

Fateful Choices for Israelis and Palestinians (Part I)

Oct 4, 2002



In-Depth Reports

The last two years of violence deserve a lot of analysis. In looking at the underlying strategic components of the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, I have come to the conclusion that certain matters must be discussed openly and clearly between the two sides. If there is disagreement, it is not because agreement is impossible, but because some issues are rooted more in emotion than in logic.

One thing is clear: violence simply does not work in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (Applause.) This is not to say that, in general, the use of violence cannot resolve conflicts. But I am resolutely convinced that, as far as Israelis and Palestinians are concerned, violence simply does not work. By this, I mean that the use of violence by Palestinians will always be insufficient to break the will of the Israelis or to make Israel accept Palestinian demands and aspirations. Likewise, the use of force by Israel against Palestinians will never break the Palestinian will.

Currently, Palestinians and Israelis are entangled in a kind of dance of death. We shoot at each other, and as we do so, we slowly sink into a quagmire that can only lead us into nothingness. In an armed conflict, the different sides usually fight over conflicting interests. Strangely -- and paradoxically -- Israelis and Palestinians do not have conflicting interests. Rather, they have a joint interest in their common future. Logically, Israelis and Palestinians must live together. Because violence does not work, the only alternative is to come back to our senses and negotiate toward that common future. In this way, the real allies of the Israelis are the Palestinians, and vice versa.

As we are negotiating, we must rely on the use of wisdom rather than intelligence or cleverness. One might use intelligence, cleverness, or other means of negotiating when one is bargaining with a merchant or trying to get a better deal in some similar transaction. But Israelis and Palestinians must not deceive each other because we will have to live with each other afterward. We will be negotiating not some article from an Istanbul market, but our very existence and that of future generations.

One of the prerequisites of wisdom is clarity -- honesty in one's positions and declarations. The basic principles for a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are clearly definable. These principles must be declared openly and committed to by the two parties.

First, the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza should end, and a Palestinian state should come into being from the territories there.

Second, Jerusalem should be shared by the two parties as a joint capital that will remain an open city. The Clinton proposals on Jerusalem could be drawn upon to define the exact nature of such an arrangement. Among other things, a formulation could be defined on the basis of which Arab neighborhoods would be under Arab sovereignty and Jewish neighborhoods would be under Jewish sovereignty. The Muslim and Jewish holy areas would not be under either party's sovereignty. Israel could act on behalf of the Israeli people in conducting their affairs over the Wailing Wall, and, likewise, the Palestinians could conduct the affairs of the al-Aqsa compound on behalf of the Palestinian people and the Muslim world, with a commitment by the two sides that no excavations, construction, or work of any sort would be done unless agreed to by both parties.

Third, the settlers would have to be evacuated from the Palestinian state-to-be. I am not saying that the settlements themselves should be dismantled, only that the settlers be evacuated.

Fourth, the refugee issue is one of the most difficult and sensitive problems from both the Palestinian and Israeli perspectives. Palestinians have a choice between two rights: the right of return exercised in the fullest and broadest sense of the word or the right to freedom as a people. The Palestinian people must choose in favor of the right to live in a free state. Once that choice is made, the refugee problem can be resolved by allowing those who wish to return to their homeland to return to this Palestinian state. Other components of the refugee problem would also have to be addressed, including the issue of compensation. Again, some of the Clinton proposals may help in this regard.

Fifth, a Palestinian state should be demilitarized. Israel's requests to this effect notwithstanding, the demilitarization of the Palestinian state would also be in the interests of the Palestinian people. Money that otherwise would be spent on the useless acquisition of weapons would be better spent on building infrastructure and on the economy. With demilitarization, the Palestinian state could rely on the guardianship of the international community for its security.

These are some of the basic principles that should govern and define the ultimate contours of a settlement between the two peoples. If Israelis and Palestinians do not work toward a solution, they will continue to fight each other forever. Far better to stop now and negotiate on the basis of this vision than to let things continue sliding toward a future that can only bring more suffering and death. Israelis and Palestinians are allies, and as such, they must negotiate to create a neighborhood of peace, stability, and progress -- a future in which our children can grow confident in themselves and in their respective national identities.

Uzi Dayan addressed the conference on this same topic. [Read his remarks. \(templateC07.php?CID=111\)](#) ❖

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