

July 8, 2007

## Her Jewish State

By [ROGER COHEN](#)

Soon after our first meeting in her Spartan office in Jerusalem, Tzipi Livni, the Israeli foreign minister, called me. Something was on her mind. A lawyer by training, she does not like to leave loose ends. I had asked her if the four years she spent in Mossad, the intelligence service, made her a disciplined person. Livni had seemed taken aback by the question, which interrupted the cascade of her pronouncements on [Israel](#) and its Palestinian nemesis. After a long hesitation, she said: “I don’t like this phrase, a disciplined person. I don’t know. I don’t know.”

Now, an hour later, she wanted to set the record straight. “I was thinking about this idea of me as a disciplined person,” she began. I perched myself on a stone wall near the King David Hotel and listened through a blustery desert wind. “There are other parts of me that are different. I prefer jeans to a suit, sneakers to high heels, markets to malls. You’ve just returned from Paris: I prefer the Quartier Latin to the Champs Elysées. In general, I don’t like formality at all. It is just part of what I do. You know, when I was young, I went to the Sinai and worked as a waitress.”

I had not known this detail about a woman who entered Israeli politics only 11 years ago, the first to serve as foreign minister since Golda Meir and a potential prime minister. Nor was it easy to imagine the tall, well-groomed 48-year-old I had just met, in her gold-belted black pants, her crocodile-skin shoes and her snug black jacket, donning denims and sneakers and hitting a flea market.

But Livni’s phone call was telling. Israelis these days fret about how they are seen. They like to convey the spirit of the underdog — that of Israel’s heroic beginnings — as if discomfited by the adornments of an increasingly

moneyed, Americanized and postheroic society. More powerful than ever, Israelis are also more anxious than ever, a paradox with U.S. parallels that they find maddening. Israel’s strength and wealth grow, but the country’s long-term security does not grow with them. The shekel rises; so does the billowing smoke just over the border in Gaza. Two Israeli withdrawals, from Lebanon in 2000 and Gaza in 2005, have ended up bolstering two groups that the West and Israel brand as terrorists — [Hezbollah](#) and  [Hamas](#). Some Israelis, watching the black-masked militia of Hamas take over Gaza, have taken to calling the benighted sliver of territory “Hamastan.”

The mother of all conflicts — the 59-year-old battle for the same land of Zionist and Palestinian national movements — has become even more tangled. It has been dragged into the wider crisis of Islamic civilization that daily spawns fervid death-to-the-West jihadists. To a Palestinian national struggle for a homeland, there is an answer, at least in theory. To a religious and annihilationist campaign against Israel, there is none. One of Livni’s catchphrases is, “There is a process of delegitimization of Israel as a Jewish state.” She sees herself in a race against time.

To manage that race, she wants to lead. Her diplomatic energy, not least in helping put together the multinational [United Nations](#) force now in Lebanon, has impressed in capitals from Washington to Europe. Her restiveness is clear. After the spring publication of the Winograd Commission’s interim report on the 2006 Lebanon war, which lambasted Prime Minister [Ehud Olmert](#) for lacking “judgment, responsibility and prudence,” Livni told him he should quit but did not resign herself. She also said she would one day stand for leadership of their centrist Kadima Party. This unusual act of defiance toward her boss, widely criticized as only half an insurrection, was a measure of Livni’s ambition, impatience and lingering uncertainties.

“Stagnation works against those who believe in a two-state solution,” Livni said in our first conversation. The West, she suggested, needs to tell Hamas, the Islamist movement battling [Fatah](#) for control of a Palestinian movement now split between Gaza and the West Bank, that it must not only recognize Israel’s right to exist but

also “the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state, which is not that obvious anymore.”

The Jewish state has been tied to the Livni family with a special bond since zero hour. For Livni, personal history is national history. Her parents were among the first couples to marry in the newborn state, the day after its foundation, on May 15, 1948. Her father, Eitan, served as operations chief for the Irgun, the Zionist guerrillas who used what would today be called terrorist methods to blast the British out of Mandate Palestine. Her mother, Sarah, was also an Irgun fighter; she suckled her daughter on visions of Eretz Israel, the biblical “Land of Israel,” including Judea and Samaria on the West Bank. Territorial compromise for peace had no place in the family lexicon. It was the weak talk of the peaceniks.

Yet here is Livni wanting to follow Meir and become the second woman to serve as Israeli prime minister, precisely in the name of a peace that would involve the surrender of West Bank land. On the face of it, she has moved a long way from her political starting point. “I want things to happen,” she said, “especially when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Israel’s values, the way I believe is the right way.” And to achieve that, you want the top job? “Only for this,” she replied. “I don’t like the exposure, the respect and so on.”

Her voice trailed away. Livni’s ambition is matched by only her bouts of self-effacement. You feel her presence in a room. She is striking, in a raw rather than a refined way, broad-faced, pale-eyed and slender. She is also strikingly confident in her lucid expositions of what she believes the Middle East needs. Stretched tight, like the membrane of the drums she recently took up playing, she exudes a tense energy. But when the conversation turns to her personal feelings, she shrinks, the “eehhs” and “umms” drawn out as she gathers her thoughts.

What she has, at a time of disorientation and seeping corruption in Israeli politics, is an image of absolute integrity, the distinction of being a woman on a male-dominated political scene and a wholesome quality that stands in contrast to the slick, wheeler-dealer style of Olmert, whose approval ratings have plunged into the single-digit zone.

