in a manner that threatens the

¹⁶ The first is a 'fly-on-the-wall' account of events beginning in January 2001 following Bush's election for a preemptive war in Iraq, published in 2004, the second is a focus on the three months following 9/11, published in 2002

paper's very existence. I'm prepared to defend this statement because I know it for sure. I'm telling you, the newspaper Ha'aretz— and this comes from within the the innermost circle of Haaretz – within the span of two years, the paper is liable to close down. In my own paper Ma'ariv, every critical headline during the Intifada, we receive dozens of subscription cancellations. Even in the service of higher interests one might 'throw the baby out with the bathwater' or behave with more sensitivity to his readership.

There is something here that ties in with what Prof. Bar-Tal said earlier. True, I published all these things in the same investigative expose that he spoke of. Correct, there was the brutal response of the IDF at the beginning of the Intifada, where a situation evolved of one Israeli death for five Palestinian deaths, and then, the business began to cascade and become the Intifada that we know. It's true that that was, in essence, the thing that perhaps aroused the Palestinians' 'killer instinct' within the Green Line. But at the end of the day, when you encounter the phenomenon of suicide bombers at the Dolphinarium in Tel Aviv and suicide bombers at the Matza Restaurant in Haifa or suicide bombers on Passover eve at the Park Hotel in Natanya, and every other day someone blows himself up and kills women and children. Yes, that also happened gentlemen, one cannot simply ignore this! You can't run away from realities and come at the same time and try to 'sell' something else to people. It is part of the complexity that you live with internally. Therefore this was the 'dosage' of criticism that Akiva and I chose to employ.

It also took me eight-nine months until I published my investigation on the Intifada. It's not that during these months I said we were right, and afterwards suddenly 'the coin dropped' and I said that we weren't right. To this very moment, I don't know who is right. In my opinion it's not a matter of 'right'. There is a picture that isn't black or white – that's somewhere grayish. One has to bring all sides of the coin.

At the beginning, we presented our side, that is rather natural. Nevertheless, a few things happened – and we talked about psychology here, and suddenly we are offering Arafat Jerusalem and this 'dog' has the chutzpa to say 'no'. What's going on here?! And therefore it takes a year for things to get out. I don't think this is such a tragedy. I don't think that this cost lives. The other thing is far more significant – the excessive 'militarization' of Israel: the fact that there isn't one Minister of Defense who comes with John Lennon glasses and an attaché case containing sandwiches from home and thinks of things slightly differently. The fact that the IDF didn't let Bibi Netanyahu depart from Lebanon – even...even that finally came to light. It takes time for such things to come out. And, it also derived from this issue– that we're surrounded by people who don't love us very much....

As for the debate 'which came first' and 'who killed whom when' – I think Danny that you present this in a manner as if we were walking around half smiling with beepers and cell phones while everyone's dying, and it's 'totally out of our orbit'. This portrayal...I don't think there is anything farther from reality.

Akiva Eldar:

I only want to say one word, since in any case it's my paper Ha'aretz that if it isn't on its death bed, it's on the operating table. Look, Haaretz didn't lose readers because of far-Left senior reporters Gideon Levi and Amira Hess and because of me, and I say this with authority. Ha'aretz is losing readership because Ma'ariv is cheaper. We did an in-depth exploration of this matter and we did focus groups. I'll let you in on another thing: Ma'ariv is in trouble. There's a problem with all the print media in Israel. The print media are dying. Even Yediot Aharonot is losing readers. If tomorrow Amira Hess and Gideon Levi and Akiva Eldar will be sacked, Ha'aretz won't gain more than one or two readers, so that's not the issue.

I would say in Chanoch Marmari's and Yoel Esteron's defense – on what our internal surveys show: The public wants a 'light' paper. It wants entertainment. You can be right on principle Danny, and you can hit the public over the head every day and tell the public that its leaders are imbeciles and mean-spirited, but the public doesn't want this. It's not because of so-called Leftist views, but rather we have, apparently, a tendency to 'give the public the merchandise it wants'. The public 'votes' every day at the kiosk as to what it wants. Sometimes I am invited to give lectures to soldiers and they say to me: 'Why do you give all sorts of stories on rape and sensational news and all that?' So I say to them – 'Wait a minute, what newspaper do you read?' I do a little survey of who reads Yediot, who reads Ma'ariv and who reads Ha'aretz. It's clear to you that at best soldier in the group reads Ha'aretz...and it's not even for sure that he's telling the truth. So I say to them – 'Alright, you got your answer! That is, you want a paper with banner headlines, with big photos? Well, it's a 'supply and demand' marketplace.'

