The Impact of Siege Mentality of Israel: How it Shaped a Society, and the Nature of the Arab-Israeli Conflict

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Abstract

It is a rare day when one is able to flip through news channels or turn the page of a newspaper without seeing a story or comment on the conflict between Arabs and Israel. In a way, this ongoing conflict has shaped the world's view of the Middle East and has become a symbol for the tension and strife in the region. Scholars, historians, and politicians have spent years analyzing each flare-up in the region, dissecting past negotiations in the hope of discovering where exactly we all went wrong in trying to resolve this impenetrable issue; or even better, a concrete reason for how it has evolved into such a daunting quandary with no solution in the foreseeable future. However, through all of this analysis and retrospection, one thing has become abundantly clear. The Israeli mindset of fear, suspicion, and mistrust coupled with the obsession with security has both shaped Israeli society and directly affected the courses of action taken in the conflict. This paper seeks to address the Israeli mindset of "paranoia" on two fronts: first, how it has affected Israel's relationship to Arabs and second, how it has shaped Israeli society since 1948.

The paper will be divided into four separate sections:

I. What is Siege Mentality, and How Does it Pertain to Israel and Israelis?
II. Siege Mentality and Israeli Military Action and Foreign Policy
III. Siege Mentality and Israeli Society and National Identity
IV. The Possibility of Elimination or Diffusion of Siege Mentality in Israel.

Section I: What is Siege Mentality, and How Does it Pertain to Israel and Israelis?

Siege mentality has been defined by the Merriam Webster dictionary as "having a defensive or overly fearful attitude."[1] According to Daniel Bar-Tal, who claims that is prevalent in Israeli society, siege mentality is a "mental state in which members of a group hold a central belief that the rest of the world is against them."[2] What is important about siege mentality, especially in the case of Israel, is that it is a group mentality. This is not to say that every Israeli suffers from siege mentality; however, it is important because it solidifies a group and creates an "us"-"them" mindset. The group unites against outside groups in the "belief that the rest of the world is against them".[3] This parallels many traits that are seen in Israeli society, such as pride, rationalization over land and actions, and a general disregard for international law. Siege mentality develops in societies that have experienced some sort of trauma that causes them to feel isolated against the world and to develop a latent mistrust for other countries, or even the world in general. It has been seen in Albanian society, and is often attributed to the conflict in Northern Ireland.

Siege mentality is a belief, and one that is strongly held and widely supported by most of Israeli society, and can even be extended to Jewish people around the world.

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1. "Siege Mentality." Def. 1. *Mirriam Webster*. The Encyclopedia Britannica Company,

   n.d. Web. 15 Dec. 2012.

2. Bar-Tal, Daniel, and Dikla Antebi. "Beliefs about Negative Intentions of the World: A Study of the Israeli Siege Mentality." *International Society of Political Psychology* 4, no. 2 (1992):

   634. http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.georgetown.edu/stable/10.2307/3791494 (accessed December 13, 2012).

3. Ibid., 634.

Shared beliefs can shape the culture and ethos of a society. Unlike paranoia, siege mentality, as stated earlier, is present in a group and therefore creates the phenomenon of group thought in the society. Typically, a group or society that has suffered a great trauma will define itself by its struggle against other groups because this satisfies the need for solidarity.[4] A statement made by the former prime minister, Yitzhak Rabin, on 11 November 1995 exemplifies this belief in Israel. He stated, "We must all fight as one man for the aims we believe in for the sake of the Jewish people and the state of Israel." [5].   The fact that this was said by a political leader in power demonstrates that this sentiment was prevalent among Israelis at the time, and beliefs frequently provoke action. If a society is convinced that it is a victim and is constantly being attacked, it will react in such a way, an idea might explain Israel's affinity for the "preemptive strike."