Genuineness is her thing. At Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial museum, Livni, who is married with two sons, had this to say two years ago: “Being a Jewish mother is to understand with the birth of the second son how impossible and inhumane is the choice between the two.” And this: “Being an Israeli is to know that you have risen from the ashes of those who were killed and knowing you have a responsibility for the coming generations.”

Gil Samsonov, an advertising executive who has known her for many years, put it this way: “Her brand is clean. She’s not looking left and right to see whom to please.” But Israelis are looking desperately for someone who can please them. The report on the Lebanon war crystallized the country’s disorientation. How could Hezbollah have repulsed the Israeli Defense Forces? How could the country’s defense minister at the time, Amir Peretz, have had, as the report put it, no “knowledge or experience in military, political or governmental matters?” How can Olmert and his finance minister be facing investigations for corruption? How is it that the former justice minister got himself in trouble over sexual-harassment charges, the same issue that just brought down the president, [Moshe Katsav](#)? Is Israel — far from David Ben-Gurion’s model state of “working people, at home on the soil” — becoming just another tawdry commercial country with an oversize army?

To all these interrogations, Livni, competent and decent, seems to provide a possible answer. “She comes from a different place with a special, strong love of Israel,” says Dita Kohl-Roman, a friend. Shlomo Avineri, a political scientist, agrees: “There is an Israeli authenticity about her.”

Authenticity was a core quality of [Ariel Sharon](#), Livni’s political mentor, the last of the heroic breed of warrior-politicians. He liked her industry and loyalty. His imprimatur bolsters her because at a time of national self-questioning, his loss is keenly felt. It was with Sharon that Livni made her fundamental ideological break: from a defender in the right-wing Likud Party of an Israeli state on all its biblical land to the idea of land for peace, embodied in the evacuation of Gaza in 2005 and the promise of a further withdrawal from the West Bank.

This shift — the reason for Sharon’s, Livni’s and Olmert’s centrist Kadima Party, created in late 2005 — was rooted in a simple calculation: an Israel that wants to remain Jewish and democratic cannot also be despotic on occupied territories where Palestinian demography is against it. “There were three ideological goals for families like Livni’s and mine: Greater Israel, a Jewish state and democracy,” says Arye Naor, a political scientist whose father also fought in the Irgun. “Well, it became clear you could have any two of them, but adding a third condemned the enterprise.”

That is logical. A Greater Israeli democracy will end up not being Jewish because there will be more Arabs in it than Jews. Livni likes logic. As her adviser Tal Becker put it to me, “She believes constructive ambiguity can become destructive ambiguity.” So it was she who, working for Sharon, wrote the program of the now-governing Kadima. And it is she who pushes hardest to spell out to Palestinians the concessions they must make.

“Just as Israel was established for the Jewish people and gave refuge to them from European and Arab states, so a Palestinian state is the homeland of the Palestinian people, those who live in the territories and those who left in 1948 and are being kept as political cards in refugee camps,” she told me. “This is the national answer. The solution for Palestinians is the Palestinian state. Israel is not part of the solution.”

Or, put another way, there can be no “right of return,” a central canon for Palestinians since the war of Israel’s foundation in 1948. That year, the United Nations declared in Resolution 194: “Refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date.”

History moves on, of course. About 1 in 10 Palestinians alive today and registered as refugees with the United Nations was born in Mandate Palestine. A Palestinian return en masse would condemn the Jewish state. In that sense, Livni is only stating the obvious. Whether such bluntness is helpful is another question. Palestinians are not about to trade one of their biggest chips up front. “What Livni wants us to do is give up before we start negotiations,” says Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, a member of the Palestinian Legislative Council. “I feel sorry for her.

She wants to remove all risk, all fears, before engaging in discussion.”

But Livni can be relentless—a “nudnik,” or nagger, in the words of Igal Galai, a friend of Sharon’s. When Livni called me back after our first meeting, something else was eating at her: “I was minister of immigrant absorption in 2004, and I convinced Sharon that it was important that I go see [Condoleezza Rice](#) in Washington. So I went, and I saw how she was interested in the depth of the conflict, in finding a real process and doing what was right and just. I had the opportunity to convince Rice, then national security adviser, and so make a contribution to the statement President Bush made soon after.”

In that groundbreaking statement of April 14, 2004, [George W. Bush](#) declared: “It seems clear that an agreed, just, fair and realistic framework for a solution to the Palestinian refugee issue as part of any final status agreement will need to be found through the establishment of a Palestinian state and the settling of Palestinian refugees there, rather than in Israel.” No American leader had ever so explicitly trashed the “right of return” of the Palestinians. “That was my contribution,” Livni revealed to me. “I did the right thing — and so did Bush.”

Livni seems to share many things with Rice, who calls the foreign minister a “friend” and a woman of peace. They have the same intensity and work ethic, the same difficulty in thinking beyond a doctrine once it has been formed, the same disciplined intelligence that sometimes appears to lack the subtlety of wisdom and the same penchant for talking about “values” and what is “right.”

