

# **How Arafat and Sharon Make Decisions?**

## **A Decision-Theoretic Analysis**

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## **Abstract**

Studies of foreign policy decision-making tend to focus almost exclusively on the impact of leaders' personality on decision making, the impact of decision units on decision making, on group decision making, decision strategies and rules that leaders adopt and other information processing elements that impact decisions.

Very little attention has been devoted to the empirical examination of which choice sets are available to the leader during a foreign policy crisis in the first place. In this paper we attempt to construct Arafat and Sharon's decision matrixes during the Palestinian *Intifada* of 2000 using the Delphi technique with a group of Arab-Israeli journalists. These experts are uniquely situated at the crossroad of Palestinian and Israeli politics, as will be explained below.

The Delphi results show an *asymmetry* in the choice sets of Arafat and Sharon, and different sets of considerations for each leader. This may provide one explanation of the failure to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli dispute thus far.

## **Introduction**

Studies of foreign policy decision making have tended to focus thus far almost exclusively on leaders' personalities, group decisions, the effect of decision units on leaders' decisions, operational codes, cognitive processes, framing, priming, and so on. Most studies (e.g. Astorino-Courtois and Trusty (2000), DeRouen (2003), Mintz et al (1997), focus on a given decision matrix consisting of a set of policy alternatives and criteria in an analysis of decisions leaders make. Little attention has been given to the empirical examination of which alternatives and dimensions are available to leaders in the first place during foreign policy crisis.

In this paper we focus on the choice sets of the Chairman of the Palestinian Authority Yasser Arafat and the Prime Minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon. Geva, Redd and Mintz (1997) pointed out that it is important to determine "how and why various elements of the decision matrix were included or excluded because this process of designing the decision matrix has critical ramifications for information processing, preference ordering, as well as the eventual decision. Alternatives and considerations are either exogenously imposed or endogenously derived or a combination of both". Kahneman and Tversky (1979) distinguished between the 'editing phase'

and the ‘evaluative phase’ of the decision process. Levy (1997) pointed out that during the editing phase of decision making actors identify the available alternatives, dimensions, etc. i.e., perform activities that can be viewed as constructing the decision matrix. And yet, this stage was not further developed in prospect theory or in other theories of foreign policy decision making.

Mitchell and Beach in their image theory (1994) also discuss the issue of the “admission” of alternatives into a choice set but the authors do not address the issue of the introduction of dimensions or considerations). Stein and Welch (1997) address the decision design issue of political leaders. They claim that existing approaches are ill suited to the task of problem representation because they assume that actors are already presumed to have a set of alternatives and preferences over possible outcomes. Maoz (1990), Taylor-Robinson and Redd (2003), Mintz and Redd (2003) and Mintz and Geva (1994) examined how framing and counter-framing affect policy alternatives, dimensions and the ultimate choice. There is a consensus in the literature that understanding the choice set and dimension set (i.e. the decision matrix) of political leaders is of critical importance for understanding preferences and predicting the actual outcome. This study gets us closer to understanding the factors that affect choice.

We use the Delphi method in an analysis of a panel of experts in Arab-Israeli politics. Specifically, we asked each of them to “sketch” the decision matrixes of Yasser Arafat and Ariel Sharon. The results show an asymmetry in decision alternatives between Arafat and Sharon: Sharon has more options and greater flexibility than Arafat. Arafat has a fewer options and less flexibility. Both leaders also have very different sets of considerations and little overlap was discovered between the choice sets of both leaders. These findings may provide one explanation for the deadlock in the negotiation between the parties in this conflict.

## **Theory**

Mitchell and Beach (1990, p. 3) state that “the mechanism that governs admission to the [choice] set bears major responsibility for the eventual decision”. Most of the literature begins with the assumption that policy alternatives are set without examining which decision alternatives enter the choice set and dimension set to begin with. This paper builds on the poliheuristic theory of decision making to identify alternatives and dimensions that are available to Sharon and Arafat during the current Intifada.

