

Palestinian-Israeli Dynamics and the Future of Palestine

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Brief Analysis

No matter what the outcome of the present crisis, the relationship between the Palestinians and Israelis will continue to be determined by various long-term trends and dynamic forces.

Palestinian Political and Social Development

The parameters and structure of Palestinian society and polity have not yet been clearly defined or recognized. For Palestine, as for all societies that have been through liberation struggles, the extent of violence during the struggle will have a long-term impact on the future course of Palestinian politics, political values, identity issues, and institutional structures. The means through which the Palestinians obtain their independence will also have a major impact on the future of Palestinian-Israeli relations.

Areas of Palestinian social and political formation that will bear on the future dynamics of their relationship with Israel include:

The extent to which democratic institutions develop, including whether they are strong and autonomous or constrained and distorted. The evolution of Palestinian public institutions happened in such a manner that the leadership has been left largely unaccountable to its broad constituency, which fact has been detrimental to Palestinian-Israeli relations. The emphasis on security—primarily Israeli security—tended to deemphasize and deprivilege other issues that would have involved Palestinian civil society in various ways.

The entrenching of the institutional culture of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and of the Israeli civil administration that operated in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from 1967 to 1994. Both contributed to the institutional behavior under the Palestinian Authority (PA). They shaped the culture of patronage, cooptation, collaboration, and withholding or granting of various privileges and perks. They also molded the governing culture of social control over a marginalized and demobilized population.

The contextual factors and conditions that have weakened civil society. For example, the Palestinian leadership has been able to consolidate its authority over the economy by operating a kind of brokerage with the Israeli civil administration. In addition, the refugee population has historically been socially, economically, and politically marginalized.

The substance and nature of Palestinian political demands and Israeli claims in a final peace deal, and how they are handled. The terms of any deal made on permanent-status issues—and how these terms are arrived at—will have a significant impact on political perceptions and feelings on the Palestinian side.

Israeli Policies and Internal Dynamics

Policy choices made by the Israeli government will inevitably produce political reactions on the Palestinian side. The most significant parameters of the Israeli-Palestinian relationship on the Israeli side will be the terms of the final peace agreement as implemented by the Israeli government of the day. In the interim, other major issues include settlement activity, the creation of "facts on the ground" in East Jerusalem, economic and commercial access to the

outside world, and domestic policies within Israel that affect the status and political feelings of the Palestinian citizens of Israel.

Outside Actors

During this period when the Palestinian phenomenon is being shaped, outside powers have much influence on the emerging system. In particular, the United States and Jordan have political, material, and other means through which they can alter the cost-benefit calculation of the two main protagonists. Yet, it is not clear how much impact the outside actors have on long-term prospects, or whether they will have a strong influence in deterring the Israelis and Palestinians from going down one path or another.

Jordan is important because of its large Palestinian population, its extensive borders with Israel, and its close economic relations with the West Bank. What happens in Israel and Palestine will affect Jordan, but what happens in Jordan—even when driven by outside events that affect the political and demographic balance within Jordan—may have equal bearing on what happens in the West Bank. Thus, choices that may be made for domestic purposes in Jordan may affect the Palestinian state and its emerging institutions.

U.S. policy could affect the cost-benefit calculations on the Israeli side by making clear that Israel's incessant settlement activity since 1993 and unilateral creation of "facts on the ground" in East Jerusalem should not be cost-free. The United States could also devote more attention to medium-term goals rather than short-term goals. For example, U.S. efforts could include setting down the basic political parameters of a final peace treaty, as seen in President George W. Bush's September 29 speech confirming Palestinian statehood and Jerusalem as a shared capital.

The Current State of Israeli-Palestinian Relations

All parties—Israel and the PA primarily—should adopt peace as a strategy. The PA has failed to understand what this strategy means operationally—that is, the necessity of developing an entire set of political tools, responses, and behavior that work toward a lasting peace. On the Israeli side, consecutive Israeli cabinets have acted in pursuit of a peace that would suit their needs, but they have lacked a strategy of peace, as distinct from an exploitation of the clause committing the PA to settle disputes without resorting to violence. Just as neither side pursued a strategy of peace fully and consistently, the United States became more and more concerned with the process, and less and less with the substance.

As for the PA and its legitimacy, the PA remains a partially elected government. Despite its flaws, it exercises some level of authority over different spheres of life throughout the entire Palestinian territories and population. The challenges to the legitimacy of the PA reflect popular ambivalence about PA governance and dissatisfaction with the performance of the legislative and judicial authority. This has led to a unmotivated and demobilized population, weakening the elements that might strengthen an autonomous civil society and economy. The incapacitation of the Palestinian center has left no alternative in the Palestinian scene other than the use of military force.

Arafat has been deeply implanted in Palestinian politics during the past thirty years, yet he has been weakened much by the intifada; he ushered in a new phase that has outgrown him. In light of efforts by President Bush and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to coerce him into delivering on nonviolence and a ceasefire, Arafat has been reasserting his personal centrality. That centrality exists not only in the perception of his constituency, but also in the perception of the key outside powers. Were the United States to sever relations with the PA, it would heighten the threat perception of the PA and Arafat above all, and it would narrow the entire issue to Arafat as a person.

In any post-Arafat scenario, it is still not clear whether anyone would be able to assert overall control and authority over the military, the administration, and the various factions of the PLO; such stability is required if negotiations with Israel are to take place. If the process of transition takes place under the present conditions of violence, the

emerging Palestinian political system and social structure could take a violent turn under rival warlords. If the succession process occurs during peaceful times, however, it will likely be smooth and straightforward, producing a kind of collegiate replacement leadership.

This Special Policy Forum Report was prepared by Ashraf Zeitoon.

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