But I found myself thinking, What good was the “right thing” or plans for Palestinian refugees festering in camps or Bush’s two-state road map or Rice’s principles or Livni’s good intentions, when the whole area — spiraling downward with a devilish energy, developing ever-more-divergent Israeli and Palestinian narratives, splintering and radicalizing in the image of Iraq, threatened by a resurgent Iran, permeated by jihadists without borders — was going up in recrimination-clogged smoke? I believed in Livni’s good faith, her energy, her honesty, her determination. What I was not sure about after our first meeting was her grasp on

reality. The fact is, Israelis and Palestinians have parted company. I could see little evidence that Livni, for all her lucidity, was any exception to this.

When you drive from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv on Route 443, which cuts through Israeli-occupied West Bank territory, walls accompany you. Not merely the “security barrier,” as Israel calls the 430-mile-plus high-tech fence it is building to keep out Palestinians (who call it “the racist, separating wall”), but a variety of other bulwarks, of wire and concrete and brick. The barriers exist in the name of security, security, security — no escaping the Israeli mantra. To some degree, they have delivered. Palestinian suicide bombings have all but ceased. But of course they betray insecurity, a gnawing condition Israelis once thought they might overcome but now tend to view as inescapable.

Also accompanying you along the route is a procession of concrete pillars holding aloft the high-speed-train track that will one day connect the two cities in a half-hour or so and perhaps relieve the clogged traffic and swearing drivers inching across the country. Israel, as this megaproject and national bottleneck suggest, is booming. Its stock market keeps climbing. Areas north and south of Tel Aviv amount to the Middle East’s Palo Alto. An emblematic act of the new Israel was the decision of Dan Halutz, then the armed-forces chief, to offload his stock on the eve of the Lebanon war. Materialism now does battle with Zionism for the Israeli soul — Moshe Dayan requiescat in pace.

I suppose this is natural enough. After double-whammy intifadas, Oslo’s aborted peace process, Camp David’s near thing in 2000 and repeated illustration of the prodigious Palestinian penchant for self-destruction, the temptation to imagine you are in California-with-fences is understandable. Israelis once conducted a daily argument of Talmudic intensity about how to settle with the Palestinians. Now many just say, To heck with them and their festering stew of a failed and now bifurcated Hamas-Fatah prestate!

“The left saw that its outstretched hand had failed, and the right saw that its iron fist has failed, and they have both veered toward a center that now says: ‘Go away. Let’s build a bunker and wait and see,’ ” Shlomo Avineri told me. “The fact is, [Yasir Arafat](#) did not set up a state;

he set up a means to continue the struggle. And Israel did not prepare for Palestinian statehood; it went on building settlements. Each believes only the language of force works in the end.”

This ultimately futile belief is part of what makes Israel such a jangled place these days, its “fantastic economic bubble,” in the words of the former diplomat Itamar Rabinovich, hovering over unease. “The country is in good shape, and the mood is in bad shape,” [Shimon Peres](#) told me. Peres, who joined Kadima from the left rather than Livni’s right, says he believes the mood is sour “because we have failed to bring Israel and the Middle East into a new age.” No kidding. Islamist fanatics rave about restoring the Caliphate, and Hamas talks of seeing off Israel the way Crusaders were once seen off: you can hardly get more “Old World” than that. But a “new age” Israel is equally vigorous, if less often in the news.

After meeting Peres, I found myself at a dinner party with Yossi Vardi, a dot-com millionaire who made a bundle from one of the first Internetwide instant-messaging services. “Israel became very fertile ground for young people with ideas,” Vardi told me. “More than \$1.4 billion in venture capital came in recently. The place is crazy — a technology boom alongside a very unacceptable political situation and chaos in Gaza, where most of the population is living on under \$2 a day. It’s not right or sustainable.” He took a sip of a respectable cabernet sauvignon — Israeli winemaking is on the rise (from a low base) — before adding: “You know, power corrupts, and occupation is the ultimate manifestation of power. There are no checks, no balances. Occupation, after 40 years, corrupts absolutely.”

Livni has a different view. “I don’t think the way Israel behaves is against Israeli values,” she insists. In a speech to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee in March, she said, “I believe that we are defined — as individuals, as leaders and as nations — by our values and by the choices we make to defend them.” She sees Israel side by side with the United States in “a struggle for the future of the free world.”

As this language suggests, a lot of her intellectual energy goes into placing Israel within the Bush administration’s post-9/11, us-and-them Weltanschauung, as an integral

actor in the war on terror, battling on the side of liberty against a Palestinian threat that gets agglomerated with [Al Qaeda](#) and President [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#) of Iran — regardless of the differences between seeking Palestine and seeking the annihilation of the West. Livni sometimes seems to pursue the development of a Pavlovian response to the Middle Eastern conundrum. Say “Israel.” Ping! American values. Say “Palestine.” Ping! Terror. “I would like to remind the world that they entered our restaurants, our discotheques; they killed children in their beds,” Livni told me. “I can understand, and I can feel, the grief of a Palestinian mother. The loss of a child or a family member is awful. It is the same pain. But in any legal system, there is a difference between premeditated murder and somebody who kills by mistake.”

She continued: “These terrorists are looking for children to kill while we are trying to avoid it. It is unfair to pitch together in the same package, to say there are victims on both sides, circles of violence and so on. That does not contribute to a solution. When the Palestinians think that the world’s judgment is ‘O.K., this can happen,’ they will never stop. They need to know that the world cannot accept it, that terror is terror is terror.”