The poliheuristic theory of decision shades light on the dimensions

that enter the choice set, their relative importance and the decision rules and strategies that affect choice. One of the key premises of the poliheuristic theory of decision-making is that leaders make political calculations and measure success and failure, costs and benefits, gains and losses and risks and rewards in political “units”. Leaders focus on a few “non-compensatory”, non-additive criteria in simplifying foreign policy decision problems prior to employing analytic, expect-utility calculations (Mintz 1993; 1995; 2003; 2004a; Mintz et al 1997).

At the core of the Poliheuristic theory of decision of political leaders is the “non-compensatory” principle. It states that *political audience costs are non-compensatory and non-additive as political leaders avoid major political losses* (See also James and Zhang 2004). Consequently, alternatives that are politically infeasible/unacceptable or damaging are discarded outright. A very low “score” on a political dimension cannot be “compensated” by a high score on other dimensions (diplomatic, economic and so on). An alternative that is unacceptable politically is rejected and removed from the choice set.

Numerous case studies have provided support for the non-compensatory principle of the poliheuristic theory in both democratic and non-democratic societies. Applications of the theory to non-democratic

regimes include China, Pakistan, Syria, and Iraq. Sathasivam (2003, p. 64) for example, claimed that because “Pakistan had already lost national territory—East Pakistan following the 1971 India-Pakistan war—its political leaders have been and are particularly sensitive to issues of national sovereignty and territorial integrity”. According to Sathasivam (2003), once India tested an atomic device in 1998, Pakistani leaders had no choice but to follow the non-compensatory decision rule predicted by the poliheuristic theory and rejected the Do Nothing alternative. Astorino and Trusty (2000) found that Syrian President Assad’s peace and war decisions followed a non-compensatory calculus of decision in a strategic setting. Mishal (2002), showed that even the militant group Hamas has been extremely sensitive to the political dimension when positioning itself as an alternative to the Palestinian Authority. Mintz (2004) has shown that Saddam Hussein’s calculations have followed the same pattern: rejecting alternatives that threaten his political survival even if they score high on other dimensions. This explains why Saddam has cooperated with the U.N. by allowing inspectors to visit Iraq in 2002-2003 while prior to U.S. attack on Iraq in 1991 he stayed in Kuwait even in face of a coalition of 28 countries (as in 1991 the coalition did not threaten *his* political and physical survival).

This calculus of decision is even more evident in democratic polities.

It has been used to explain Presidents Eisenhower, Carter, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton's decisions on the use of force. DeRouen (2003) found that President Eisenhower's decision not to use force in Dien Bien Phu followed the non-compensatory principle: the use of force alternative encountered significant opposition from the public and was rejected by the President; Taylor-Robinson and Redd (2003) argue that Eisenhower's decision to intervene in Guatemala 1954, was also influenced by non-compensatory, poliheuristic calculations. Mintz (1993) showed that President Bush's 1991 decision to attack Iraq has followed the non-compensatory principle, by initially rejecting the Do Nothing alternative in face of Saddam Hussein's decision to invade Kuwait, and then maximizing benefits and minimizing costs. And Redd (2000) claimed that President Clinton's decision not to use ground forces in Kosovo was motivated by non-compensatory calculations stemming from the potentially high number of casualties if ground forces will be sent. Finally, decisions on the formation of political coalitions in Israel were analyzed by Mintz (1995) who showed that intra-party rivalry and inter-party rivalry and opposition affect the formation of political coalitions as well as foreign policy choice.

Experimental studies utilizing the Decision Board software for computerized process tracing in international relations have also

demonstrated the validity of the poliheuristic decision calculus (see Geva et al 2000, Mintz et al 1997; Redd 2000). For example, in a study of high-ranking Air Force commanders Mintz et al (1997) found strong support for the poliheuristic calculus: cognitive, non-compensatory heuristics employed in the first stage and more analytic, expected utility like calculations in the second stage. Redd (2000) found support for the non-compensatory principle of decision making under dimension-based processing. Geva et al (2000) found similar results in a study of dimensionality in foreign policy decision-making.

