

"In my beginning is my end," wrote T.S. Eliot in words that are well-suited to the Arab war against Israel. Since its creation on May 14, 1948, the Jewish nation of Israel has fought in no less than four major wars with its Arab neighbours to retain its sovereignty, not to mention the countless terrorist attacks. It was not until the agreement at Oslo, Norway, which was later ratified on the White House lawn in September 1993 by Yasir Arafat, chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and Yitzhak Rabin, then Prime Minister of Israel, with perhaps the most famous handshake in history that peace was foreseeable in the near future. However, as will be demonstrated, little peace was actually achieved.

Literature about peace and condemning the absurdity of war, has been written since the days of the Bible and the Koran. For example, as stated in the Bible in Isaiah 52, "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger that announces peace!"; and in the Koran, ""He who walks with peace - walk with him!" Various cultures have used this religious theme of peace as a stepping stone towards abating passions between conflicting parties and conveying and creating an atmosphere conducive to peace.

However, when conflicts that are deeply rooted and important to people remain unresolved for long periods of time, they tend to escalate, transform and resurface repeatedly, resulting in an intractable conflict with a high level of intensity and destructiveness. This has been the case between the Arabs and Israelis.

In conflicts such as this, when fighting becomes a way of life and strong opinions against the other as the "enemy" are prevalent and normative, the possibility of reaching a peace agreement that requires an understanding of the other's feelings and a general meeting of the minds, is a challenge that to this day is still an ideal goal yet to be achieved.

This paper will examine theories behind international negotiations and intractable conflicts, the history and efforts of the two conflicting parties in the peace process, the types of conflict resolution that have been employed, and the problems facing dispute settlement for the parties involved.

A Preface to Understanding the Actors & the Negotiations

As our world becomes more interdependent, there is a higher likelihood for conflict. This opens the door for more negotiations or other dispute settlement mechanisms. Various cultures come to the table in the hopes of coming to a consensus and end the conflict.

Culture may be understood as a system of accepted beliefs and assumptions amongst a certain group of individuals that are transmitted from one generation to the next through a learning process. This constrains peoples' perceptions of reality and influences what people believe, how they act and what values they hold.

Naturally, when different international actors come to the negotiation table, they bring their culture with them. This inevitably conditions how they view the negotiation, their opponent, and what game is being played. The negotiation is affected by the actors' stereotypes of others, the intentions they have brought with them, the values they possess, and alters how the issues are understood. Most importantly, issues may carry with them symbolic value that cannot easily be explained, conveyed or rationally understood by the other party. Symbolic meanings generally encompass memories from past experiences and may strongly influence current behaviour.

When actors come to a negotiation, they also employ a strategy that will result in the achievement of their goal. These strategic choices are led by the values they possess, which directly relate to their

culture.

According to Guy Olivier Fauve, these factors can be summed up into four categories, all of which play a crucial role in any negotiation: First is cognition. This deals specifically to the way negotiators perceive and understand what is at stake in a negotiation, such as power, status, resources, security etc. It also relates to how the negotiation itself is perceived (the nature of the game being played). Cognition is concerned about what one party knows about the other. Stereotypes, historical memory, and past personal experiences drive the perceptions brought to the negotiation. These cognitive aspects are important in how the issues are framed and what choices are made. Second are beliefs. This includes the set of values that are generated from the cultural backgrounds of the negotiators and direct their behaviour. Third is behaviour. This concerns the way the actors play. Each culture has its own ideas of what risks are acceptable to take, how to behave and thus select defensible arguments that support this. Last is identity. This is the most deeply felt and is the most difficult to deal with. Any change to one's own identity, is perceived as a denial of oneself and at the symbolic level is viewed as a destructive. Identity is the untouchable core of one's culture.