It is precisely to stop terror, Livni emphasized, that the wall has been built against the wishes of the Israeli far right, who saw in it a division of Zion: “Yet when I am in Europe, I hear Palestinians saying this is ghettoization, this is the Berlin Wall. And I say, at the end of the day, when you are talking about a two-state solution, what do you think? There is going to be a border, a fence, something.”

But where? Livni brought out a map to make her point that a return to the precise 1967 lines — as U.N. resolutions and the Arab peace plan reiterated this year in Riyadh demand — was impractical. Given certain Israeli settlements, what Bush in 2004 called “already existing major Israeli population centers,” and the eventual need to somehow link Gaza and the West Bank (Livni favors a tunnel), the border would have to shift some. So, she said, perhaps the barrier, which often zigzags inside the West Bank to separate Jewish settlers and Palestinians, could even be helpful.

“Palestinians oppose this even before they know where the line would be,” she mused. “There sometimes seems to be a contradiction between what Palestinians demand, what they claim and the way they act.” Palestinians, however, have no monopoly on self-contradiction. Israelis — Americanized but still in an existential struggle, terrified of annihilation but now the region’s overwhelming superpower, often blinded by the wall to what is perpetrated behind it — can sometimes resemble studies in unreason garbed in the practiced language of Western reasonableness. At times I wondered to what degree Livni had really moved from her hard-line, Likudnik beginnings.

At the Nahalat Yitzhak Cemetery in Tel Aviv, lilac petals lie scattered on the dusty earth, and old cypresses form a solemn cortege. It is a beautiful oasis in an unlovely city. At one corner is a gravestone with an unusual engraving — that of the whole biblical Land of Israel with a gun and bayonet cutting through the center and the words “Only Thus!” This is where Livni’s father, Eitan, who died in 1991, is buried. He insisted in his will on this Irgun symbol.

He was a tough purist, and his only son, Eli Livni, the foreign minister’s brother, appears to have inherited some of his no-nonsense directness. “In the Livni family,” Eli says breezily, “your father and mother never hug you. What they give you is a good, formal education.” This upbringing involved occasional beatings with a belt (for him) and rigorous instruction in honoring principles. The Livnis were outsiders, a test of their moral fiber. Throughout the children’s education, the Labor Party was dominant. The left-wing Palmach, whose commanders included [Yitzhak Rabin](#) and Dayan, held places of honor in accounts of the state’s creation. The rightist Irgun, by contrast, was marginalized. Its political successor, the right-wing Herut Party, founded by Menachem Begin and others in 1948 and destined to evolve into Likud, was also sidelined. As an Irgun hero, Herut militant and close friend of Begin, Eitan Livni long stood on Israel’s political margins.

“Tzipi got into trouble at school at the age of 12 when a teacher was talking about the glorious role of the Haganah and Palmach, and she stood up and said, ‘What about the Irgun and the Stern Group?’ ” Eli says. “Her

teacher contacted my mother and said Tzipi should not argue about facts.”

Most Saturdays, the Livnis would go to Begin’s tiny Tel Aviv apartment. Tzipi (short for the biblical name Tziporah) recalls conversations centering on “stories from the past, frustration from the present and hopes for the future.” The frustration was about exclusion: the way promotions in the army depended on being in the Labor Party and getting ahead meant praising the Labor prime minister, Ben-Gurion, rather than Vladimir Jabotinsky, the spiritual father of Likud and a Livni family hero.

“In the history books, they were not there; they were the enemy in a way, being rightists,” she told me. “On May 1, which is Labor Day, everyone was out with their red flags, and I was the one walking with the Israeli flag.”

From an early age, in other words, Tzipi Livni lived with the sense of being distinct, the need to be willful if she was to be heard and the example of a hero-father not about to hug her. Mirla Gal, who would reach the top of the Mossad during a 20-year career, met Livni in first grade. She recalls the curiosity of other kids at Livni’s membership in the Betar scouts, a group founded by Jabotinsky. Gal, like most Israeli children, was in the mainstream scouts movement, called Tzofim, where the songs and heroes were different.

“We were curious because her world wasn’t ours,” Gal said over lunch at a beachfront Tel Aviv restaurant. “Even then she was principled. When I was 12, she turned [vegetarian](#) and has been ever since.” Gal gazed out across the broad beach to a glittering Mediterranean — hard to believe it was the same tranquil sea a few miles away in seething Gaza — before adding, “You know, she drives herself very hard and always demands a lot of herself.”

“Too much?” I asked.

Gal paused. Prudence gets ingrained during two decades in Israeli intelligence. “What Tzipi asks of herself, she asks of others,” she said finally. “She has a very high threshold for trust, but once it’s there, you’re O.K. I understand because I am the same way. You have to be straight. She was raised in a house where these things

were fundamental. She grew up in a very Zionist home. She loves this country so much. That is what drives her.”

The driven quality was quickly apparent. Livni was a very good soccer player, a very good basketball player, a tomboy who would go nuts when her brother hung her beloved cat out the window. Her father was rarely around, working nonstop in a glucose business, trying to raise money after work for the widows and war-injured of the Irgun. He was a dreamer — a quality Eli also sees in his sister, who has hung a photograph of their father, in pensive profile, as the only adornment of her foreign minister’s office.