Leaders avoid major political loss. They simplify their choice problems by employing the non-compensatory decision heuristic.<sup>1</sup> In this study we use a panel of Arab-Israeli experts to identify the choice set, dimension set and non-compensatory political variables (if any) that affect decisions of Arafat and Sharon in the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians.

### **Method:**

To identify Arafat and Sharon choice set and dimension set, we utilized the Delphi technique with a group of 15 Arab-Israeli experts.

Originally developed by the RAND cooperation, the Delphi technique

has been used in numerous studies in Political Science and Management to address widely divergent topics such as the management of change, Beech 1999, and for long-range corporate planning. This technique was also utilized by Bueno de Mesquita (1984) in conjunction with an expected utility model, to forecast leadership change in Iran.

The Delphi technique involves a) the recruitment of experts in a particular field, b) the repeated questioning of each group member, and c) results that are typically based on a consensus of a panel of experts. The experts refine their opinions, “phase by phase, until they reach a consensus” (Hellriegel, Jackson and Solcum, 1999, p. 248). According to Hellriegel et al, the consensus arrived at using the Delphi technique tends to be much more accurate than a single expert’s opinion.

The heart of the Delphi technique is a series of questionnaires (ibid, p. 248). The following phases are typically envisioned (p. 249):

1. A questionnaire is developed and is distributed to a group of experts.
2. A summary of their responses is prepared.
3. This report along with a revised questionnaire is then sent to those who completed the first questionnaire.
4. The report containing the information (e.g. on decision alternatives

and decision criteria of political leaders) is summarized and presented to the experts.

5. The experts are asked whether they agree/disagree with the other experts' opinions and whether they want to revise their original answers.

6. A second report is prepared and distributed to the experts who are asked to indicate whether they support the emerging consensus.

7. The process is repeated until investigators feel that agreement on a topic is reached or that positions are firm (Hellriegel, p. 249).

Because of coordination costs, a range of 15 to 20 experts typically participate in a Delphi study (ibid, p. 250).

In this study, we have followed the procedure recommended by Hellriegel et al 1999, as follows:

- 1) The first questionnaire we developed asked respondents to list Arafat and Sharon's decision alternatives and considerations (see figure 1). It was administrated in January 2000, long before Operation Defensive Shield, and the November 2002 primaries in Labor and the December 2002 primaries in Likud.
- 2) The experts' answers were summarized.
- 3) The answers were re-distributed (in April 2002) to the

experts.

- 4) The experts were asked to state whether they agree or disagree with the original answers of group members.

The experts' responses revealed an emerging consensus. A description of the respondents and discussion of the results are provided below.

### **The Expert Pool:**

Fifteen Israeli-Arab journalists constitute the panel of experts in this study.<sup>2</sup> These journalists and journalists-to-be are uniquely situated in the interface between Palestinian politics and Israeli politics, for the following reasons: They are an effective group to observe the actions and behavior of both sides *simultaneously*. They represent the "Palestinian Israeli" who identifies with Israel as an official state authority and at the same time identifies with the Palestinian Authority [PA] and the Palestinian people as a source for national identity. These experts potentially have two leaders: one civic and official (Sharon) and one nationalistic (Arafat). It is the first time that one systematically analyzes the views of Israeli-Arab journalists who can simultaneously observe the agendas and dilemmas of both Arafat and Sharon.

The experts participating in this study work for Arabic and Hebrew

newspapers. They were trained by the Ha'aretz newspaper in journalism and communication. Questionnaires asking for the construction of Arafat and Sharon's decision matrixes (alternatives and considerations) were presented to each member of the 15-member panel. Each matrix was then analyzed. Results were aggregated and reported.

