

aspects that exist in every international conflict (see a general analysis of Bar-Tal & Geva, 1985; Bar-Tal, Kruglanski, & Klar, 1989; Klar, Bar-Tal, & Kruglanski, 1988). Specifically, the present paper consists of five parts. The first part presents a short example of the beliefs of the Israelis and the Palestinians regarding the history of their conflict and demonstrates the incompatibility between their beliefs, called *cognitive discrepancy* of the rival parties. The second part discusses the epistemic process which describes the formation of beliefs and explains the causes of the cognitive discrepancy as found in the wishes and fears of the two parties. The third and fourth parts analyze the wishes and fears that bias the beliefs of Israelis and Palestinians. Finally, the fifth part describes the contribution of the epistemological approach for conflict resolution.

EXAMPLES OF THE ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN BELIEFS

It is usually taken for granted that two parties engaged in a conflict have different accounts as to the causes of the conflict. In order to illustrate a *cognitive discrepancy* between the Israeli and the Palestinian version of the historical background of the conflict, two very short examples are provided.¹

The Palestinian version is taken from a book entitled *Palestine Occupied* written by Sami Hadawi (1968), while the Israeli version is taken from a book distributed by the Israel Information Center entitled *History from 1880* which consists of material originally published in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

Immediately, in the beginning, the two versions differ in providing the background for the accounts. They differ in their emphases while describing the causes and implications of the emergence of the Zionist movement. The Palestinian version is as follows:

The basic issue in the Palestine Problem is the uprooting and dispossession in 1948 of an entire nation in order to make room for the 'ingathering' in Palestine of Jews from all parts of the world. This build-up of the Jewish population in Palestine was not inspired by humanitarian considerations for the oppressed and persecuted Jews of Europe as was made to believe, but was achieved mainly in order to fulfil the political aspirations of a major ideological movement called Zionism. (Hadawi, 1968, p. 8)

The Israeli version is as follows:

The merging of two trends—the rationally intellectual and the emotionally traditional—gave birth not only to Zionism as an organized political effort, but also to

the beginnings of the pioneering movement of the late 19th century, which laid the foundations, on the soil of Erez Israel, for the economic, social and cultural rebirth of the Jewish nation. The land itself seemed eminently suitable for the purpose: a marginal province of the weak Ottoman Empire, sparsely inhabited by a population consisting of various religious groups and seemingly lacking any national consciousness or ambitions of its own; a motherland waiting to be redeemed from centuries of neglect and decay by its legitimate sons. (p. 1–2)

Similarly, both versions differently describe the outbreak of the Six Day War, a crucial event of the present crisis. The Palestinian version:

The Israelis, disappointed by their failure to achieve what they had gone out to get, were unwilling to give up or to make concessions that would solve the Palestine problem. They kept the area in a state of tension, and hardly a month passed without the Middle East news making the headlines. (Hadawi, 1968, p. 20)

There were other reasons why the Israelis selected the year 1967 for their attack on the Arab States. First, inter-Arab differences were at their highest and therefore the Arabs were least able, militarily, to resist any thrust which the Israelis might make. There were signs that fences were being mended, and the Israelis could not afford to wait and see Arab unity and preparedness frustrate their plans. Second, the 1968 U.S. presidential elections were approaching, and the Israelis felt confident that their influence in the United States was now sufficiently strong to make the 'Jewish vote' a factor to be reckoned with in preventing a repetition of United States interference to dislodge them, as President Eisenhower did in 1956. (Hadawi, 1968, p. 21–22)

To escape world condemnation, the Israelis used the closure of the Strait of Tiran and the entry of U.A.R. troops into the non-militarized Sinai Peninsula as a pretext to launch their attack and to occupy the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank of Jordan and the Golan Heights in Syria—a territory they coveted for so long and planned to occupy in their second round of expansion. The argument that the Israelis acted in 'self-defense' was at first accepted by world public opinion, but subsequent events and declarations proved that this was not the case. (Hadawi, 1968, p. 21–22)

The Israeli version:

For a decade after the Sinai Campaign there was no large-scale outbreak of hostilities between Israel and the Arabs, but neither was there a decline in tension. Arab hatred of Israel was continually fanned by teachers, journalists and politicians; incessant declarations of undying hostility came from leaders of both 'progressive' and 'conservative' Arab states. Ben-Gurion repeatedly stated that Israel was prepared for complete disarmament in Israel and the Arab countries under mutual supervision and proposed a joint American-Soviet guarantee of the territorial independence of all Middle East states, but there was no response to either proposal. (p. 194)

On May 14, 1967, Nasser had begun openly dispatching large numbers of Egyptian troops into Sinai. Eshkol told the Israel government that the Egyptian troop movements, apparently, had more demonstrative than practical significance, but ordered part of the reserves mobilized as a precautionary measure. On May 16, Cairo Radio declared: 'The existence of Israel has continued too long. We welcome the Israel aggression, we welcome the battle that we have long awaited. The great hour has come. The battle has come in which we shall destroy Israel.'

¹The examples presented here are, of course, not the only Israeli and Palestinian versions of the conflict, but certainly reflect the main focus of all accounts by the two parties, which may vary in emphasis or even in the facts cited.