There is much evidence to support the manifestation of a siege mentality in Israel. According to Bar-Tal and Antebi, "[it] is a consequence of a long history of past experiences which left their mark on the Jewish Psyche and imprinted the emerging Israeli Ethos."[6] Jewish people have essentially been exiled from every nation or society of which they were part, from the Roman period, the expulsion of the Jews in Spain, and through the holocaust. Having been the victim for so long, and suffering such horrific genocide, it seems natural that the Jewish people would suffer from the "latent hysteria that stems directly from this source."[7] Why would they believe that they have a friend in the world when the world stood and watched as millions were slaughtered? It is this mindset that creates isolation within Israeli society and the belief that they can rely only on themselves, since the world has always failed them in a time of need. This belief was only amplified by the fact that in its first thirty years of existence there were numerous attempts by the Arabs to annihilate the Israeli state.[8]

Part II: Siege Mentality and Israeli Military Action and Foreign Policy

Nowhere has Israel's siege mentality been more evident than in its foreign policy. A study by Bar-Tal and Antebi of Israeli college students found that the siege mentality is especially prevalent among two groups: students with hawkish political views, and religious students, two groups that are often in power in the Israeli state.[9] Countless statements have been made by Israeli leaders that demonstrate the siege mentality, and historically their foreign policy has only reinforced this theory. This section explores this idea further.

Security is a major concern for the Israeli state, and it "has been defined as a basic need which individuals strive to fulfill."[10] In a state such as Israel, forced to fend off threats for most of its existence, this could not be more true. In fact, one could argue that for most of the time, Israeli political views have been modeled directly on this obsession with security, as there is a constant fear that with complacency can come the destruction of the beloved nation. In fact, many Israeli's believe that security "must be achieved as a precondition prior to any peace agreement [with Arabs]." In the same study by Bar-Tal and Antebi it was found that student's evaluation of national security influenced their vote in elections for the Knesset, and this evaluation was directly correlated with their political attitudes, demonstrating the strength of the influence of security in Israeli politics.[11]

Two common traits of Israeli military tactics are the preemptive strike, or a defensive strike much more severe than is warranted. A prime example of this mindset was Operation Defensive Shield, conducted in 2002 by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) in the hopes of ending, or at least decreasing, the occurrence of suicide bombings. What ensued was a brutal and oppressive tactical strike by the IDF that alerted various human rights groups, the UN and the world at large. Operation Defensive Shield was carried out under Ariel Sharon, an extreme hawkish leader, and one must take into account the context of the situation. Israel was especially sensitive and suffered from a feeling of insecurity following the *Al-Aqsa* Intifada, did America, coming directly after the September terrorist attacks. It was a perfect situation for Israel to flex its military muscles.

4. Bar-Tal, Daniel. "Societal Beliefs About Siege." In *Shared Beliefs in a Society: Social Psychologival Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2000. 107-115.

5. Alan Johnson, Toby Greene and Lorin Bell-Cross (2015). The Life and Legacy of Yitzhak Rabin. www.fathomjournal.org.

6. Ibid., 634.

7. Bar-Tal, Daniel. "Siege Mentality in Israel." *Ongoing Production on Social Representation* 1, no. 1 (1992): 49-67.

8. Bar-Tal, Antebi; "Beliefs About Negative Intentions of the World." 634.

9. Ibid., 643.

10. Bar-Tal, Daniel, and Daniel Jacobson. "Structure of Security Beliefs Among Israeli Students." *International Society of Political Psychology* 16, no. 3 (1995): 567-590.

11. Ibid., 587.

Israeli troops sealed off villages that were considered "special military areas", humanitarian groups from administering aid. There were reports of Israeli troops attacking ambulances and pointlessly damaging over three thousand refugee homes. [12] Upon analysis of Operation Defensive Shield, one could argue that Israel's reaction was not only an attempt to diminish the occurrence of terrorist attacks being carried out by Palestinians, but was also a way to demonstrate their authority over the Palestinians and instill level of fear in the occupied territories.

