

Will the Intifada Go On?

Jul 1, 2003



Articles & Testimony

One can discern two general schools of thought -- pessimists and optimists.

Pessimists tend to believe that the conflict is due to a discrepancy between ideas of legitimacy. Pro-Israel members of this camp doubt that Palestinians will accept Israel's right to exist. The implications are clear -- jumpstarting the so-called "peace process" is meaningless until Palestinian violence stops and Israel demonstrates its military superiority.

Pro-Palestinian pessimists maintain the exact opposite view -- the Israel-Palestinian conflict will not be resolved until Jews accept a Palestinian state. The implications are also reversed -- the Intifada does not hinder peace, it bestows legitimacy upon the Palestinian cause. From this perspective, only Israeli weakness, not strength, can bring about a resolution to the conflict. Both camps are inherently pessimistic because reforming perceptions of legitimacy requires at least the persistent threat of force, which preconditions even the prospect of negotiation.

In contrast, optimists do not conceive of Israeli-Palestinian relations in zero-sum terms. For them, negotiation can simultaneously improve the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians. According to this view, the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not about legitimacy, which militates against negotiation, but about promoting inter-communication, thereby fostering mutual trust.

For pessimists, the question of legitimacy makes irrelevant, even misguided, any discussions of a two-state solution, whereas optimists believe such discussions can signal a willingness to make concessions, thereby inducing reciprocal trades for peace. Such a position assumes that the Palestinians would ultimately forego the use of violence and Israel would make sufficient territorial withdrawals for the creation of a Palestinian state, without which everyone can agree that a two-state solution will remain elusive. Unfortunately, even this end goal is not shared by all. ❖

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