### **Results:**

An analysis of the experts' opinions reveals the following findings (see Table 1) :

1) There is an *asymmetry* in the choice sets of Sharon and Arafat: Sharon has many alternatives and therefore has more flexibility; Arafat has a fewer alternatives and has little flexibility. Initially, nine experts (53%) claimed that Sharon has more options than Arafat, five (33%) claimed that these leaders have an equal number of alternatives while only two experts (13%) suggest that Arafat has more options than Sharon. However, a consensus representing 92% of the experts emerged after the report summarizing the first round of views and revealed that Sharon has more options than Arafat.

Among Sharon's options the experts listed: maintain the political status quo, negotiate a cease fire, negotiate an interim agreement, resume

peace talks for a permanent political settlement, launch war, freeze settlements, dismantle Israeli settlements, continue with the assassination policy of Palestinian militants, crash the Palestinian Authority, get rid of Arafat.

Among Arafat's options the respondents listed: maintain the status quo, escalate the military conflict, continue the Palestinian uprising, resist settlement expansion, negotiate under fire, switch to a non-violent Intifada, negotiate an interim agreement, surround, go back to Tunis, resign, make peace, stop the Intifada, and negotiate a final, permanent agreement.

According to Mishal (2001) and Rubenstein (2000), generating broad Palestinian support of objectives, policies and operational methods “has become imperative in Arafat's eyes for preserving his standing as a central authority with wide popular backing”.

2) Arafat has to take into account more criteria/considerations than Sharon. Whereas Arafat has fewer options than Sharon, he has to take into account a few more factors than Sharon.

Specifically, variables such as political survival, political power, ego and respect, personal security, internal political pressures, the position of moderate Arab countries such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, the position of the “rejectionist states”, the Palestinian Hamas and the

Palestinian Islamic Jihad movements; Israel; the European Union, the U.S., Russia; Palestinian public opinion, etc) are all important considerations identified by our group of experts (see below).

Sharon on the other hand is constrained by a smaller number of considerations: the U.S. administration, the security situation, the competition with Benjamin Netanyahu for leadership of Likud (which ended in January 2003 in a convincing victory for Sharon but which according to the experts influenced many of his more hawkish decisions until the primaries in Likud), and coalition-related calculations.

3) The experts participating in our study have attributed great significance to political considerations in the calculus of decision of both sides. Sharon's main political considerations were identified as coalitionary and partisan, whereas Arafat's political considerations relate more to his self-interest as a political leader, survival, honor, credibility, respect, and ego. This provides insights into poliheuristic calculations of political leaders in democratic versus non-democratic regimes (see below). Moreover, experts often listed several political considerations for both Arafat and Sharon. For example: survival of the national unity government, rivalry within Likud, support of the Right for Sharon's policies. Survival and political standing for Arafat.

4) Whereas Sharon has several non-compensatory political constraints, there is no evidence for non-compensatory political considerations for Arafat. Specifically, most of the experts have assigned a value of 9 or 10 in importance score (weight) to the political dimension for Sharon but only 5 and 6 to Arafat, providing no support for the non-compensatory, avoid-major-political loss principle with regard to Arafat's political calculations.

5) Most of the experts saw little overlap between the options available to Arafat and those available to Sharon. Initially eight of the fifteen experts identified either zero or one common alternative in the choice set of both sides (typically "maintain the status quo" or "continue the military campaign"). This is an important finding, as it explains why in the absence of active outside involvement of a third party (i.e. the United States), it has been extremely difficult for the parties themselves to resolve the conflict.

6) For Sharon, not all alternatives identified are mutually exclusive. For example, the experts claim that Sharon can negotiate and dismantle settlements at the same time, dismantle a few settlements and continue the military campaign, or negotiate and withdraw from major Palestinian cities.