Operation Defensive Shield demonstrates another aspect of siege mentality that is often seen in Israeli foreign policy, and that is a seemingly blatant disregard for international law. During this operation the IDF was criticized by the UN and other humanitarian groups for allegedly using human shields, attacking ambulances, and disregarding the presence of civilians in the areas that were being attacked. [13] Essentially, a group that believes that the world is against it will feel less of a need to abide by international laws, giving it a sort of "freedom of action."[14] Simply the name "Operation Defensive Shield" demonstrates that much of Israel's military tactics was influenced by a siege mentality. Israel launched this attack in the name of "defence" against Palestinian militants who were viewed as a direct threat to the security of the Israeli state. It encouraged the belief that Israel was once again the victim, not the aggressor, which is a trademark trait of siege mentality and one that is consistently demonstrated by Israeli military action.

Operation Cast Lead was another military strike carried out by the IDF, further displaying Israel's siege mentality with regard to military action. The attack was launched in 2006 and targeted Hamas facilities and personnel in the Gaza Strip, and resulting in a withdrawal of troops in 2009. The operation originally consisted of air strikes but increased as Israeli troops and combat vehicles began to move into Gaza. A UN report estimates that close to seven thousand civilians were injured and over a thousand killed at the hands of the Israeli troops, with only thirteen Israeli lives lost, three of them civilians, an enormous disparity. The UN Human Rights Council launched an investigation into thirty-six instances where Israeli actions were thought to have violated human rights laws. In conclusion, the Council found the IDF responsible for having deliberately targeted civilians in the attack and using weapons such as white phosphorus, deemed a violation of international humanitarian law. [15]

Israel vehemently protested against the UN report, and true to form, "publicly announced its intention to wage an 'aggressive battle against NGOs,' which it deemed 'biased against' the country."[16] This statement presents the true Israeli siege mentality, in that the nation believes that it is the victim in the situation and is being targeted unjustly. By vowing that it will "aggressively battle" NGOs that have become it's enemy, Israel demonstrates typical traits of a society with a siege mentality. Rather than using a diplomatic solution and simply contesting the claims or altering their military tactics to be less belligerent, Israel instead declares war on the organizations "targeting" it.

Looking back a few years, it is worth mentioning Israel's attack on an aid fleet en route to Gaza that killed nineteen people and injured dozens. This happened in 2010 in international waters, about sixty-five kilometers off the coast of Israel. As the boat came closer to shore, Israeli forces warned the captain to explain where the boat was headed and the purpose of its trip. They flanked the ship, which diverted its course to avoid confrontation, and then fired on despite its clear humanitarian purpose. The Israeli government defended its actions by claiming that the ships were "provoking" the Israeli forces, and the Israeli military spokeswoman released a statement saying, "This happened in waters outside of Israeli territory, but we have the right to defend ourselves."[17] This response is interesting in that the Israeli military did not deny the attack. It acknowledged that it took place in international waters, once again displaying disregard for international law by rationalizing that the attack was executed in defence. This event demonstrates Israel's "trigger-happy" military tactics, resulting from the experience of constant terrorist attacks and perceived lack of allies.

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12. Allain, Jean. "Epilogue." In *International law in the Middle East: closer to power than justice*. Aldershot, Hants, England: Ashgate Pub., 2004. 268.

13. Ibid., 268.

14. Bar-Tal, *Shared Beliefs in a Society.* 113.

15. Pike, John. "Operation Cast Lead." Global Security.org. www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/operation-cast-lead.htm (accessed December 10, 2012).

16. Ibid.

17. Al Jazeera English. " Israel attacks Gaza aid fleet - Middle East - Al Jazeera English."AJE - Al Jazeera English .

http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2010/05/201053133047995359.html (accessed December 14, 2012).

The latent fear that at any point there could be an attempt to steal Israeli land from the Israelis promotes this type of unnecessarily severe military reaction that has become a trademark of the IDF.

