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Arab and Jewish Attitude: Toward a Palestinian State

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Abstract

This article deals with the attitudes of Arabs and Jews in Israel regarding a Palestinian state. These include their images of such a state, the costs and benefits perceived if a Palestinian state were established, and the fears and desires involved, including the desire to keep contact with the Palestinian population in the various life domains. The article will attempt to analyze the extent to which the attitudes toward the establishment of a Palestinian state and its likely character derive from a rational calculus of expected costs and benefits to one's own group.

Disciplines

Communication | Social and Behavioral Sciences

Arab and Jewish Attitude: Toward a Palestinian State

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This article deals with the attitudes of Arabs and Jews in Israel regarding a Palestinian state. These include their images of such a state, the costs and benefits perceived if a Palestinian state were established, and the fears and desires involved, including the desire to keep contact with the Palestinian population in the various life domains. The article will attempt to analyze the extent to which the attitudes toward the establishment of a Palestinian state and its likely character derive from a rational calculus of expected costs and benefits to one's own group.

In the present case, it is obvious that the calculus of self-interest is different for each of the two groups. It is safe to suggest that Israeli Jews regard their state both in contractual and communal terms (Kimmerling 1985; Liebman 1989). Israeli Arabs, on the other hand, regard the state in contractual terms, but do not see it as a frame for community. Rather, being a minority, Israeli Arabs have a communal affinity for culture and kinship with fellow Palestinians outside of Israel. In constructing their attitudes toward the prospect of a Palestinian state, therefore, one might expect the Jews to evaluate its worth only in terms of cost-benefit considerations for themselves. Israeli Arabs, on the other hand, might consider not only their own immediate self-interest but also the interests of their kinsmen elsewhere. However altruistic, such concern may reflect a long-run self-interest as well, based on the enhanced identity that derives from communal association with a nation-state.

Our findings are derived from four waves of the continuing survey of the Guttman Institute (May 1989, July 1990, November 1990, May 1991). Each wave of the survey was based on a representative sample of the Israeli population 20 years of age and over, including about 1,200 Jewish and 250 Arab respondents. This article is based on that part of the questionnaire that examines support for a Palestinian state by Jews and Arabs, respectively. It looks at the perception by each group of the benefits that a Palestinian state is likely to bring (1) to each of three potential beneficiaries—Israeli Jews, Israeli Arabs, and Arabs in the occupied territories, and (2) in each of three areas of concern—security, economics, and social interaction.

BACKGROUND

Israel is a pluralistic society composed of different ethnic, national, and religious groups. Undoubtedly, the Jewish-Arab division is the deepest one and the most complicated. These two groups differ in ethnicity, religion, language, culture, and national aspirations.

Arabs are outside of the Jewish national consensus in Israel as far as nation-state building (in many of its aspects), ingathering of exiles, absorption of immigration, and other cardinal issues are concerned. Most of the interpersonal relations between Arabs and Jews in Israel are formal and technical, characterized by asymmetric minority-majority relations (Mari 1988; Smooha 1989).

Since the establishment of the state of Israel, the collective identity of the Arabs living there has been affected by several contradictory factors. On one hand, they are part of the Arab world, particularly of the Palestinian people, in terms of language, nationality, and cultural symbols. On the other hand, they are Israeli citizens struggling for civic equality and promoting their status. In this sense, the Arab citizens have two main reference groups. At the national level, they are affected by the Palestinians and those who live in Arab countries that are in continuous conflict and tension with Israel. At the citizenship level, they are affected by the Jewish majority that controls the national power center and determines the division of resources (Al-Haj 1991).

Although Jews in Israel have maintained a national consensus on the aforementioned cardinal issues, there has always been a dispute among them regarding the appropriate way for the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the desired nature of their relationship with the Palestinians. This dispute has grown wider since the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 (see Lissak 1990).

FINDINGS

Our findings reveal that the dispute between Arabs and Jews regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not restricted to the issue of annexation versus yielding territories. Rather, it extends to the question of what kind of Palestinian entity should be established in the territories. Although the vast majority of Arabs support the creation of a full-fledged Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel, the majority of Jews reject this option.

Figure 1 indicates that support of the Israeli public for the establishment of a Palestinian state is essentially stable over time. When Arabs and Jews are combined as a national sample, about one-third of the Israeli public may be said to favor a Palestinian state. However, as indicated earlier, a wide gap exists between Jews and Arabs over this issue. Among the former, the percentage of those supporting a Palestinian state was 20 in May 1989, 22 in July 1990, and 17 in November 1990. In May 1991, it increased once again to its previous level (22%).