“My father expressed a combination of values,” she told me, sitting in that office. “There was the understanding that the whole land of Israel was our heritage, but the other part was the need to respect others, not to control others’ lives. And because of the need to make a combination of these values, not to bring them into contradiction, I got to my own conclusion, that there is a need to divide the land.” That step was a long time coming. After the 1973 war, as a teenager, she took part in demonstrations against [Henry Kissinger](#)’s peace plans. Giving up land, any land from Sinai to the Golan Heights, was unacceptable.

In the army, Livni excelled, and at training school she was twice elected most-outstanding officer. Gal took part in the same training; she observed a toughness that impressed everyone. This, combined with impeccable nationalist credentials, made Livni an ideal candidate for the Mossad, which she joined in 1980 at the age of 22. “I brought her to Mossad,” Gal says. “She was very good at everything she did and only left by her own choice. She could have had a 20-year career there too. The smartness, the coolness, the speed of analysis, the straightness — these are prized qualities in Mossad.”

Livni will acknowledge only that she served in Paris. Did the Mossad experience influence her? “No, no, no,” she said, laughing uneasily. Nothing? Nothing, she insisted.

Her brother once visited her in the French capital and found her enrolled as a student in the Sorbonne, behaving in the strangest ways. “I came all the way from Lagos, where I was working in construction, and stayed for two days, and I think I saw her for one hour,” he

recalls. “She would get these phone calls and say, I have to go, I have to go, and she’d rush off, and so in the end I said, O.K, I’m out of here.”

Livni wanted a more normal life. She left Mossad in 1984 and settled down in Israel. She completed a law degree and married Naftali Shpitzer, who now owns an advertising agency. They took up residence in a small apartment in Tel Aviv, not far from where she grew up. A first son, Omri, now in the army, was born soon after; a second, Yuval, followed. When I saw Livni a second time, in Tel Aviv, she said the seashore was where she felt at home. “But,” she added, “my existence here comes out of the connection between me and Temple Mount. This is the umbilical cord. It comes from Jerusalem.”

The biblical Jewish heritage again: you cannot take it out of Livni; it is part of her Likud inheritance. As she says, “Likud was my home, almost literally.” Her father had an office in the Likud building; her own law office was also there. Just before Begin’s rise to power in 1977, ending three decades of Labor hegemony, her father was elected to the Knesset, but politics did not grab Livni until the Oslo peace accords of 1993 cast her into inner turmoil. Once again, as in childhood, she felt alienated.

“Society was split and full of hatred, and I found myself in between two camps,” she told me. “One was the historical right of the Jews on the whole land of Israel and keeping the entire land.” Livni touched her heart. “This was my history, my heritage. On the other, I saw the left wing thinking we could live in a new Middle East, happily ever after. But I thought they were unrealistic, even if I saw we would have to give up some land to preserve the dream of Israel.”

On balance, she could not support Rabin’s push for peace. Oslo, even before Rabin’s assassination in 1995, was an illusion to her because it involved signing a memorandum while leaving the tough issues — Jerusalem, land and refugees — to last. The lawyer in her bridled. “The advice can never be just to sign and leave the most difficult parts to the end,” she said.

Livni’s first campaign for the Knesset, in 1996, failed narrowly, but she caught the eye of the Likud prime minister, Benjamin (Bibi) Netanyahu, and served as the

head of a privatization program that helped stir Israel’s current economic boom. Netanyahu ceded to Sharon as mentor after Livni was elected to the Knesset in 1999. At various ministries — Regional Cooperation, Agriculture, Housing and Construction, Justice and Immigrant Absorption — she acquired a broad political education. Her efficiency and energy paid dividends. A vicious clash as justice minister over [Supreme Court](#) appointments — she delayed the naming of anyone after her own choice was resisted and so drove some judges crazy — amounted to one of few ripples.

“She was a Likud princess, coming from the family she did, and Bibi pushed her, and then Sharon pushed her, and here we are,” says Zalman Shoval, a prominent Likud member and former ambassador to the United States. “I don’t know whether Sharon ever thought of her as a future prime minister. I doubt it, because he only thought about succeeding himself. But she was good for him.”

As the collapse of Oslo and Camp David ended the left’s dreams of a warm peace and the second intifada hardened views across the country and 9/11 cemented Israel’s antiterror alliance with the United States, Livni came to represent a realist, rightward-shifting center. Disengagement from Gaza became the new face of firmness, a “test case” on the road to possible statehood for the Palestinians. She glided upward, spared most of the rough and tumble of politics.

As a result, doubts have lingered about whether she has what it takes to prevail. “There’s nothing Clintonian about her, no familiarity or touch with crowds,” says Majalli Whbee, a Druze Knesset member who served as her director-general at the Ministry of Regional Cooperation. “I’ve talked to her about this, told her not to put herself behind glass, and she agrees.” Shoval also wonders if she has the needed “fire in her belly.” Still, looking ahead to an election that is most likely to come within a year, given the government’s weakness, he acknowledged, “A Kadima Party led by Livni is much more formidable opposition for Likud than one led by Olmert.”

That Livni will realize her ambition is possible. She could be chosen to lead Kadima into the next election and triumph. Israeli politics are unpredictable. But her

motivational dream of a two-state peace — one at odds with the Greater Israel map on her father’s grave — still seems far-fetched. Putative Palestine is remote and riven and receding. Whether Palestinians, even the moderates now gathered in an emergency West Bank government, will prove susceptible to her ideas is far from clear.