It is all these various factors which parties bring to the table that must be taken into consideration when trying to resolve a conflict, but which are often very difficult to see and understand. This cannot be more true than with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Before looking at the Palestinian-Israeli conflict specifically, there are a few key points to be made about negotiations in general. First, for a negotiated settlement to be possible, the parties must believe that the benefits of an agreement outweigh the losses. If the two parties' interests are diametrically opposed, a solution that would require one side to yield all or most of its position will most likely be unacceptable. Second, negotiations are impossible if the parties to a dispute refuse to have any dealings with each other. Third, it will be difficult for negotiations to be successful, if the parties use non-recognition to deny standing of the other in a dispute, or as a general indication of disapproval. Up until recently, the refusal of the Arab states to recognize Israel and Israel's refusal to acknowledge the PLO prevented direct negotiations. In this context, non-recognition was a reflection of the substantive issues in dispute, and therefore became a large initial hurdle for the Israelis and Palestinians to climb over. Fourth, negotiation will be ineffective if the parties' positions are far apart and no common interests are established to bridge the gap.

In addition to these aspects, negotiating in the international context can be viewed as a bargaining game "in which opponents exchange concessions and where the exchange is influenced by the situation in which it takes place." However, according to Siegel and Fouraker, to make this a successful undertaking, there must be present a prominent optimal outcome, complete information so that the outcome can be identified, veto power by each party to ensure the outcome is mutually acceptable and only two parties are involved. The problem arises when there is no optimal outcome identified or it is difficult to find. Who makes the first concession? Which party should make the larger concession? Especially in intractable conflicts, the bargaining becomes a contest of wills, where each is trying to pressure the other into conceding first or more frequently.

Introduction to Intractable Conflicts

The conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is characterized as an intractable one. Generally intractable conflicts involve several parties over a long period of time and are concerned with an intricate set of historical, religious, cultural, political and economic issues. They tend to give rise to a feeling that their basic human needs and values are threatened, which result in destructive behaviour and outcomes.

There are a few factors that have come to characterize intractable conflicts. First, the conflict persists over time, with sporadic increases in intensity and occasional outbreaks of violence. Second, needs and values that the parties experience as critical to their own group's survival are involved. Although these concerns may be unrelated to the issues that have triggered the conflict, the issues are often transformed and become threatening in nature. Third, the experience of threat and effects associated with the conflict, affect most aspects of each person and the community's social and political life. Fourth, the disputants develop a feeling of hopelessness towards resolving the conflict. Over time, it becomes more difficult to envision any approach to resolution, other than the continued use of force to eliminate the other. Fifth, after such a prolonged conflict, the primary motivation of the parties is to harm the other. This is generated from mutual feelings of fear. Last, intractable conflicts are resistant to repeated and concerted attempts at resolution.

John Burton, Jay Rothman and John Paul Lederach, prominent conflict scholars, have distinguished between issues in intractable conflicts that primarily concern resources (ie; time, money or land), and those that concern the basic issues of personal and group identity (ie; fair treatment, security, safety, sense of control). Identity-based concerns are tied to the most fundamental human needs, so that when conflicts that involve them, strike at the very existence of those individuals involved.

If intractable conflicts are characterized by a high degree of concern towards one's identity and this is linked to the amount of control exercised, then this needs to be addressed through a climate in which these concerns can be discussed. Negotiation is not so much the application of logic to a problem or situation, but rather is an exercise in talking and accompanied by listening. Talking is what will get the parties closer to an agreement that will deal with the nature of the problem.

The initial principal requirement in intractable conflicts is for the frozen positions of the parties concerning identity and control to become the subject of joint thought and deliberation. This should presuppose any action taken, for actions do not solve the underlying issues of a conflict.

Negotiations will also allow the parties to discuss the various psychological processes that can fuel a conflict's intensity. This includes elements such as misperception (ie; negative stereotypes), selective perception (ie; selective evaluation of behaviour), self-fulfilling prophecies (ie; when negative attitudes and perceptions have an impact on the other's behaviour), over-commitment (ie; escalation of commitment), and entrapment (ie; parties expend more resources in the conflict than seems appropriate by external standards). Other factors include a win-lose or competitive attitude, cognitive rigidity where there is an inability to envision alternatives, miscommunication, breakdown of interaction and communication with the other party.

It is within this setting that a closer look will be taken of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in which a hostile battle has persisted over decades over land, resources and most importantly, identity.

Introduction to the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a protracted, deep-rooted conflict between identity groups that is now at least a century old. The origins of the conflict can be traced to the advent of Zionism at the end of the 19th century. During the early decades of the 20th century, there were waves of Jewish immigration in Palestine, which soon clashed with the Arab population. There was considerable contact between the two groups, but it was largely negative. There was social and economic separation, political conflict and periodic violent confrontations.