The drop in support in November 1990 for a Palestinian state among Jews may be explained against the background of the Gulf crisis. This crisis brought a considerable

decrease in the sympathy of the Zionist left for the Palestinian issue. The Gulf crisis highlighted the opposing orientation of Arabs and Jews in Israel; each group identified with a different side in the conflict. For Jews, the clear-cut decision was to identify with the Allies led by the United States. For Palestinians, the decision was much more complicated. Although some condemned the occupation of Kuwait by Iraq as a way of settling conflict between Arab countries, the vast majority of Palestinians supported the linkage declared by Iraq between the Kuwaiti case and the Palestinian issue, in the sense that Saddam Hussein should not withdraw from Kuwait until the Palestinian case is settled (see *Al-Hamishmar* February 1, 1991).

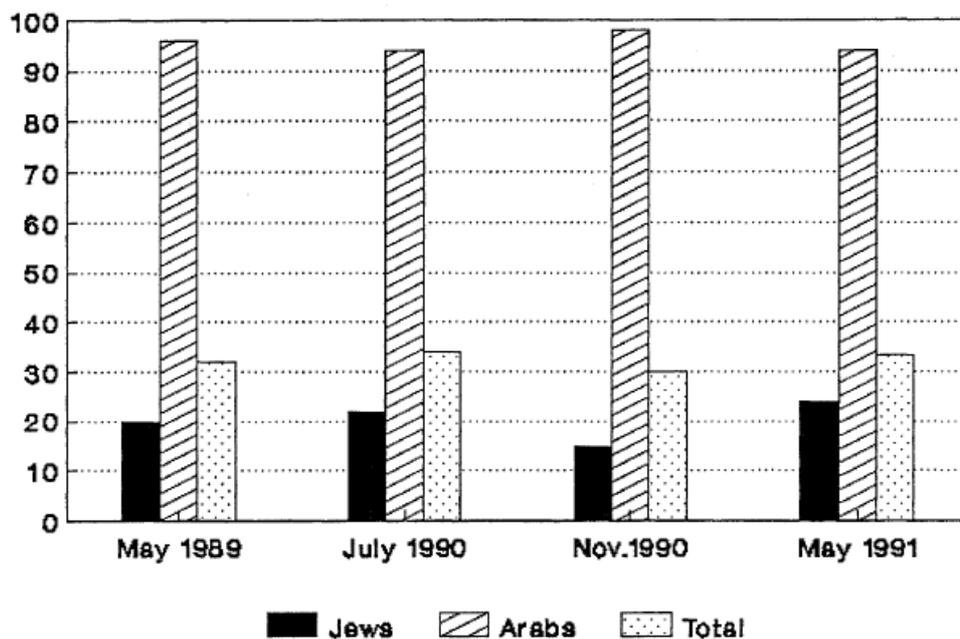


Figure 1: The Support for a Palestinian State Among Jews and Arabs over Time

Unlike the Jews, the Arabs of Israel overwhelmingly support a Palestinian state. By adopting a "two state solution," Arabs think that all groups involved would benefit, including Jews in Israel. This fact is reflected in answers to the following question: "If there were a Palestinian state, what would be the future situation, compared with today, of Jews in Israel/Arabs in Israel/Arabs in the territories, in terms of their personal security? Economic situation? Social situation?"

As shown in Table 1, Israel's Arabs believe that a Palestinian state would improve the situation of all parties, even if they believe that their Palestinian brethren in the territories would benefit most. The Arabs have a global perception regarding the potential impact of a Palestinian state and, in this context, do not differentiate among the several fields: personal safety, economic situation, and social situation. In other words, Arabs have very high positive expectations from a Palestinian state.

Unlike the Arabs, Jews are more cautious and negative in their assessment concerning the impact of a Palestinian state. Overall, they think that, for Jews in Israel, the situation will

be worsened as far as personal safety and economic situation are concerned. When asked about the potential repercussions of a Palestinian state on their social situation, the Jews divide almost equally. Jews acknowledge that the social situation of the Arabs in the territories and those living in Israel would improve if there were a Palestinian state, but believe that their economic situation would worsen.