**Table: 1: Arafat and Sharon's Decision Characteristics**

	<i>Sharon</i>	<i>Arafat</i>
Number of alternatives	More	Less
Number of dimensions	Less	More
Key political considerations	Intra party rivalry, Coalition maintenance	Political survival & self image
Non-compensatory political calculus	Yes	No

## **Poliheuristic Calculations**

Democratic and authoritarian leaders are both concerned with political survival (Russett and Starr 1996; see also case studies in Mintz 2002). A political leader in a democratic society is naturally more sensitive than a leader in a non-democratic country to such domestic political factors as public opinion, political opposition, whether he or she has the votes to pass a resolution, political rivalry within the leader's political party and/or between the party and a rival party or parties.

The Arab-Israeli experts participated in our study pointed out that Yasser Arafat's *political* calculations are different from those of Ariel Sharon. The experts claimed that in the case of Arafat such calculations are more personal and individualistic than coalitionary or party related.

The Poliheuristic theory of foreign policy decision-making implies that political leaders are quite sensitive to political audience costs while trying to avoid major political loss.

In the case of Sharon, the experts pointed to non-compensatory political calculations. No such evidence has emerged when studying Arafat's decision matrix. Some claim however, that Arafat did not accept former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak's July 2000 offer at Camp David because of non-compensatory concessions he had to make over holy sites in

Jerusalem. Our Delphi analysis of Israeli-Arab experts suggests that political factors govern both Sharon and Arafat's calculations but that in the case of Sharon they are non-compensatory primarily due to the coalitionary structure of the Israeli political system, while in the case of Arafat, even though such considerations are *very* important, they may not be non-compensatory. Whereas political considerations are key to the decisions of both Arafat and Sharon, there is a significant difference in the way they view politics. Specifically, for Sharon, the key political variables are coalition politics and partisan politics (the political competition/rivalry within the Likud's central committee). Abramovitz (2003) has also pointed out that Sharon was influenced in his policy considerations by calculations regarding the internal contest within Likud.

In contrast, for Arafat, key political considerations have to do with threats to his political survival, to his power, ego honor, credibility and respect (see also Astorino-Courtois and Trusty's 2000 analysis of Syrian Assad's peace and war decisions vis-a-vis Israel; Rubenstein (2000) analysis of Arafat; and Mintz's 2004 analysis of Saddam Hussein's decision). According to Mishal (2001), for Arafat, every move, political or military, "is weighed according to the effect it will have on his standing and prospects for survival. Success is often measured not so much by furthering goals as by

keeping others [the opposition] from furthering theirs. In this kind of political thinking, the specter of what will be lost by reaching an agreement overshadows the benefits”. Each side makes demands on the other side that are non-compensatory: Sharon has demanded that the Palestinian Authority fights terrorists and turn over militants. The Palestinians demanded the right of return for refugees and dismantling settlements (ibid).

Mishal (2001) also points out that if Arafat is to reach decisions perceived as deviating from the official doctrine of the Palestinian Authority, he “must find a way of diminishing the importance of that deviation while insuring him a supportive political coalition. To this end, he must adopt tactics and modes of behavior that blur the magnitude of the concessions and make light of their significance” (see also Rubenstein, 2000).

Lacking “Palestinian sovereignty, autonomous governing institutions and an independent economy... and having to deal with two populations - a Palestinian Diaspora and a Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza - with different needs and interests... Arafat has had to be attentive and sensitive to his constituencies and domestic public opinion” (ibid).

## **Conclusions and Implications**

Information about which choice set and dimension set of political

leaders is important for understanding and potentially predicting foreign policy decisions of political leaders. Obviously, alternatives that do not make the “choice set” cannot be selected. Dimensions that are not included in the “dimension set” cannot be considered. In this paper we used the Delphi technique with a pool of Arab-Israeli experts, to identify empirically the alternatives and dimensions of Arafat and Sharon. We questioned experts in Israeli-Palestinian politics who are uniquely situated at the crossroad of Israeli and Palestinian politics about Arafat and Sharon’s options and considerations during the Intifada.

The findings reported above have important implications for conflict management and conflict resolution as follows:

1) According to Druckman (2003), an asymmetry in options between negotiators reduces the likelihood of a negotiated settlement. This is the case unless the side that has fewer alternatives increases (or is being forced to increase) the number of his or her alternatives, or the side that has more alternatives decreases (or is being forced to decrease) the number of his alternatives.