Israeli foreign policy has been discussed in passing in this section but warrants a more detailed analysis, as it holds evidence of the existence of the siege mentality among political leaders, both past and present. It would not be unwarranted to make the claim that Israel's interests do not originate from its own terms, but rather are derived from the interest of the Arabs. In short, what is good for the Arabs is bad for Israel, and vice versa. [18] This point of view does not create an optimistic outlook on peace negotiations with Arabs, as it fosters the belief that even upon entering peace talks, the interest of Arabs and Israelis will always be at odds. It has been a constant view among Israeli leaders that any concession made to Arabs would be seen as a sign of weakness, since it could only naturally be considered a loss for Israel.[19] The Camp David accords exemplify this attitude towards Arabs. The negotiations centred around land disputes, settlements and of course, Jerusalem. Ehud Barak was extremely reluctant to offer up any land to Yasser Arafat and the Palestinians, for fear that a concession would, on the home front, be seen as an act of weakness. As Zeev describes in his analysis of Israeli foreign policy,

"Even if a given territory has no strategic value per se, and even if the Israelis are aware of that, giving it up would be interpreted by the Arabs as a sign of weakness … Israel must insist on holding on to the territories not because it needs them … but because the Arabs want them."[20] Although Barak did eventually make concessions, in the view of Israeli's, by offering Palestinian custodianship of Temple Mount, he suffered for it. It was indeed seen as a political act of weakness, and Barak lost the forth coming elections to the more conservative Ariel Sharon.

Siege mentality can be used to explain another aspect of Israeli foreign policy, the mistrust of third parties in peace negotiations. In 1987 Yitzhak Shamir stated in an interview that, "We have plenty of … 'friends' in the world who would like to see us dead, wounded, trampled and suppressed."[21] Many believe that in order for peace to be achieved between Israel and Palestine, a third party must be involved in order to assist in navigating the delicacies of the negotiation.

Israel's siege mentality, however, is not only manifested in its relations with Arabs, but is extended to the rest of the world. This makes it difficult for successful negotiations involving a third party. In 1967 Abba Eban explained this mentality by stating, "As we looked around us we saw that the world divided between those who were seeking our destruction and those who would do nothing to prevent it."[22] As stated earlier, this can be attributed to the common belief in Israeli society that self-reliance is necessary, as history, namely the holocaust, has dictated that the world cannot be counted on to aid an ailing Israeli state. From the Jewish point of view, "The Holocaust does not stand alone as one grim event but is a metaphor for Jewish history itself. "[23] Knowing this, it makes sense that third-party negotiations become difficult in this particular conflict. Although this third party is usually the United States, which has always been a strong ally of Israel, it seems that mistrust is always present on the side of the Israeli leadership, fearing their greatest ally, could turn on them. This mentality came to a head during the Yom Kippur war when Israel moved into panic mode, a result of depleting war materials. There was "serious apprehension of the consequences of Israeli leaders losing confidence generally in the United States … fear that Israel might take desperate action that would upset American diplomatic designs …"[24] In essence, although Israel does find itself strong and powerful allies, in the ultimate decision its leaders fall back on the belief that the state can trust no other.

18. Maoz, Zeev. "The Psychology of Reluctant Peacemaking." In *Defending the Holy Land: a Critical Analysis of Israel's Security & Foreign Policy*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006. 482

19. Ibid., 482

20. Ibid.,.

21. "Interview with Prime Minister Shamir on Israel Television, 23 December 1987." Interview. *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 Dec. 1987. Web. 14 Dec. 2012.

22. Bar-Tal, Antebi. *Siege Mentality in Israel*. 58

23. Ibid., 51.

24. Alan, Dowty. "The Yom Kippur War." In *Middle East Crisi: U.S. Decision-making in 1958, 1970 and 1973*. Berkeley: University of California, 1984. 244.

Part III: Siege Mentality and Israeli Society and National Identity

Siege mentality has not only shaped Israeli foreign policy, but also Israeli society as a whole. As explained above, siege mentality is a group thought. There is a widely held belief among Israeli's, and Jewish people in general, that Israel must defend itself by any means necessary against any enemy that presents itself. This section aims to explore the structure of Israeli society in general, and specifically its educational system.

The Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel is a telling description of Israeli society, as it displays the basis from which Israeli society would be crafted. It was created on the foundation of Zionist beliefs and established a "Jewish State in Israel" based on the views of Theodore Herzl. Although the document does state that "it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture; it will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions",[25] the fact that the declaration describes Israel as a Jewish State leaves little room for citizens of any other ethnicity of religion. This is a trait of siege mentality, in which the in-group rejects out-groups, creating an "us" and "them" situation. From this point on, the land would be Israel, and home to an ethnically Jewish State. A society with siege mentality, places great emphasis on oneness in the society, and especially when this group has been engaged in continuous conflict. A state such as Israel that has been fending off attacks and threats of annihilation for most of its existence "is unlikely to tolerate more than limited departures from the group unity."[26] There is pressure in Israeli society to conform, founded on the belief that this cohesiveness will help stave off any potential danger to the state. It is the idea that the entire community must support the same goal, because internal conflict could result in interference in the struggle with the enemy.[27]

It is important to note the tone of the beginning of the document. The first half of the Declaration reads as a sort of justification of the settlement of the Jewish people, and delegitimization of the Arabs. Delegitimization manifests itself in siege mentality, especially in societies in the midst of conflict. It provides an explanation for the conflict, and also reduces the enemy to a group that is simply an obstacle, not another group of humans that are worth negotiating with. [28]Upon analysis of the Israeli Declaration of Independence one can see that it emphasizes Israel's claim to the land, dating back to their expulsion at the hands of the Roman Empire. The document also places emphasis on the improvements the Jewish people have made to the land by the reestablishment of a Jewish civilization, such as the revival of agriculture and the economy. This justification implies that the Jewish people are more entitled than any other inhabitants of the land because they genuinely care for it and have an emotional investment in its prosperity. As the first formal declaration issued by the new State of Israel, the Declaration of Establishment of the State of Israel effectively delegitimized the Palestinians by essentially ignoring their existence.

It has already been established that Israeli society places strong emphasis on conformity and unity, creating group thought demonstrated in siege mentality. However it is worth exploring this further to see how exactly this has shaped Israeli society. A variety of studies have assessed Israeli mentality in relation to Arabs, and conflict in the region One of the more telling was by Arian, Talmud and Hermann in 1986, which found from a national sample that fifty-one percent of the general population of Israel believed that "The whole world is against us."[29] An even more telling survey conducted with Israeli youngsters between the ages 15 and 18 in 1987 found that sixty-three percent agreed with the statement, "The Holocaust is not a one-time event and can always recur", while eighty-four percent agreed that "in all the world there exists anti-Semitism, even if not expressed explicitly."[30] These two studies on their own demonstrate that the majority of Israeli society held beliefs similar to these. This is where the issue of conformity manifests itself in Israeli society. In a society that places emphasis on unity and oneness, common beliefs will be stronger than those of individuals, especially regarding enemies and conflict. It is for this reason that these studies hold such weight.

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25. The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel.

26. Coser, Lewis A.. *The Functions of Social Conflict*. Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1956. 103.

27. Daniel, Bar-Tal. "Societal Beliefs in Times of Intractable Conflict: The Israeli Case." *International Journal of Conflict Management* 9, no. 22 (1998): 13.

28. Ibid., 11.

29. Arian, A., Talmud, I., &Hermann, T. (1988). National Security and Public Opinion in Israel. Boulder, Co: Westview Press.