TABLE 1
The Perceived Situation by Jews and
Arabs If There Were a Palestinian State

	<i>According to Israeli Jews: Compared with today, the situation in the future would be:</i>			<i>According to Israeli Arabs: Compared with today, the situation in the future would be:</i>		
	<i>Better</i>	<i>Same</i>	<i>Worse</i>	<i>Better</i>	<i>Same</i>	<i>Worse</i>
For Jews in Israel						
Personal safety	18%	13%	69%	56%	17%	27%
Economic situation	26	33	41	62	18	20
Social situation	33	34	34	59	28	13
For Arabs in Israel						
Personal safety	43	30	28	76	18	6
Economic situation	31	39	30	75	20	5
Social situation	43	32	25	75	18	7
For Arabs in territories						
Personal safety	55	19	27	95	2	3
Economic situation	30	20	50	90	4	6
Social situation	47	25	28	91	5	4

NOTE: Better = "much" and "a little" better; Worse = "a little" and "much worse."

STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS: EXTRACTING BASIC CONCEPTS THAT GOVERN ATTITUDES

Another way to examine these data is in terms of the "attitude space" implied by the data. The structure of that space may be studied by Faceted Smallest Space Analysis (FSSA) (Shye 1978, 1991; Shye, Denesh, and Sharashor 1991). FSSA is a nonmetric, multivariate technique for mapping observed variables (e.g., questionnaire items) in accordance with the correlations between them. The attitude space obtained by the FSSA maps is studied with respect to correspondences between its sub-regions on one hand and content classifications of the variables on the other. In a variety of studies, FSSA maps have been found useful in decoding political attitudes (see Shye, Denesh, and Sharashor 1991; Russett and Shye 1993 for a recent example). Figures 2 and 3 show the FSSA maps obtained for Arab and Jewish samples,