In an ideal world, I agree with you Danny. That's what should happen and I truly carried out struggles over this issue with the paper, and sometimes the struggles haven't been at all simple. But in the end, the ones who have to give an account to the publisher isn't me, it's my editors. Ha'aretz is blessed with a publisher who told me once that 'his editors fear for his pocket more than he does'.

Speaker from the audience:

The impression in the news and among the public is that President Bill Clinton backed Ehud Barak's version to the hilt regarding the reasons for the failure at Camp David. My question is whether this impression is correct, and what was Clinton's prime motivation in this issue?

Yoram Peri:

An important question. Indeed, we didn't speak at all about the US role and Clinton in particular. Each one of you who wants to address this question, should do so, and say in one or two sentences in summery, so we could close the discussion.

Gadi Baltiansky:

First of all, we're all sitting here for two hours and we still haven't said that at Camp David Arafat said 'no'. After all, this story comes embedded with a fact or two... There was a proposal of Clinton's. I'm talking about a proposal that was put forward at Camp David, not the detailed working paper that was issued. And Arafat said 'no'. He wasn't prepared to leave there with a basis for continuing negotiations. In my view Arafat made a mistake. His mistake was that he said 'no', and Barak said 'yes'. That Israeli yes – 'Yes, but...' – was a 'yes with reservations' that was given after an all-night team session. Barak then uttered his famous sentence: "I'm now siding with history, not siding with politics". This didn't happen with Arafat. He had to say what he said at the end of December 2000 when he said "Yes, but..." But by then it was too little and perhaps too late.

This is a fact that Clinton revealed afterwards and was angry over, and not without cause. When Arafat said 'I'm not willing to accept the proposal as the basis to continue' he in essence said 'to Clinton – 'No!' And the President of the United States did not like getting 'no' for an answer. Arafat may have had reasons to say this. It could be that this was due to lack of preparation, it could be due to the substance of the proposal itself – I won't go into this. I am presenting this as fact. And indeed Clinton said what he said. Clinton had (and continued to have down the road, as well) more complaints against Arafat than against Barak over the failure of the Summit itself.

But, Clinton didn't 'sell' the spin, or reach the conclusion that 'there is no one to talk to'. He continued to lead. He proposed a detailed plan in December 2000 after the outbreak of the Intifada, because he believed it was possible to reach an accord. It's a fact. He encouraged the sides. He invited the sides to continue deliberations, and Barak himself sent his Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time Shlomo Ben-Ami, and the head of the Prime Minister's Office Gilad Sher, and others to the Bolling Field Air Force Base near Washington DC. By the way, there Israel was more adversarial than it was at Camp David.

One must make a differentiation between Clinton's complaints against Arafat at Camp David and the conception that Barak began to create after Camp David that said 'since I didn't succeed in reaching a settlement, it is impossible to reach a settlement at all' – a conception that he really created after he lost the elections.

In the 'war of versions' that began to emerge in the second 'wave' of publications after Camp David, there were also publications in the New York Review of Books where Ehud Barak was interviewed. Among other things he said in the article that there would not be an agreement before 2028. Not 2027. Not 2029. Not 2006-and-a-half. 'Not until 2028.' Why did he say 2028? Earlier, I said something about calendars. Barak is intelligent and analytical. He didn't simply make up this number. He said 2028 because he figured out that 80 years would have to pass since the 1948 War of Independence: 1948 plus 80 brings us to 2028.

Why 80 and not 79? First of all, because most 80 year-olds are usually dead. Secondly, he did the arithmetic and found out that it took 80 years from the Bolshevik Revolution – the

October Revolution of 1917, for Russia to reach an end to the Communist Era and the breakup of the USSR, because it takes 80 years for these kinds of processes to ripen.

Why am I saying this? Because I would argue that the real spin was after he lost the elections, and the longer the Intifada dragged on. And Prof. Bar-Tal is correct that the Intifada, as we recall it and know it today isn't the same Intifada of the first few months. When they say 'Intifada' today, we don't relate to these months – to the same six months between Camp David and the elections – because for us, Israelis, 'Intifada' is buses blowing up. But not one bus blew up during these six months. There wasn't one suicide bomber. There was the lynch in Ramallah of two Israeli reservists who took a wrong turn, were apprehended by Palestinians, and murdered by a mob inside the Ramallah police station. There were two Tel Aviv restaurant owners who were murdered while frequenting a café in the West Bank town of Tulkarem, together with a Palestinian friend...and due to this attack the Taba Talks were suspended. But, there were no attacks of the kind identified today more than anything with the Intifada.

