

## **A Tortuous Trail: The predicament of the Israeli peace movement, 1993-2008**

Hermann, Tamar S. (2009). *The Israeli Peace Movement – A Shattered Dream*. NY: Cambridge University Press, 310 pp.

In a closed-to-the-media meeting he held in mid August 2009 with members of the radical right wing – Jewish Leadership (*Manhigut Yehudit*) – faction of the Likud party, former IDF Chief of Staff and current deputy Prime Minister, Moshe (Boggy) Ya'alon, referred to the Israeli peace movement, Peace Now (*Shalom Achshav*), as "a virus." He said that the movement jeopardized the national interest by their persistent anti-settlement campaign, which, he maintained, negated the basic right of Jews to live wherever they wished in the entire Greater Israel territory. He was wholeheartedly seconded by Dr. Uzi Landau, the National Infrastructure Minister. This was – at least thus far - the latest episode in a long chain of attacks, direct and indirect, by Israeli officials, media people and often even the "man in the street," on peace activism and the peace movement. The common denominator of all these attacks was the prevalent accusation that the movement and its activists were "unpatriotic" and "self-haters," who, more than the "natural" Israeli and Jewish values and interests, cherished universal values such as human rights and the national right to self-determination (in more refined wording), and the enemy's ideas and interests (in blunter terms).

These attacks were not at all self-evident, considering the small membership and low profile of the peace movement (actually, as shown in the book, not one movement, but an assortment of movements and groups of different sizes, strategies and even ideologies), in the last two decades or so, certainly since the outbreak of the second Palestinian *intifada* in September 2000. The intriguing question is why they bothered – if the movement is indeed so small and unnoticeable, why was it the target of so much anger, mistrust, and verbal and non-verbal violence in Israel (and yet popular in international public opinion)? The answer, which is also the bottom line of the book, is that despite its small size and current invisibility, today it is clear that the peace movement was quite successful in influencing Israeli public discourse on the origins, development and ways of resolving the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict as well as well in promoting the idea that Israel should not only react, but can and should make moves to change the regional situation from a zero-sum game to a win-win one.

Furthermore, as shown in the book, friends and foes alike admit today that several ideas that the movement developed and cultivated over the years, such as the two state

solution or the realization that military superiority alone could not guarantee Israel's security in the long run, while a diplomatic settlement of the conflict apparently could, was the basis for the Oslo Process. In other words, these ideas, which were consistently promoted by the various peace groups, yet rejected by the Israeli Jewish mainstream for many years, were adopted in the early 1990s by the Israeli policymakers who "created" Oslo and incorporated into the official foreign and security policy of the state. In fact, in a way, despite the collapse of the Oslo process and the change of ruling parties, some of these ideas remain part of Israeli policy and are accepted by public opinion on the conflict and the potential ways to resolve it.

If so, other questions, dealt with in detail in the book, emerge: Why didn't the movement and its activists get any credit for this cognitive and political transformation, not even during the Oslo heyday? Why have both the Israeli upper echelons and the general public consistently turned a cold shoulder to peace activists, and how did these negative relations with the mainstream effect the ideology, strategy, tactics and organizational structure of the peace movement in the years since the signing of the first Oslo declaration of principles in August 1993?

This book attempts to answer these and other questions by focusing on external and internal processes and interactions experienced by the peace movement. The analysis uses insights from general social movement theory and theories on public opinion and foreign-security policymaking. The discussion also rests heavily on the findings of public opinion surveys conducted in Israel in the framework of the Peace Index project. The data from the latter are used to systematically juxtapose the peace movement's positions with Israeli public attitudes on relevant matters between 1993 and 2008.

Following the introductory, theoretical chapter of the book, the next two chapters cover the Israeli sociopolitical terrain and provide readers with a brief history of Israeli peace activism and organizations from the pre-State days to 2008. The main chapter of the book – *The Path Strewn with Obstacles*, which is divided into five periods – describes and analyzes in great detail the predicament of the movement, which paradoxically, following the launching of the Oslo peace process, experienced a prolonged, fatal decline in membership, activity, political significance, and media visibility. The final chapter – *A Path Finder: Exploring New Ways or Getting Lost?* – puts forward a detailed 'balance sheet' of the movement's achievements and failures.

The appendices include a comprehensive list of all Israeli peace groups and movements, as well as graphs summarizing the findings of the Peace Index surveys.