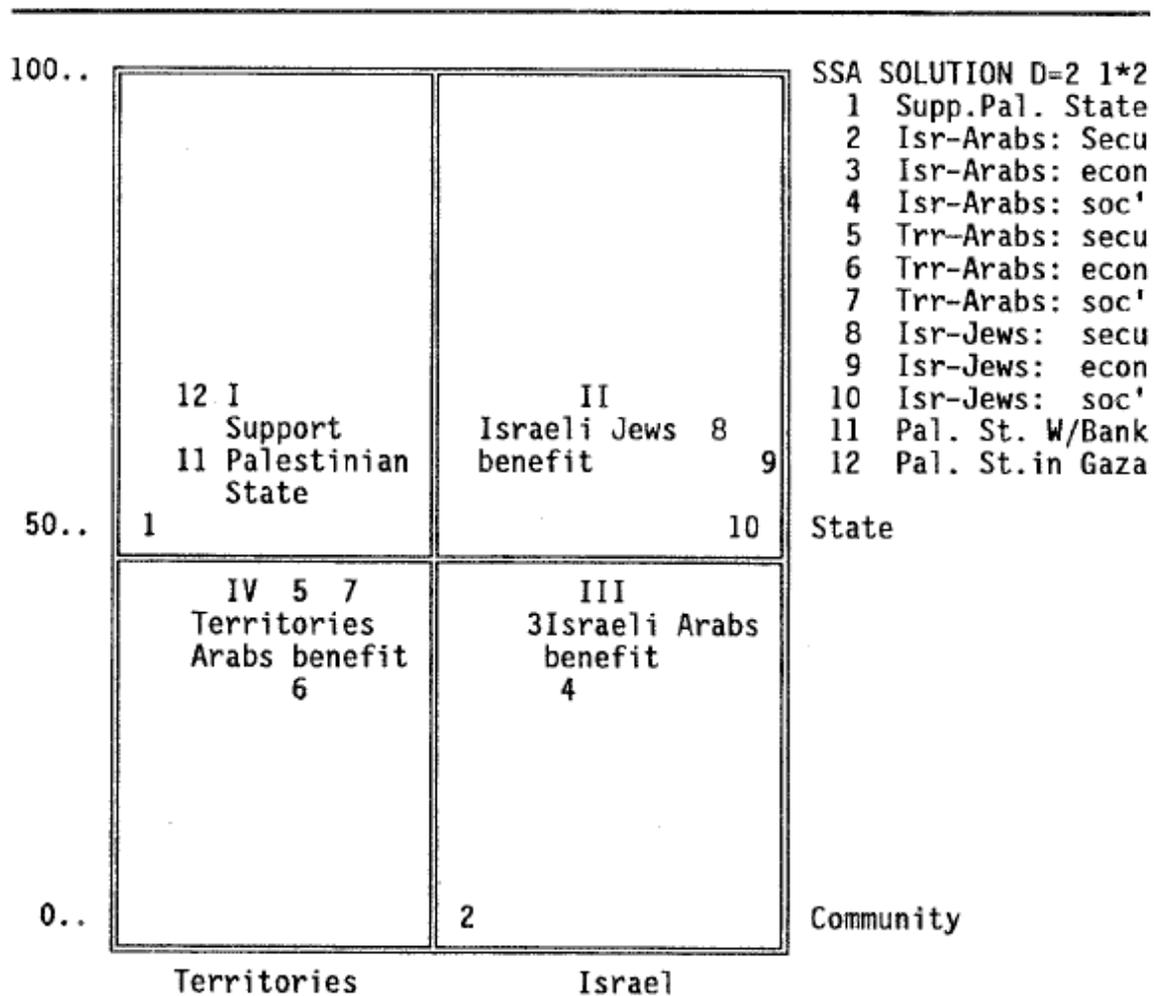


Figure 2: Attitudes Toward a Palestinian State and Its Benefits: Structural Analysis by Faceted Smallest Space Analysis (Arab population)

respectively. Both maps are based on the same set of twelve variables and can be partitioned into four meaningful regions (clockwise):

The partitionings of the maps into four regions can be shown to be the product of two more elementary partitionings: By a geographic criterion, the space can be divided according to whether reference is made to Israel itself (Israeli Jews, region II; Israeli Arabs, region III), or to the territories (Palestinian state, region I; Arabs in territories, region IV). Secondly, by a social organizational criterion, a further division can be made according to whether reference is made to a majority state (Palestinian state, region I; Israeli Jews, region II), or to a minority community (Israeli Arabs, region III; Arabs in territories, region IV).

That this same pattern of partitioning is repeated in both samples, the Arab and the Jewish, attests to its stability across populations and provides evidence for possible structural lawfulness. Hence the FSSA maps empirically validate the conceptual distinction between Israel (within the Green Line) and the territories; and between two kinds of social frameworks, the formal (state), and the informal (community).