In the course of time, the violence intensified and the Intifada's pattern of suicide bombings in the heart of Israel developed later, and this conception – that Arafat didn't want to reach a permanent settlement because he knew exactly how it would look, and he opposed this outline... This meshed well with the approach of Sharon's Government. Consequently, while one can no longer say it's due to Arafat because he's gone – Barak today still says...and will continue to say that 'there's no partner at this time' – 'this time' meaning until 2028 apparently, and it's impossible to reach a settlement. Therefore, Barak opposes the Geneva Peace Initiative which is the one detailed model that one can raise. And, he will oppose all other outlines that will be presented as a permanent solution because it breaks the primary myth that he has transmitted: That because he didn't succeed in reaching an agreement, it's a sign that it's impossible to reach an agreement, and the other side is not interested in an agreement.

And by the way, it could be that Barak believes this myth. I say this to his credit, because I think he really did believe it. He wasn't lying. Any break in this myth also undermines his explanation why he lost the elections and undermines his *raison d'être* as a statesman. We think we need to explode and to shatter this spin. If this session today contributes something to shattering this, that would be enough.

Akiva Eldar:

Barak can say now: 'OK, it's a new ball game, Arafat is gone, so that's a no-brainer'. That is, Barak already has an 'ejection seat' on that one. He can say: 'I had a problem, because I stood firm facing Arafat, and whoever will need to stand firm facing the Palestinians will stand facing Abu-Mazen....' [Gadi Baltiansky: But he didn't say that. He continued to say that...] But you'll see that he'll say it and anyone who gets close to peace, then Barak will say 'Nu, it's a no-brainer.'

As for Clinton, I think that the reason that he came out unblemished from this issue is that the Israelis really love him. I think he got away cheap from this entire story. I remember. I

think – and Gadi, correct me if I’m wrong – that the only correspondent who was permitted to enter Camp David was from the New York tabloid *Newsday*. And why? Because the only thing in Clinton’s head was to make amends for what he’d done to Hillary just a short while back and to help her get elected to the Senate. Seriously, I think that he simply did a cynical calculation – that this was not the time to pick a fight with the Jews, and so he gave an interview to one of the news channels, and he dumped everything and did the opposite of what he had promised Arafat. Seems to me that today he’s a bit sorry for this. Here and there in interviews, even in his book, Clinton corrects this matter a bit.

Ben Caspit:

I want to say two short things in summary. First of all, let’s look for a moment at the quarter-full cup. It cost a lot of blood and it took four years, but what transpired here was, in essence, an ‘accommodation of expectations’. Yes it’s true that the Israeli public – or at least part of the public – doesn’t understand that Abu-Mazen comes to parley with Israel, with Arafat’s agenda in essence, and there will be in Israel some sort of ‘sobering up’ on this issue. On the other hand, everyone knows today how the settlement will look – what we didn’t know in July 2000 at Camp David. We all know we can’t escape withdrawing to the Green Line with these or those minor alterations. Everyone knows all of these things today that we didn’t know at all at the time. Our blunder.

And in closing, perhaps to paraphrase something that MK Achmad Tibi said from the Knesset dais. He was verbally sparring with MK Eliezer (‘Cheeta’) Cohen and said to him: ‘Cheeta, you were an IAF pilot, right?’ And Cheeta responded: ‘Yup, 25,000 flight hours.’ Turning to address another MK, Tibi continued ‘And you MK Gideon Ezra were deputy director of the GSS? Right?’ Turning to address another MK ‘And MK Danny Yatom – you were head of the Mossad? Right? So tell me, how do you beat us Palestinian] time-and-again with this kind of human material?’ [Laughter in the audience] and then Tibi added: ‘Apparently with us it’s even worse...’

I think if the Palestinians had maintained their struggle, kept the present Intefada going as it was at the start.... (We call it erroneously an ‘Intifada’. An Intifada is a popular uprising and this doesn’t exist, at least for now. What there is, is armed conflict. This is a war in every sense.) If they had kept the present Intifada going and gone forward in their attacks on the Jewish settlers in the Territories and on the IDF in the Territories – I’m not saying I pray this would have happened – but, then, in my opinion, we already wouldn’t be in the Territories. What happened with *Arba Imahot* (the Four Mothers protest movement) and Lebanon would have happened in the West Bank and Gaza as well¹⁷.