2) Consistent with poliheuristic theory, because Arafat has few options and not much to offer to other Palestinian groups, he has difficulty forming an internal coalition. Sharon on the other hand, has a relatively large

number of options and flexibility and therefore, can offer different things to different parties in the coalition formation process in 2003. Therefore, from the Palestinian perspective, negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians need to involve other (third party) entities. Arafat has less room for manipulation of his domestic audiences than Sharon. He also has less flexibility to justify deviation from the Palestinian Authority's official policy or commitments.

3) Arafat tries to enlist the international community, (primarily the European Union), to back his position. He is advocating the involvement of international forces in the negotiation process and on the ground as peacekeeping and/or monitoring or observing force, in order to try reduce and limit Sharon's options and increase his choice (i.e. option) set and enhance his flexibility. Sharon on the other hand has understood that the incorporation of other international players (beside the U.S.) in the decision unit will reduce his maneuverability to the minimum while generating more options for Arafat. He therefore did all he can to postpone and reject such a non-compensatory political options.

4) Because Arafat has fewer options than Sharon, he aims at obtaining as many guarantees as possible regarding the permanent settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Sharon, however, had more options and therefore

pressures Arafat for short-term solutions while avoiding the long-term, permanent settlement.

5) Under such circumstances, it has been difficult for the sides in the conflict to reach equilibrium and resolve this dispute.

6) The lack of overlap between the choices of Arafat and Sharon means that our experts perceive them to be working in parallel paths and that therefore, without a third party involvement in the negotiation between Israel and the Palestinian may be difficult to move the process forward in a meaningful way.

7) Non-compensatory political factors such as coalition structure (in Israel), and the inter-group rivalry among Palestinian factions affect the chance for conflict resolution.

The results show an *asymmetry* between the choice sets of Arafat and Sharon and little overlap in the decision matrixes of Arafat and Sharon. It implies that the 1993 Oslo peace process has evolved into a parallel self-interested process, rather than a cooperative process.

The study has also shown that often alternatives such as “negotiations” and dimensions such as “politics” have several variations on the theme (rather than a unique meaning), implying that leaders may be facing larger, more complicated decision matrixes that are typically being modeled.

## Notes

1. The poliheuristic theory also suggests that leaders utilize a two-stage process in making decisions: during the first stage, the set of possible options and outcomes is reduced by the application of a non-compensatory principle to eliminate any alternative with an unacceptable return on a critical, typically political decision dimension (Mintz 1993; 2004). Once the choice set has been reduced to alternatives that are acceptable to the decision maker, the process moves to a second stage during which the decision maker can either use a more analytic, expected utility-like strategy or switch to a lexicographic decision strategy.

2. The experts attribute to Sharon several “variations” on the theme of Negotiations. Options for negotiations that were listed include: direct negotiations with Arafat and the Palestinian Authority, negotiations via (former) Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, negotiations via third parties, simultaneous negotiation and dismantling of settlements, negotiations and withdrawal from Palestinian cities, negotiation for a 20 year agreement, negotiation under fire, negotiation for the immediate establishment of a Palestinian state, negotiation for an interim agreement, negotiation for a final agreement, and no negotiations.



## Appendix A: The Questionnaire

### The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict:

1. Please list the policy alternatives that Arafat is facing regarding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.
2. Please list the Considerations that Arafat is taking into account for those alternatives.
3. Please weight/indicate the Importance that Arafat gives to each of these considerations:

\_\_\_\_\_ (not important) 0-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 (very important)

4. Please list the policy alternatives that Sharon is facing regarding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

5. Please list the considerations Sharon is taking into account for these alternatives?

6. Please weight/ indicate the Importance that Sharon gives to each of these Considerations:

- \_\_\_\_\_ (not important) 0-1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10 (very important)

Thank you for your cooperation,

The Research Team

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