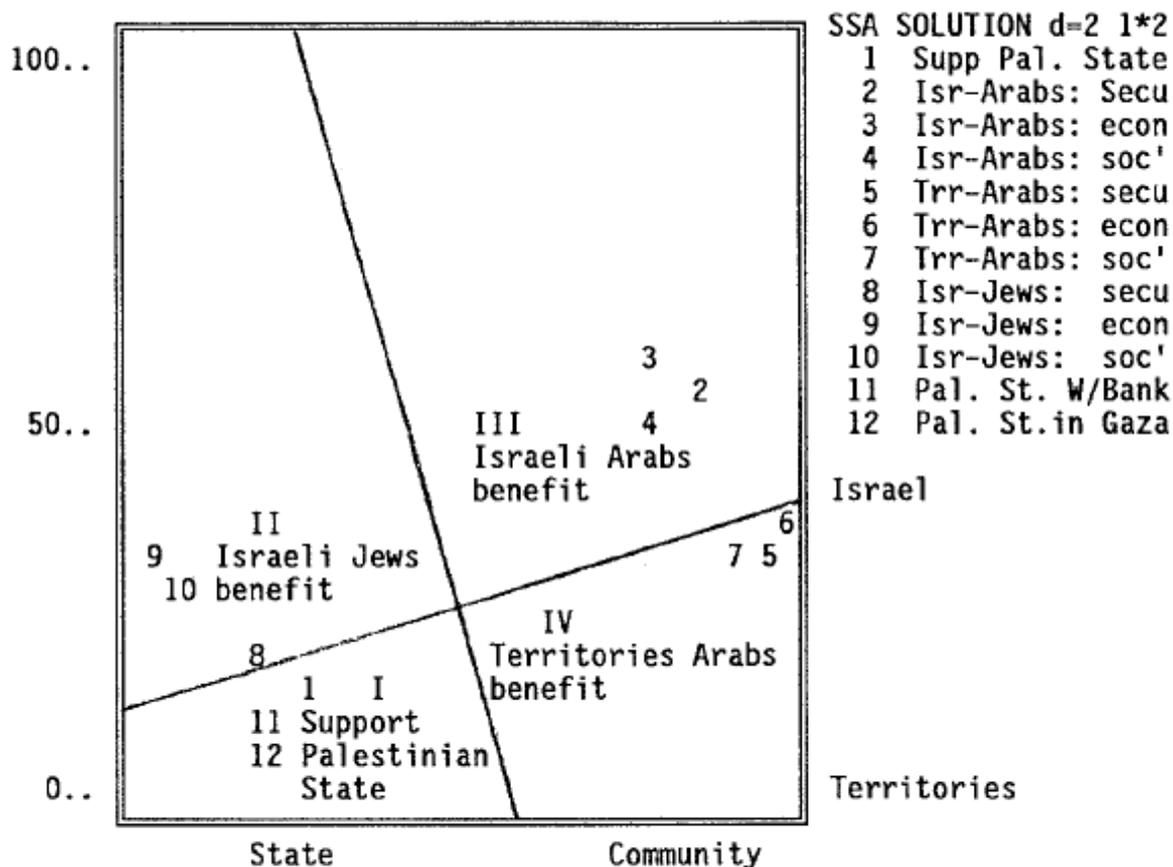


Figure 3: Attitudes Toward Palestinian State and Its Benefits: Structural Analysis by Faceted Smallest Space Analysis (Jewish population)

Region I: Support for a Palestinian state (in general, var #1; in the West Bank, #11; in the Gaza strip, #12)

Region II: Expected benefit to Israeli Jews (personal security, #8; economically, #9; socially, #10)

Region III: Expected benefit to Israeli Arabs (personal security, #2; economically, #3; socially, #4)

Region IV: Expected benefit to Arabs in territories (personal security, #5; economically, #6; socially, #7)

Another feature worth noticing is that in both correlation matrices (that serve as input to the FSSA procedure), practically all coefficients are positive or zero. Hence, by and large, the more one sees the Palestinian state as beneficial to one group, the more likely one is to consider it beneficial to all other groups (and in every respect examined—security, economic, and social), and, also, the more likely one is to support a Palestinian state. (The one exception to this general picture is embodied in slightly negative correlations observed in the Jewish

sample between the expected economic benefit for Israeli Jews and that expected for Arabs in the territories; that is, some potential competition, though minor, is anticipated.)

IS SUPPORTING A PALESTINIAN STATE A FUNCTION OF ITS BENEFITS?

Against the background of these underlying commonalities, it is of special interest to examine differences between the two samples, the Arabs and the Jews. For the Jews, support of a Palestinian state is dictated first and foremost by self-interest, particularly their own security considerations. Correlations between expected benefits to Israeli Jews and support of a Palestinian state are high: .73 with enhanced personal security, .42 and .53 with economic and social improvement, respectively. Expected benefits to the Arab populations in Israel or in the territories contribute much less to Jewish support of a Palestinian state—the relevant correlations range between .08 and .28 (see Table 2).

TABLE 2
Correlations (monotonicity coefficient) of Expected Benefits of a Palestinian State with the Support of Such a State (Jewish population)

	<i>Expected Benefit</i>		
	<i>Security</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Social</i>
For Israeli Jews	.73	.42	.53
For Israeli Arabs	.13	.17	.23
For Territorial Arabs	.23	.08	.28

TABLE 3
Correlations (monotonicity coefficient) of Expected Benefits of a Palestinian State with the Support of Such a State (Arab population)

	<i>Expected Benefit</i>		
	<i>Security</i>	<i>Economic</i>	<i>Social</i>
For Israeli Jews	.34	.24	.21
For Israeli Arabs	.58	.46	.42
For Territorial Arabs	.81	.61	.64

For the Israeli Arabs it seems that the primary motivation for supporting a Palestinian state is the benefits that would accrue not to themselves, but to the Arabs in the territories: expected benefits to the latter correlate .81, .61, and .64, respectively, with support of Palestinian state. The self-interest of Israeli Arabs takes only second place with the corresponding coefficients of .58, .46, and .42, respectively (see Table 3). Apparently, the commitment of Israeli Arabs and their identification with their brethren across the Green Line

play major roles in determining their support for a Palestinian state. This, however, need not imply suspension of their own self-interest, which may well be served by the Palestinian state in terms of a strengthened national identity.