With the establishment of the independent State of Israel in 1948, followed by the wars between Israel

and the neighbouring Arab states, and the displacement of a large percentage of the Palestinian Arab population from their homes inside the part of Palestine that became Israel, the fundamental dynamics of the relationship between the two communities changed.

After the 1948 war, a large segment of the Palestinian population lived in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, the two parts of Palestine that remained in Arab hands. However, this changed when Israel took possession of these areas after the 1967 war.

Since this time, the two sides clashed on numerous fronts. But a break appeared in these clouds in 1992, and both parties became highly motivated to settle their conflict. In I. William Zartman's terms, the situation became ripe for resolution. "Ripeness develops when a mutually hurting stalemate exists, especially if the parties are also facing an impending catastrophe. Israel and the PLO were in a stalemate in that Israel could not defeat the PLO or vice versa."

The stalemate was hurting Israel by exposing it to conflict-related costs. This included the intifada (uprising by Arab youth), which had eroded popular support for maintaining control of the West Bank, fear that Iran or Iraq would attack Israel out of support for the Palestinians, and concern was growing about American support in the wake of the Gulf War. It was within this context, that in 1992 the Labour Party with Yitzhak Rabin as its leader, won the election on the promise of settlement with the Palestinians.

During the same time, Yasir Arafat was facing dwindling PLO funds and the Hamas movement (radical outgrowth of the intifada) was gaining strength as opposition to PLO leadership. A situation of dependence emerged. Israel needed the PLO to provide peace with the Palestinians, improve relations with the Arab world and the U.S., while the PLO needed legitimate authority by Israel in Palestinian territory so they could collect taxes and marginalize Hamas.

This ripeness was sensed by Terje Larsen, a Norwegian sociologist who was conducting research in the Gaza Strip. He arranged to host twelve secret, back-channel meetings in Oslo over an eight-month period. The Palestinians were represented by Abu Ala, a high level associate of Arafat, while the Israelis were represented at first, by a low-level delegation of two university professors who gave informal reports to the Labour Party. Israel's participation became more formal and high-level after five meetings and the realization that a reasonable agreement could be reached.

The Norwegians employed communication tactics that would help each side talk to one another and develop friendly interpersonal relations. This included common meals and recreational facilities. Larsen would intervene during the negotiations only when some smoothing over problems was required and would urge continuation of the talks when there was the possibility of break-down. The parties also had the luxury of time to go over the various concerns, issues and proposals.

Although there were a few flare-ups and it took a lot of hard-bargaining to get through the sticky issues, the atmosphere was warm and jocular. According to Dean G. Pruitt, a common understanding of the issues and a solidarity of purpose developed where each side was ready to engage in give and take to reach a settlement. The question that surfaces was whether the "friendly" behaviour was enough to sustain a long term peace settlement, or was it a temporary solution to an intractable problem? As will be demonstrated, the facade of commonality at Oslo was nothing more than a mirage, hiding the true issues and feelings of each side.

Nonetheless, with a firm handshake by Rabin and Arafat on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993, the Oslo Accords were presented to the world as a momentous step towards peace. The Accords

envisioned an interim period during which the Palestinians and Israelis would engage in confidence building measures before tackling the tougher, larger issues like Palestinian borders, statehood, refugee claims and the status of Jerusalem. In other words, a more permanent peace was postponed until the more fundamental issues were resolved.

The negotiations focused on the reconciliation of some past differences like water, land rights and security measures. Israel agreed to withdraw its military forces from Jericho and the Gaza and there would be a transfer of power to a nominated Palestinian Authority (PA). The PA would administer most of the Palestinian populated areas of the West Bank and Gaza. The PA leadership's primary areas to address during this interim period was the Palestinian diaspora (subgroups originating from Palestine but with the formation of "Israel", moved to the surrounding Arab states), the stateless residents of the refugee camps in Lebanon and Syria, and most importantly, securing a Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza.