You don’t so much drive into the Palestinian territories these days as sink into them. Everything, except the Jewish settlers’ cars on fenced settlers-only highways, slows down. Donkeys, carts and idle people replace Israel’s first-world hustle-bustle. The buzz of business gives way to the clunking of hammers. The whole desolate West Bank scene, described recently by the [World Bank](#) as “a shattered economic space,” is punctuated with shining garrisonlike settlements on hilltops and checkpoints where Palestinians see themselves reflected in the stylish shades of Russian-immigrant Israeli soldiers. If you are looking for a primer on colonialism, this is not a bad place to start.

In Jericho, where thousands of foreign tourists would arrive daily when the “peace of the brave” of Rabin and Yasir Arafat still held, a luxury hotel is almost empty; Palestine-in-embryo is a hard sell for tour operators. On a windblown street stands a rundown building with the Orwellian name of Negotiations Affairs Department. In it sits Saeb Erekat, the chief Palestinian negotiator.

He looks brisk in his yellow tie. When the phone rings, it is the Jordanian foreign minister; they discuss Rice’s postponing another trip. Erekat, a senior Fatah member, has an acerbic wit. “I try my best to understand the Israelis’ fears and aspirations, but they can get too complicated for me,” he said. “Every day there’s something going on, like the cats outside my window at night, and I never know if they’re making love or fighting or both!”

Erekat laughed. There was desperation in his hilarity, a trace of the hysterical. “But the Palestinians are worse!” he continued. “All you hear is shouting; all you see is chaos and lawlessness, the mess in Gaza.” He paused, eyes flitting to the Yahoo e-mail account on his computer screen. “But amidst all this, something else is developing. There are 70-percent-plus of Palestinians who go with the two-state solution, even if nearly 50 percent of Palestinians voted for Hamas. Those same

people condemn suicide bombing. Look, negotiations are over. It's time for decisions!"

He has a point. One odd thing about the Middle Eastern impasse is that a clear majority of people on both sides agree more or less on the outcome: two states, Israel and Palestine, divided along the 1967 borders adjusted to conform with agreed territorial swaps; an inventive deal on Jerusalem allowing both sides their measure of the sacred; massive compensation for Palestinian refugees not wishing to return to nascent Palestine; and perhaps a stabilizing role for a third-party force.

Unlike in Ireland, where peace has broken out without agreement on whether Ulster should ultimately be Irish or remain British, the bedrock lineaments of an accord exist. In that sense, Israel-Palestine is easier than Ireland. But the loud, absolutist, ruthless minority always prevails, and Bush's with-us-or-against-us school in Washington does not believe in probing absolutism, as currently embodied by democratically elected Hamas, to find where it might cede to compromise.

Erekat calls himself the "most disadvantaged negotiator since Adam negotiated Eve." He has no army, navy or economy. His society is split. "I don't stand a chance with a U.S. senator," he noted. The impact of Israel-loving evangelicals, the Jewish lobbyists of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the post-9/11 conflation of global and Palestinian terror has made selling Palestine in Washington about as easy as selling the North Korean economic model. That has simplified life for Olmert and Livni.

Any real U.S. pressure on Israelis to reach out to Palestinians has been intermittent at best. This, along with finding viable Palestinian representatives, is a core problem that [Tony Blair](#) will confront in his new post as special Middle East envoy for the U.S., Russia, the [European Union](#) and the United Nations. The cause of peace has paled. After "Gaza first," at the time of Israel's disengagement in 2005, has come the new cry of "West Bank first." It has the ring of desperation.

"Palestinians are tired of the no-partner-for-talks symphony," Erekat said. "Livni has an interlocutor in me and Abbas. We don't ask why Israelis choose Labor or Kadima; she doesn't need to ask about Hamas. With a

decent peace accord, we can go to a referendum. Moderates would win. That would be Hamas's fig leaf. But Livni has to learn that peace and settlements don't go together, walls and peace don't go together and nothing is solved until everything is solved."

Livni says it is the Palestinians, especially those in Hamas, who must do the learning. They need to learn to side with moderates against jihadists. They need to accept the West's basic demands: renunciation of terror, recognition of Israel and respect of previous Palestinian-Israeli accords. They need to learn that pushing for refugees to return to Israel amounts to questioning Israel's existence: a 1948 rather than a 1967 issue.

Arab states, unlike at Camp David in 2000, can help the Palestinians to make these compromises "by saying publicly what they say behind closed doors." They can contribute to a "political horizon" — a favorite Livni-Rice phrase — by "opening bureaus of interest in Israel." If they fear a nuclear Iran, as Sunni states from Jordan to the gulf do, they should support Israel as a bulwark of moderation.

Since the collapse of the Palestinian national unity government, Livni says she is more hopeful. She welcomes Blair's arrival. The new emergency government in the West Bank, headed by a Palestinian she admires, Salam Fayyad, "offers a clear distinction between moderates and the extremists of Hamas in Gaza." As a result, she says, "we can negotiate, starting with short-term issues, like freeing up money and easing life for Palestinians in ways that do not affect our security."

