

**ANOTHER VIEWPOINT
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PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS: A WAY OUT OF THE IMPASSE

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After 100 years of conflict, 70 years of searching for national identities, 41 years of Palestinians' living under Arab and Israeli occupation, and 2 years of the Intifadah, a daily routine of violent action and reaction, there are signs that now is an opportune time for the Palestinians and Israelis to break through their impasse. I propose that two new mechanisms could make that possible: pursuing an incremental approach and involving non-Palestinian Arabs and non-Israeli Jews jointly in the peace process. The conflict is between two parties of unequal strength and international military and material backing and accordingly the effects have been differentially distributed. However, it is evident that they have been fighting a war that neither of them can win in full. In the meantime both of them have suffered so long and to such an extent that they should welcome peace, security, and legitimacy for themselves and for future generations.

The casualties of the conflict have mounted: over 750 Palestinians have been killed in the last two years, thousands have been injured and many more thousands have been jailed or detained. Over forty Israelis have been killed and hundreds injured in the same period. The destruction of capital has brought havoc, to the Palestinians whether in the destruction of their homes, businesses, and plantations, or the decimation of their social and economic institutions. Israel, on the other hand, has continued to waste billions of dollars in military

expenditure on a war it cannot win. National liberation movements have virtually always succeeded.

While the costs have been mounting, positive forces have been evolving in favor of peace. Egypt is back in the lead in the Arab world to resolve the conflict. The United States is again at the center of diplomatic activity, this time in communication with all parties, including the Palestine Liberation Organization(PLO). The Soviet Union, though preoccupied with the dramatic happenings in the Socialist camp, is edging closer toward good relations with Israel while maintaining excellent relations with the PLO. The European Economic Community (EEC) countries are actively trying to promote a resolution of the conflict in a more even-handed and promising manner than ever before. All the major international actors, such as the United Nations and NATO, are trying to smooth relations between Israel and the Palestinians. Most important of all, the Palestinians themselves, both the PLO leadership and the people who live the Intifadah on a daily basis, have committed themselves to peaceful coexistence with Israel. Furthermore, changes in Eastern Europe are a good reminder that freedom and independence will win.

Change has also been evident on the Israeli side. Though life in Israel may seem normal and the Intifadah far away, the reality is different: civic and literary groups have demanded recognition of the Palestinians as a nation, and peace movements have been active as ever calling for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Even the Israeli government has within its ranks almost a majority who lean toward negotiating with the Palestinians. In addition, Jews outside Israel have been more active and vocal on the side of peaceful coexistence than ever before.

If all these positive forces exist, why then have the Palestinians and Israelis found no way to make peace? Several factors stand in the way. The Israelis and the Palestinians have long-standing territorial and political conflicts; they have accumulated feelings of hatred and enmity that alienate them and prevent them from pursuing a more peaceful approach to resolving the conflict; and they have become entangled in a procedural maze they are unable to get out of for a variety of reasons.

First, both parties seem to have fallen into a trap of international diplomacy and protocol at the expense of discussing substance. Second, both have been too saturated with distrust and insecurity to risk dealing with each other. Third, both have been deceived by their apparent achievements to agree to a compromise before they are convinced that they have achieved the maximum. The Palestinians mistake world attention to the Intifadah as a triumph, and the Israelis consider their continued occupation as a victory. Yet neither can claim genuine success, while both continue to suffer costs. Finally, both have been at a loss for a face-saving mechanism to break the deadlock. Yasser Arafat has made a major compromise by implicitly recognizing the right of Israel to exist in a part of Palestine but he still has to find his way to explicit recognition. Similarly, Mr. Shamir says "Never" to negotiations with Palestinians associated with the PLO, but he has been willing to talk with Egypt which has been in direct contact with the PLO. He says "Never" to contact with the PLO but he has been exchanging messages with them through third parties. He says "Never" to a Palestinian state but is willing to negotiate the future of the Occupied Territories after a transition period from occupation to non-occupation. Mr. Shamir still has to find the courage to face the Palestinians in a peace effort as he does in the war effort. Obviously both sides want a catalyst to break the impasse and reach out for substantive peace negotiations. I

suggest that pursuing an incremental approach toward pacification and involving non-Palestinian Arabs and non-Israeli Jews could be a big step toward resolving the conflict, as follows:

1. The Palestinians want to end the occupation, while the Israelis argue that occupation will not end as long as violence and insecurity prevail. However, both goals may be satisfied if the Israeli military will stay out of or withdraw from any village or town that appears free of violence for a given period of time, say two weeks, and will cease to interfere in their internal affairs. The less military presence, the less provocation and violence there will be and thus the less need for the military presence. Gradually all of the Occupied Territories may be free of occupation and of violence. This process will be continued until military occupation is virtually ended, while a political settlement is being negotiated.

2. The Palestinians want elections to be under international supervision, while the Israelis insist that no Palestinian associated with the PLO may be a candidate. I suggest that international supervision may be best conducted jointly by non-Palestinian Arabs and non-Israeli Jews--that should satisfy the Palestinians. On the other hand, any Palestinian should be able to run for elections as long as peaceful coexistence with Israel is part of the election platform, (the joint committee would see to that) which should satisfy the Israelis.

3. Both parties are distrustful of each other; however, if the Palestinian candidates commit themselves to negotiate with Israel in good faith regarding the transition from occupation to non-occupation and future relations, and if Israel commits itself to respect the election results, mutual trust will begin to grow.

4. While these processes are underway, Israel can help to break through the impasse by allowing schools and universities to reopen. Israel will also make a major contribution by

removing all restrictions on the economic and social activities in the Occupied Territories, as long as these activities are not security threats. These activities serve both to help improve living conditions and to allow the Palestinian people to be engaged in constructive and productive efforts. Such steps should be beneficial to Israel both in trust building and in cost cutting since less effort would be required to "maintain law and order."

Direct contact between the conflicting parties is the shortest way to break through the impasse. Though the Palestinians and the Israelis have been in direct contact, it may still be necessary for a third party to facilitate the process of negotiation and legitimize the contact and make it public. The most suitable such third party would be a joint committee of non-Palestinian Arabs and non-Israeli Jews who are committed to peaceful coexistence between the two parties.

These proposals are no doubt based on oversimplifications but they can be viable as a start. If the Palestinians and the Israelis try them, both will be winners, and even if they do not succeed fully, neither party will be a loser.

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