The negotiations also paved the way for the mutual official Palestinian and Israeli recognition. Since the formation of Israel in 1948, the Palestinians had not recognized the Jewish State and the Israelis had not recognized the legitimacy of the Palestinians. Although this recognition was a fundamental first step towards peace, it was the interdependence that the Accords created between the two delegates that was most important. Because the Accords promulgated continuous negotiations to resolve certain major issues and shared participation and cooperation, the Palestinians and Israelis would need to work together, especially if they wanted peace to succeed.

Unfortunately, problems in the solidarity of the Oslo Accords began to emerge. Israel had been living up to their promises. Their territorial withdrawals continued, but this came without much reciprocation by Palestinians in honouring their part of the deal, nor from the U.S. in fulfilling the promise they made to press the Palestinian Authority on compliance. The Palestinians did not combat terrorism, confiscate illegal firearms, limit the number of Palestinian police, prevent hostile propaganda, amend the PLO Charter or cease violent attacks. Instead they kept calling for "jihad" or "holy war" against Israel and therefore continued with terrorism. The Oslo Accords had also authorized a limited 24 000-man Palestinian police force armed enough to maintain law and order within the territory Israel was ceding to the Palestinian Authority. This number, however, would inevitably rise to at least 40 000 and weapons banned by Oslo were smuggled in from Jordan and elsewhere.

Despite the multilateral promise-breaking, in October 1997, then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Arafat at the Wye Plantation in Maryland. These negotiations included the active participation of President Clinton. The Wye negotiations tried to revive the peace process begun in Oslo. Both knew that failure to establish a settlement would spell victory for extremists on either side. For Arafat, if the peace process collapsed, he would lose credibility. It would be an advantage only for Arafat's militant Islamic opponents who could not see past the barrel of a gun. For Netanyahu, only the fanatic Gush Emunim settlers would be happy if the peace process failed. The 82% of Israelis who wanted peace would be disappointed. The only ones that would benefit from a failure of the peace process are the absolutist no-compromisers, the ethnic purists.

The essence of the Wye River Memorandum was a pledge by Israel to withdraw from more territory and the Palestinians to conform with prior agreements involving issues of security (as listed above). Since the Israelis were fulfilling their promises, the main focus of the negotiations was what the Palestinians were offering. Consistent with Netanyahu's desire for reciprocity, he wanted terms that would position him strongly to decline further moves in the Oslo process if the Palestinians failed to perform their promises. On the other hand, Arafat wanted an agreement without clear commitments or enforcement mechanisms.

However, the Palestinians and Americans believed that in order to achieve peace, there could not be strong commitment towards compliance. This meant not curing existing violations or preventing future ones. In this regard, the Wye Agreement was drafted to omit certain terms like, verification of compliance, mechanisms to enforce obligations and provisions for termination in case of material breach.

The lack of assurances and reciprocity to fulfil concessions agreed upon, became a stumbling block towards achieving peace. So that by the time the 5-year mark rolled around in May 1999, which under the Oslo Accord was the time a final status agreement was supposed to be reached between Israel and the Palestinians, there was no final peace agreement in sight. The expiration of the Oslo peace accords passed without a declaration of a Palestinian State. Rather, both sides were deadlocked over implementation of the Wye Agreement in which Israel promised to cede 13.1% of the West Bank in exchange for heightened Palestinian efforts to control terrorism. Each side accused the other of failing to live up to its commitments under the U.S.-brokered agreement.

Part of the problem in ensuring a true and lasting commitment to the promises laid out in the various agreements, was the change in political leadership in Israel. With each new Prime Minister, came a new platform that appealed to different beliefs among the Israeli population. For example, in contrast to Rabin's efforts and promises, Prime Minister Netanyahu rejected the Accords that implicitly recognized the Palestinian's right to self-determination, a notion that was tantamount to statehood. Rather, he believed that giving the Palestinians political freedom was a compromise Israel should not make: "Autonomy over civil institutions like education and health is ok; a state is inconceivable." His intransigent policies had pretty much buried Oslo, and, with it, the promise for peace.

In 1999, Ehud Barak was elected the Prime Minister of Israel. With this brought a new hopefulness to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Unlike Netanyahu, Barak preferred a negotiated settlement to the preservation of the status quo. Moreover, whereas Netanyahu treated Palestinian leadership with contempt, Barak treated them with respect, a crucial element in establishing open communications for negotiations.