30. Bar-Tal, Antebi., *Siege Mentality in Israel*. 51.

When studying beliefs and the mentality of a society, it is important to emphasize those of young people, as they will dictate whether these beliefs continue or die out. They dictate the future of the society, so it is necessary to study its educational system, as this can mould the beliefs of children. Bat-Tal states that textbooks are "potential agents of mass enlightenment and/or social control."[31] The history of Israel's educational system is interesting. In the seventies and eighties schools followed a state mandated curriculum. Specific textbooks were chosen and specific information presented to students. From 1900 to 1948, textbooks focused on the rationalization of ownership of Israel. In the seventies and eighties they emphasized how "Arab life was transformed as a result of the progress introduced by the Jews and the Jewish State."[32] A study conducted in 1987 found that in high school textbooks Arabs/Palestinians were portrayed negatively sixty-three percent of the time, neutrally about thirty percent of the time and were presented in a positive light only six percent of the time. Delegitimizing labels were used about fifteen percent of the time.[33] The nineties saw a decentralization of education, and teachers and schools selected textbooks individually. Students were exposed to information that countered that presented without question in the past. The 2000s saw a reversal of this trend, as a result of increasing violence in the area and a change in government in 2001. The Ministry of Education attempted to re-establish control over the textbooks used in schools.[34] One could argue that this attempt to assert control over the curriculum was a result of the increasing violence, especially as, in a society with a siege mentality the unity of thought is of the utmost importance during conflict.

A study by Dan Porat in 2004 explored the influence that textbooks can have on a student's perception of a historical event. He selected twelfth-grade students from two separate schools in districts that historically had distinct political views, but both part of the Israeli school system. The City School, is co-educational and the majority of students either secular or from families representing the Israeli left wing. The Covenant School, is a religious academy for boys and many of the students live in settlements in the occupied territories. The political orientation of the covenant schools students is representative of the conservative right wing. [35] Five students were selected from the Covenant School and six from the City School. They were presented with an account of the battle at Tel-Hai, a battle between Jews and Arabs that resulted in the death of the Israeli military leader Trupeldor, who claimed that it was honorable to die for one's country. This story has typically been told in two narratives: legend-portrayed Trumpeldor as a national hero, and claimed that the Arabs were the aggressors that the Israelis were merely defending themselves, on the other hand, the accidental narrative, claimed that the situation was an unfortunate misunderstanding and assigned blame to neither party. At the start of the study, none of the students claimed to believe in the accidental version. Of the eleven students, six believed in the legendary narrative, one a mixture of the versions, and four did not sufficiently describe their beliefs. The participants were then asked to read excerpts from a textbook which presented both narratives. They wrote down their new narrative. One student from the Covenant School supported the accidental view but then added, "it is not written in this account but this is what happened" to explain his attributing fault to the Arabs after reading the accidental excerpt. The students were then asked to orally recite their narrative. Six recounted a mixed version, and five an accidental one, in which fault attributed to neither party. The study was resumed 12 months later when the researchers asked the students to write down what they remembered from the historical event. Seven of the eleven students recounted the legendary perspective, two recounted a mixed narrative and two did not remember what they had read.[36]

The importance of this study lies in what the one student wrote "It is not written here, but this is what happened." The students who recounted the same narrative that they had read earlier demonstrated that they selectively chose information from both sources to reinforce beliefs they already held. This could be attributed to the fact that these beliefs had already been deeply instilled in them at an earlier age.

31. Bar-Tal, Daniel. "Representation of Arabs in School Textbooks." In *Stereotypes and Prejudice in Conflict Representations of Arabs in Israeli Jewish Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. 159.

32. Ibid., 159.

33. Ibid., 165.

34. Ibid., 159.

35. "It's Not Written Here, but This Is What Happened: Students' Cultural Comprehension of Textbook Narratives on the Israeli-Arab Conflict." *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 4 (2004): 963-996.

36. Ibid., 984

This idea, coupled with the fact that the majority of Israeli textbooks depict Arabs in a negative light, does not lend itself to an optimistic outlook on peace from young Israeli students. Taking into account general societal beliefs about Arabs in Israel, students could be entering the Israeli educational system with negative views of Palestinians and Arabs in general, and using textbooks to reinforce this belief. Even if the textbooks do present "neutral" or "positive" information about Arabs, Porat's study would claim that students select the information from textbooks that reinforce their already negative beliefs, a vicious cycle that does not show great signs of being broken.