The brutal response of the IDF – the Palestinians saw they were losing 5 to 1 in casualty ratios – led the Palestinians...out of their own innate murderous revengefulness, to begin sending suicide bombers to city centers, to the cafes. This in essence created what

¹⁷ The call by the protest movement *Arba Imahot*’s to withdraw from Lebanon was the driving force behind changing public opinion in favor of a unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon to the international border, that led Ehud Barak to order the May 2000 pull-out.

happened afterwards and united Israeli society, and made the media impervious in a certain sense, when people are being murdered and blood is running in the streets.

That is the tragedy of what happened. If they had done what the Hezbollah did in Lebanon – and this was what the army was afraid of – that is, ‘Lebanonization’ of Judea and Samaria ...in my opinion, Israeli society would already have pulled Israel out of the Territories and ‘ended the occupation’ – or however you want to call it. They didn’t do that. My mother once said: ‘You can’t choose your parents.’ Well apparently [you can’t choose] your neighbors either... That’s just the way it is here.

Yoram Peri:

As I noted at the beginning of our meeting, the intent of these deliberations was not to compare versions, and not to carry out an historical analysis of the correctness or incorrectness of this or that version concerning the failure of Camp David summit. Rather, it was to take the dominant version, the hegemonic version, and examine it: Yes, to ask how this conception was created? How was it crafted? How did it develop? Why was it ‘bought’ so easily? And indeed, after three or four years, it’s hard to pinpoint who is guilty. We didn’t talk almost at all about Yassir Arafat’s guilt. We spoke only about one statement by President Clinton. It would be inappropriate to assume that what transpired here at the symposium was to ‘gang-up’ on Barak. By the way, Ben-Ami held the same position as Barak, and what was said here about Barak – perhaps not what was said about his personality traits, but indeed in regard to his political perceptions – could equally be said about Shlomo Ben-Ami as well. The important issue that concerns us – what we though reasonably should be debated today – is the issue of the conception, and I will sum up this gathering with this [thought].

I am going around for months with this very bad feeling in regard to Israel and Syria. The IDF General Staff– the Chief-of-Staff 'Bugi' Ya'alon and senior officers on the General Staff hold (though not all of them) strongly believe that it is possible to easily reach a peace agreement with Syria, and that now is the time to do this. And they enumerate why: The parameters of the agreement are clear. We were very close to an agreement. And the agreement wasn’t done, not because of the Syrians, but because of Israel. Not only the champions of the ‘revisionist school’, but also the champions of the original ‘conservative school’ all concur on this – including President Clinton and including Dennis Ross. They said it was possible to reach an agreement in 2000 and this didn’t happen not so much because of the Syrian position but rather because Prime Minister Barak got "cold feet" at a certain moment of the negotiations.

The military – which was responsible for Israel’s security – believes today as it believed than, in 2000, that there is no security risk from this agreement, despite going down from the Golan Heights. Moreover, the military says that ‘two days after an agreement with Syria, there will also be an agreement with Lebanon’. Two days’ is a direct quote from the Chief-of-Staff Ya'alon, and he didn’t say this in a close forum. Moreover, since the Hezbollah is the main agent operating against us today, closing the Syrian spigot will end the Hezbollah threat. Then Israel can have a ‘ring of peace’ that includes Egypt, Jordan,

Syria and Lebanon. And all this at an easy price that can be achieved today because Syria is in bad shape and it needs this peace. I want to underscore: These are not the positions of pro-Syrian diplomats or leftist Israeli politicians, but rather the IDF top brass, and the IDF's position has been clarified to the Government.

Those who argue against this proposal say that the Syrians are pretending that they are interested in a peace agreement with us only in order to find grace in the eyes of the United States. Yet didn't Anwar Saadat make peace with us for the United States? If the state of President Hafez Assad is so difficult, isn't this the best time to make an agreement...and not wait until his situation eases? After all, then no doubt he won't agree to a larger compromise.

Moreover, in recent months Syria made territorial concessions to Turkey and to Jordan in two border disputes, and therefore it could be that the agreement this time will be more conciliatory than the agreement arrived at in the past. In other words, the people who are in charge of the security of the State of Israel think that it is possible to reach a good agreement with Syria. The fact that there are those who think that it's inexpedient to give up Golan Heights wine have the right to their own opinion. What bothers me – and we aren't here at a political rally, after all – is that there is no public debate on this at all. We are living again according to a conception: 'Those Syrians scum, with them, with the Syrians there's no one to talk to'. The question I ask myself is – whether in another few years someone will have to conduct a discussion like the one we are doing here today that will analyze why there weren't any negotiations with Syria, and what was the price the two sides will have to pay until we will deliberate with them.