This improved the climate for a settlement, but still several issues would remain arduous to overcome. The most serious problems concerned Barak's traditional stance on security, his refusal to dismantle the Jewish settlements on the West Bank, and his insistence that Jerusalem remain as one under exclusive Israeli sovereignty and control.

The changes in Israeli leadership complicates the peace process, even today with new Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, in that there are inconsistent point of views brought to the negotiating table, not to mention a confusion on the part of Arafat, who is never quite sure what to expect. It is hard to understand where the leader/negotiator is coming from. The ability to communicate and feel comfortable in negotiations is never established, because just as it is obtained a new prime minister is elected.

Negotiation and a Settlement Possible?

Former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, a key architect and driving force behind the Oslo Accords, emphasized that "only a solution that does justice to all parties, and avoids rectifying one side's wrongs at the expense of the other side's rights, can be durable." To establish a permanent solution, justice and mutual consent are required.

Within the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, there was a power inequality which resulted from Israel's activities, resource acquisitions including land and water, and military strength. This made Palestinians

feel weak, vulnerable and dependant. This causes difficulty in the Palestinian negotiator's ability to infuse their sense of justice and fairness into the bargaining.

According Cecilia Albin, the Palestinians were being driven in negotiations by pragmatic considerations of what they could achieve given their weaknesses. Palestinian disadvantages included Israeli control over resources (ie; water supply, territory), a constantly deteriorating "Best Alternative To a Negotiated Agreement" (BATNA), and the deferral to the permanent-status talks of the issues most significant to them. She lists other factors such as, poor coordination, consultation and bargaining strategies among Palestinian negotiators, financial difficulties for the PLO and a lack of a strong ally to offset the U.S. support to Israel.

In addition, there was fragile support within the Palestinian community. Many Palestinians criticized the Oslo Accords and interim talks. They believed that any continued Jewish settlement in what they considered Palestinian territory (ie; West Bank and Gaza), violated international law, the spirit of the Oslo Accords and prejudiced future bargaining. To them fair negotiations required a freeze on settlement activity.

Palestinians also believe that a truly just solution requires a reversal of the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the establishment of a binational state in Palestine. This is based on their historical presence in the area and Israel's perceived usurpation of their national rights through military conquest and territorial expansion. Even if things cannot be restored to pre-1948, then at least pre-1967 should be used as a reference in negotiations for appreciating the extent of their losses and concessions to the Israelis over time.

So it is within this context, that Palestinians feel that Oslo endorsed Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza as legitimate starting points for negotiations and compromise. They believe this fails to take into account past events that have led to Israel's superior power and thus enhanced bargaining position. It is these feelings of unfairness, exploitation and weakness that have caused problems in establishing peace. What kind of peace is it if only the negotiators support the agreement, but the will of the people is contrary? As within the Palestinian population, extremist groups and militants will make their true feelings known the best way they know how...through terrorism.

What may be a problem is the possibility that a weakened and dispirited Palestinian people will accept a humiliating agreement that gives them far less than what was promised in Oslo. Such an agreement would almost definitely guarantee that the conflict will reignite in the future. Some people think that the only formula for a lasting peace is to give the Palestinian people the economic viability and territorial coherence enough to make their state a reality in a manner that embodies respect and reconciliation. But on the other hand, if the Palestinians are given at least some of what they want including statehood, without giving up anything, will the Israelis be happy? Will peace truly exist? Once given a little, could it not be foreseeable that the Palestinians will not stop fighting until they get everything?

Social-Psychological Dimensions of International Conflict

To help understand why conflicts become intractable and why achieving a negotiated settlement is so difficult, one must look at the motivations, perceptions and fears behind the parties. According to Herbert C. Kelman, there are four propositions about the nature of international conflict: First, international conflict is a process driven by collective needs and fears; second, international conflict is an intersocial process, not just an intergovernmental phenomenon; third, international conflict is a multifaceted process of mutual influence; and last, international conflict is an interactive process with an escalatory, self-perpetuating dynamic.

In an intergroup conflict, each side has fears about the denial of certain needs, including threats to security and identity. In a protracted conflict, like the one between Palestinians and Israelis, these fears turn the conflict into a struggle for their own group's survival. Even when it is territory and resources that are focused on during the conflict, it almost always reflects the underlying fear about security and identity. The Israelis do not want to give up too much because it threatens their existence, especially considering their adversarial Arab neighbours. The Palestinians, however, will not stop fighting unless they get what they rightfully believe is theirs...a Palestinian state.