Part IV: The Possibility of Elimination or Diffusion of Siege Mentality in Israel

According to Daniel Bar-Tal, siege mentality is "a consequence of a long history of past experiences which left their mark on the Jewish Psyche and imprinted the emerging Israeli Ethos." He states that when a society suffers from siege mentality, it will manifest itself in the education, politics and culture of the society [37] Siege mentality is a viable and sensible way to interpret Israel's actions in the ongoing conflict with Palestine and can be used to explain various aspects of Israeli society and culture.

Israel's military actions and strategies can be attributed to it's siege mentality, as the need to protect it against any perceived threat, real or not; this is reflected in the hawk-like government that is frequently in power. A article from 2010 in *The Economist* accurately described the Israeli military policy in saying that, "Israel is caught in a vicious circle. The more its Hawks think the outside world will always hate it, the more it tends to shoot opponents first and ask questions later, and the more it finds that the world is indeed full of enemies."[38]

This questions whether there can ever be an Israeli state without a siege mentality. Simply stated, this means that agreement will never be completely possible, and there are several reasons for this. First, the siege mentality has proven to be a blockade in peace negotiations with Palestine and bordering Arab states, and the ongoing conflict feeds into the siege mentality by causing Israel to constantly be on the defensive. Secondly, it is impossible to completely erase the siege mentality from Israeli society as it is based in history, a result of severe traumas inflicted on the Jewish people. Thirdly, the siege mentality is encouraged by political and educational mechanisms, fostering a people who see themselves as victims in an indifferent world.[39]

It might be possible, however, to reduce the prevalence of the siege mentality, and there have been points in Israeli history that have seen it weaken. One example came after the 1967 war that saw an impressive Israeli victory over the Arab states.[40] In this situation, a reduction in the siege mentality would have made sense, as the victory showed that Israel could defend itself against its enemies, assuaging the ever-present fear of annihilation.

As discussed earlier, the educational system in Israel serves as a facilitator of Israel's siege mentality. In the seventies and eighties this came to a head when the Ministry of Education standardized the school curriculum. Students were taught a specific account of Israeli history using textbooks was deemed accurate by the Ministry; however, they usually delegitimized Arabs and portrayed them in a negative light, or even as the enemy. In the nineties teachers and schools were given freedom to choose their own teaching materials, allowing for a different perspective to be presented to students. Of course, school is not the only way that information is presented to students; a great deal of conditioning comes through the media and especially parental beliefs.

Bar-Tal suggests that one way to eliminate the siege mentality is by "introducing new channels of information,"[41] and this could be done by using new, more neutral textbooks in the Israeli school system. In fairness, a variety of textbooks have been published in recent years, used in Israeli schools, that take a much more even-handed approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. One of the books designed for elementary school pupils, entitled, "*We and Our Neighbors*" gives a more positive depiction of the neighboring Arab states, evident simply from the benevolent and inclusive title. By changing the way information is presented to children, it may be possible to diminish siege mentality in future generations, leading to a more manageable peace process.

37. Bar-Tal, Antebi. "Beliefs about Negative Intentions of the World." 634-636.

38. "Israel and the World: Israel's Siege Mentality." *The Economist*, June 3, 2010. http://www.economist.com/node/16274081 (accessed December 13, 2012).

39. Bar-Tal, Antebi. "Siege Mentality in Israel." 64.

40. Bar-Tal. "Shared Beliefs in a Society." 109.

41. Bar-Tal. "Siege Mentality in Israel." 64.

In conclusion, a siege mentality has afflicted the Israeli state since its official establishment in 1948. It is a result of the endless conflict in the region that has created a people who believe they have no true friends or allies anywhere in the world. It has manifested itself in educational, military, and political aspects of Israeli society and played an undeniable role in attempted peace negotiations with the Arab states and Palestine, creating a vicious cycle of mistrust and suspicion that shows no signs of truly being broken.

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