At the same time, she continues, "we can start looking at long-term issues, the nature of a future Palestinian state, our common denominators." But can Abbas and Fayyad deliver when Hamas controls Gaza, where 1.5 million Palestinians live? "As usual, we are choosing between bad options," she says. "But we must grab this chance if we don't want to lose the West Bank to Hamas. The [Arab League](#), the world, must work with the moderates and strengthen them right now."

Livni's ideas are clear. But, I asked her in our first meeting, are you good at persuading people? "Eehhh, ummmm, yes, I am good at persuading people," she

managed in that quieter voice, before declaring that she does not like to speak about herself and finally mustering, "In convincing the other, I try to start from their point of view, so it's easier for me to find a common denominator."

Their point of view: this is the key. I tried to imagine Livni donning her jeans and sneakers and, instead of hitting a market, taking a look at the scene outside Erekat's place: the dry riverbed with its pile of plastic bottles and discarded tires, and beyond that a brick factory going to seed, and beyond that the sleepy sprawl of Jericho, and beyond that the checkpoints with their daily humiliations, and still farther the snaking path of the wall-cum-fence cutting the beauty of the ancient hills like a blade. What, I wondered, would she feel and how might all this impact her formulas?

Palestinians have failed themselves. Their hand in their misery is decisive. They could have had about half of the land back in 1948. At various points since then, they could have had more than the roughly 22 percent now up for negotiation. But Israelis, justifiably proud of their open society, need to scrutinize the closed autocracy just over the wall. If they will not look at the devastating physical evidence of 40 years of occupation, it is unclear how they can grasp, and so perhaps begin to turn back, the rise of Hamas and Islamic extremism.

"Hamas is ready for a two-state solution," says Barghouti, who served as information minister in the Hamas-Fatah unity government. "They will say so when Israel recognizes Palestinians' rights as equal human beings. But the Palestinian government that Israel wants is a government of collaborators working as subagents for Israeli security. And I can promise you they will never get that."

Sitting in his Bethlehem office, he continued, "No walls are ever permanent, and this one destroys the idea of a two-state solution because it kills the option of a viable Palestinian state. In fact it leads to only one alternative: a binational state in which we are a majority because our population grows at 4.2 percent a year and theirs at 1.7 percent." It won't happen, of course, but the insidious one-state talk is a measure of the conflict's dangerous drift.

In May, the month before the violent Hamas takeover of Gaza from Fatah, Livni gathered international ambassadors to Israel for a briefing at a Tel Aviv hotel. Hamas rockets launched from Gaza were raining down on the Israeli town of Sderot; Livni's message was that the situation had become unbearable. "Enough is enough," she declared, appealing for determined pressure on terrorists "so that the Palestinian people will understand that this is something which is not tolerable."

She also gave expression to a particular Israeli disquiet: "Israelis must know that the international community does understand we are under attack. It is so important to Israel to know that our right to defend ourselves is supported and that you understand that there is suffering here, and not just among Palestinians."

Israel — built on the Zionist dream of gathering in the Jews and so normalizing their status through the attainment of sovereignty — was supposed, as Avineri has written, not only to take the Jewish people out of exile but also ensure that exile was "taken out of the Jewish people." After the millennia of marginalization and Auschwitz, it was supposed to create what Ben-Gurion called "a self-sufficient people, master of its own fate," rather than one "hung up in midair." In some measure, it has.

But as Livni's appeal for sympathy suggested, all the great achievements of Israel have not yet ended Jewish precariousness, Jewish annihilation angst — the inner "exile" of the Jew. Israel remains, in Livni's words, "a nation struggling to realize our basic right to a peaceful coexistence." She told me that "in a Europe without borders, people are questioning what the meaning is of a Jewish state."

Its moral authority compromised by a 40-year occupation, its kibbutznik uniqueness compromised by a globalized consumer culture, its future compromised by the gathering appeal of jihadist dogma, Israel stands at a crossroads. "Something deep has to change," says Dahlia Scheindlin, a pollster. "We can't any longer be the victims rushing to proclaim we're being obliterated and ending up obliterating others." The Diaspora Jew did not go to Zion to build the Jew among nations.

Livni, with her umbilical attachment to the Zionist idea, gets this. She gets the need to hurry to some resolution with the Palestinians in order to stop the erosion of the Israeli *raison d'être*. Watching her in that hotel conference room, beneath the attentive gaze of dozens of ambassadors, I had to admire her. Each point was made with punch, not least that Hamas was rearming in Gaza with Hezbollah in Lebanon as a model. "She is very professional, in good standing and taken very seriously," Jakken Biorn Lian, the Norwegian ambassador, told me.

My admiration was redoubled because May had been a bad month for her. Her high-wire act after the Winograd Commission report, telling Olmert he should go without going herself, had brought a wave of media criticism, much of it sexist. She was described as being fit only to run a women's volunteer group. The onslaught was a fair reflection of the sexism she also encountered within the heavily male cabinet as she tried to resist another bombing raid on Lebanon.

A few days after her not-quite-oust-Olmert push, Yariv Reicher, a consultant, told me: "I'll take her as my lawyer or friend, but to lead here you have to have something hard to describe, something Sharon and Begin and Rabin had, something from the innermost person that gives you hope, an answer to your pain. She needs to speak from her guts."