THE IMAGE OF THE PALESTINIAN STATE

As in the case of cost-benefit expectations of a Palestinian state, when asked about the image of such a state, a wide gap also emerged between Arabs and Jews. The former believe that a Palestinian state will prove to be democratic and peaceful to Israel (see Table 4), whereas Jews think the opposite. Most Jews are convinced that such a state would not be democratic and would seek to annex parts from Israel. Also, the vast majority of Jews think that a Palestinian state would be of Islamic character. Arabs are divided over this latter issue;

TABLE 4
The Image of a Palestinian State
in the Eyes of Arabs and Jews (in percentages)

	<i>To a Great Extent</i>	<i>To Some Extent</i>	<i>To a Small Extent</i>	<i>Not At All</i>	<i>Total</i>
Arabs					
Will be democratic	54.0	38.0	4.0	4.0	100.0
Have ambitions to annex parts of Israel	10.0	13.0	22.0	55.0	100.0
Have a religious- Muslim character	16.0	36.0	23.0	25.0	100.0
Jews					
Will be democratic	4.0	20.0	30.0	46.0	100.0
Have ambitions to annex parts of Israel	51.0	28.0	13.0	8.0	100.0
Have a religious- Muslim character	59.0	27.0	8.0	6.0	100.0

53% think that the Islamic character would be a dominant element in a future Palestinian state.

These findings may explain why most Jews perceive a Palestinian state as a security risk. In the eyes of Jews, a nondemocratic, Islamic state that seeks to annex parts of Israel spells a continuous source of instability. However, Palestinians have repeatedly emphasized that a Palestinian state cannot constitute a threat to Israel, not only because of the social and economic problems such a state would face, but because it would be small, with only limited military and strategic power (Sahliyeh 1991, 14).

These attitudes are reflected also in the desired character of such a state in the eyes of Arabs. We asked respondents to answer the following question: "Imagine a situation in which

a Palestinian state is established alongside the state of Israel; to what extent do you desire that this state be democratic? Of Islamic character? Seek to annex territories from Israel?" Ninety-one percent of Arab respondents indicated that they strongly desire or desire that a Palestinian state be democratic and only 19% expressed their desire that such state should seek to annex Israeli territories. As for the Islamic character of a Palestinian state, one-third of the respondents expressed such a desire. It is worth mentioning that Jews see a contradiction between a democratic and Islamic state, whereas Arabs do not think that such a negative relationship necessarily exists.

A survey conducted in May 1991 among the Palestinians in the territories revealed a similar picture regarding the desired character of a Palestinian state. The majority of Palestinian respondents (76%) preferred a democratic system and 54% preferred a multiparty system. At the same time, 47% said that the preferred ideology is the religious one (Haj-Yehia 1992, 13).

If we are to judge according to these attitudes, we might hypothesize that a Palestinian state would adopt a model of democracy similar to the Israeli one, which is not inimical to religion. In other words, although this state would not be ruled by the Sharia (religious laws), it might be difficult to expect a clear separation between state and religion.

With respect to settlement of the Palestinian issue, Jews in Israel are divided concerning their will to keep contact with the Palestinian population, with a substantial part (40% to 50%) of them claiming they want to keep contact with Palestinians in the different fields (Table 5). As in the case of support for a Palestinian state, here, too, there was a drop in the desire to keep contact with Palestinians on the eve of the Gulf War and, once again, an increase after the war. This is another indication that the anxiety of the Israeli population during the war decreased shortly after the cease fire, when life was back to normal. In this sense, the fears existing prior to the Gulf War have affected the attitudes of Israeli Jews regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict much more than the war itself.

TABLE 5
Jews and Arabs Who Want to Keep
Contact with Palestinian Population, over Time

<i>Type of Contact</i>	<i>Jews</i>			<i>Arabs</i>		
	<i>July 1990</i>	<i>November 1990</i>	<i>May 1991</i>	<i>July 1990</i>	<i>November 1990</i>	<i>May 1991</i>
Social	51.0	36.0	45.0	83.0	82.0	85.0
Economic	47.0	31.0	40.0	78.0	80.0	79.0
Cultural	43.0	29.0	38.0	84.0	84.0	81.0

The second point has to do with the ordering of the different fields of desired contact. Interestingly, the several waves of the survey revealed that the Jews rank social contact with Palestinians as more attractive than cultural or economic contact. Jews feel estrangement from the Palestinian-Arab culture, in which they see the Islamic element as central. In

addition, Jews prefer contact with Western European, rather than Arab Middle Eastern culture (Shye, Tzemah, and Bar 1988, 23). Likewise, as shown in Table 1, Jews think that they will benefit more socially than economically as a result of the establishment of a Palestinian state. This finding reflects the fact that whereas some Jews (e.g., the eastern, those originating in Arab countries) are not averse to social contact with Palestinians, they do foresee economic competition between Israel and the Palestinian state, possibly because of the (currently experienced) cheaper Arab labor.