But it did take guts for Livni to tell her boss he should quit. Rows between Israeli prime ministers and foreign ministers are nothing new: each vies to control the Washington relationship, the one that counts. But Olmert-Livni represents a new level of poison. When Sharon had his crippling stroke last year, both she and Olmert were in position to take over the Kadima leadership. Livni stepped aside — and was rewarded, she feels, with contempt. Livni's testimony to the Winograd Commission amounts to a portrait of humiliation. Requests for meetings with Olmert at critical moments in the war are refused; she is told to "calm down" when she does see him; she is forced to watch the prime minister chat to the chief of staff as she is talking; and she is long frustrated in her quest for a diplomatic outcome.

"The situation is very sensitive," she told me when I asked about Olmert during our first meeting, adding that in the end "it is not about me and the prime minister but

the crisis in our society." What she had said "was exactly what I wanted to say, no regrets. I chose the words. I know that people want blood. That's nice, but. . . ."

Resilience tends to pay in Israeli politics. Netanyahu has bounced back at the head of Likud, and even [Ehud Barak](#), the former prime minister who fell from grace after his peace efforts collapsed, has returned as Labor leader and defense minister. Many saw a rite of passage in Livni's grilling by the media. Her rise had been too smooth; this painful episode would toughen her. "Of course she will come back," says Igal Galai, the friend of Sharon's who watched her emergence. "Right now in Israel, I don't see anyone better."

Doubts persist over the future of Kadima, bereft of its creator, Sharon, and beset by corruption. But Livni says that she still believes in the neophyte party. She did not leave Likud to follow Sharon, she insists. She left "because there is a need to promote a peace process" and Likud is a party "whose ideology starts with the word 'no.'" Israelis are questing for new hope. Whether Netanyahu's Likud or Barak's Labor can provide that is open to question: both speak of yesterday.

Dita Kohl-Roman has watched her friend's evolution closely. Livni used to shut off any conversation about becoming prime minister, but the Lebanon war was a turning point. Such crises pose the question, Can you take this — do you want the job enough? "And a few months later we sat in a Tel Aviv coffee shop," Kohl-Roman told me, "and she said she was ready to run for prime minister and that she had gone through an inner process and was prepared." She says she believes that to win Livni "must get over her uptightness, go through a process of loosening. And then I hope our society can encompass someone who represents something so good and decent as our leader."

Livni can rise above her inner constraints. In a speech in 2005 that riveted the nation on the 10th anniversary of Rabin's death, she declared: "I did not elect or choose Rabin, but he was elected to be the Israeli prime minister, the prime minister of my country. . . . Law, ladies and gentlemen, is not a technical issue. It is the full expression of a precious system. Specifically, in a time when Israel is fighting for its existence, we cannot allow ourselves to forget the aim, the common

denominator and the shared values that are all the meaning of the existence of Israel: a national homeland for the Jewish people, a Jewish and democratic state. These two values are connected to each other. This is the thing that connects us with each other.”

Those words in my head, I strolled through Rabin Square, which has all the beauty of Warsaw at the height of Communism. In one corner is a small shrine to Rabin at the spot where he was murdered on Nov. 4, 1995. An inscription says that here Yitzhak Rabin was murdered “in the struggle for peace.” Another says, “Peace shall be his legacy.”

Alongside these words is a photograph, seemingly from a faraway era, of Rabin shaking Arafat’s hand beneath the sunny gaze of President [Bill Clinton](#). I found myself fighting back tears: how much had been lost since then and how close Israelis and Palestinians had come. A peace of the brave it was; it is brave to see beyond grievance, hurt and history to the innocence in every child’s eye.

Might Livni and Israel rise to bravery again and might Palestine find a leader to accompany such courage? There are few encouraging signs, but Livni has not given up hope. “Each of us can live with our narrative, so long as we are pragmatic when it comes to the land,” she says. “I still believe in our right to the whole land, but felt it was more important to make a compromise. We cannot solve who was right or wrong in 1948 or decide who is more just. The Palestinians can feel justice is on their side, and I can feel it is on my side. What we have to decide about is not history but the future.”

Roger Cohen is a columnist for The International Herald Tribune and a guest columnist for The New York Times.

Jewish Holocaust Hoax AshkeNAZI Jews ruled Germany; the result transformed into the NAZIS. The Party's Leader since 1921 was Rothschild's Adolf Hitler.. he was always the main speaker, and a member of the World Zionist Organization. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_Zionist\\_Organization](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_Zionist_Organization). Jewish Holocaust Hoax. AshkeNAZI Jews ruled Germany; the result transformed into the NAZIS. The Party's Leader since 1921 was Rothschild's Adolf Hitler.. he was always the... Beyond Israel's self-definition as a Jewish state, the question remains as to what extent Israel is a continuation of Jewish political history within the context of the Jewish political tradition. Among the central tensions built into the founding of the State of Israel are those that revolve around Israel as a Jewish state. Formally, Israel is built on the modern European model of centralized, reified statehood. He wrote "The Jewish State" in a mood of restless agitation. His ideas were thrown pell-mell into the white heat of a spontaneous revelation. What was revealed dazzled and blinded him. Alex Bein, in his excellent biography, gives an intriguing description, drawn from Herzl's "Diaries," of how "The Jewish State" was born. The Jewish world, not alien to her, did not find expression through her; her conscious efforts were all directed toward implanting the German cultural heritage in her children.