Unlike Jews, the vast majority of Arabs said they want to maintain all types of contact with the Palestinians. The most desired field of contact for Arabs is the sociocultural. It may seem surprising that economic contact is always ranked lower. This is because Arabs in Israel see their linkage with the Palestinians as mainly connected to their national and cultural bonds. In fact, there have been no considerable economic relations between the Palestinians across the Green Line. Economic relations between the Palestinians in Israel and the territories have been marginal since 1967, and both groups are dependent on the Israeli economy, which is controlled by the Jewish majority (Lewin-Epstein and Semyonov 1986).

Clearly, the attitudes of Israeli Arabs toward a Palestinian state reflect their complex Israeli-Palestinian identity. Although the vast majority of Israeli Arabs support a Palestinian state and strongly desire contact with the Palestinians, some 70% say that even if a Palestinian state were established, they would not leave Israel to live there. They would rather continue to be Israeli citizens and struggle for their civil rights (see Al-Haj 1991, 25). However, this is not exactly what Jews think about the intentions of Arabs. Some 65% of Jews said that Arabs would move to a Palestinian state if one were established.

The question arises of whether there is a relationship between the attitudes of the Jewish majority toward the establishment of a Palestinian state and toward future contact with Palestinians, on one hand; and the image they have of such a state on the other? In other words, are the attitudes of Jews toward a Palestinian state totally ideological, or are they affected by cost-benefit considerations as well? To answer this question, we examined the correlations among the attitudes toward a Palestinian state, attitudes toward contact with Palestinians, and the image of such a state.

Table 6 shows a significant relationship between the attitudes of Jews in Israel towards a Palestinian entity and the image they have of that entity. The most meaningful for the Jewish public is the democratic character of a Palestinian state and the potential security danger it might present to Israel. The perceived Islamic character is also important, but it is not as important as the former elements. The more a Palestinian state is perceived as democratic and the less threatening to Israel, the more the Jews support its establishment and desire contact with Palestinians in the different fields.

To summarize, our findings show that Arabs and Jews in Israel have a contradictory image of a Palestinian state. Whereas the former have a positive image and high expectations of a future Palestinian state, the latter have a negative image and think that such a state would present a threat to Israeli security. In addition, Palestinians in Israel would like to see a democratic Palestinian state that manages to keep a balance between state and religion.

Our findings reveal that the attitudes of the Jewish public toward the Palestinians as a whole and a Palestinian state in particular are strongly affected by cost-benefit considerations and future images of a Palestinian state. The findings reiterate that the value of community is

very strong in the political culture of Israeli Jews (see also Kimmerling 1985; Liebman 1989). This leads to the conclusion that intermediate arrangements that contribute to confidence building between Israelis and Palestinians and highlight the security benefits to be derived would greatly affect the Jewish public and enhance the prospect of a permanent solution for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

For the Arabs, the establishment of a Palestinian state with normal relations with Israel will satisfy not only their concern for their larger community but also the enhancement of their identity. In this sense, the Palestinian state for Israeli Arabs—who have no intention of moving—there will serve not so much as a contractual frame but as a communal frame.

TABLE 6
Correlation Matrix of Jewish Attitudes
Toward a Palestinian State, and Desired Contact with
Palestinians According to the Image of a Palestinian State

	<i>The Image of a Palestinian State</i>		
	<i>Democratic</i>	<i>Seeks to Annex Parts of Israel</i>	<i>Islamic</i>
Support the establishment of a Palestinian state	0.2150**	-0.2297**	-0.0879*
Desire social contact with Palestinians	0.1642**	-0.1064**	-0.0306
Desire economic contact	0.0794*	-0.1005**	0.0049
Desire cultural contact	0.1843**	-0.1266**	-0.0352

NOTE: $N = 1,151$.

* $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

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