Each parties' needs and fears create a resistance to change, even if both sides know it is in their best interests to end the conflict. Most parties are worried that once at the negotiating table, they will find themselves on a slippery slope, where concession after concession they will be left with an outcome that will compromise their very existence. To arrive at a resolution that will lead to a lasting, stable peace that both sides consider fair, the collective needs and fears of both parties must be addressed.

Conflicts, especially protracted ones, become an inescapable part of daily life for members of each community. This social element influences the political constraints under which governments operate. Leaders attempt to respond to public moods, shape public opinion and mobilize group loyalties which often feed the conflict and reduce possibilities for resolution. The element of give and take, which is usually an essential part of a successful negotiation, is likely to be inhibited if every step is monitored by interested pressure groups at home. The negotiator's awareness and pressure by the general public within each state and the international community will affect the outcome. For example, Arafat could not walk away from negotiations appearing weak because he conceded too much or did not push hard enough, for extremist Palestinian groups, like Hamas, and the general public, would lose faith in his abilities as their leader and representative. It is a hard balancing game between establishing a middle ground with the other party, satisfying what the negotiator thinks is a good deal in the circumstances, and pleasing the masses.

Conflict resolution in this sense therefore requires arrangements and accommodations that emerge out of the interactions between the two societies and to which the parties feel committed. If an agreement is not widely accepted within the two societies, a lasting, durable peace is unlikely to be achieved. What is required, according to Kelman, "is a gradual process conducive to change in structures and attitudes, to reconciliation, and to transformation of the relationship between the two societies - the development of a new relationship that recognizes the interdependence of the conflicting societies and is open to cooperative, functional arrangements between them."

The third proposition by Kelman, looks at the mutual influence used in international politics. This involves parties seeking to protect and promote its own interests by shaping the behaviour of others. Conflict occurs when the attainment of one's interests threaten or is perceived to threaten the interests of the other. In conflict resolution, the parties exercise influence to induce the other party to come to the table, to make concessions, to accept an agreement and to fulfill that agreement.

To make relations more amicable and less adversarial, negative inducements should be supplanted with positive incentives. These may take the form of economic benefits, sharing resources, integration in regional institutions and are most especially effective if they meet the other's interests, needs and fears. It is a way of responding to the others' concerns. Unfortunately, it is not a strategy normally employed since it requires parties to explore and carry out actions designed to benefit the adversary.

A key element in any influence strategy based on responsiveness is mutual reassurance. Many parties are afraid that going to negotiations and making concessions will jeopardize their security, identity and national existence. Mutual reassurance helps in overcoming these fears through acknowledgements, symbolic gestures or confidence-building measures. For example, a confidence-building measure within

the Palestinian-Israeli context was the closing of military installations and withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories. These were indicators to the Palestinians that the peace process may lead to an end of the occupation and negotiations were not threatening their national aspirations.

Acknowledgements refer "to a party's public acceptance or confirmation of the other party's view of status, its experience, its reality." They have a more powerful psychological impact in opening the way to negotiations and agreement, even though they are verbal statements that do not immediately translate into actions. This is because most protracted conflicts are marked by the systematic denial of the other's experience, authenticity and legitimacy. The denials create fear, insecurity and vulnerability because they undermine the foundations of one's nationhood. This was the case for Israelis and Palestinians, who until the mutual recognition in the September 1993 Oslo Accords had not acknowledged the legitimacy of the other, but which helped create negotiations.

The last proposition looks at conflicts as an interactive process, in which the parties change as they act and react in relation to each other. The interaction is governed by norms and images that create an escalatory, self-perpetuating dynamic. This can only be reversed through positive leadership, diplomacy, third-party intervention and other mechanisms that help resolve conflicts.

The essential feature of social interaction is taking account of the others' perspectives, feelings, intentions and expectations. This is severely impaired in intractable conflicts where the other party is seen as the enemy who wants to destroy them. Long-lasting conflicts entrench parties in their own perspectives on history, justice and images of the other. Interactions just tend to reinforce and perpetuate mirror images where the adversary is viewed as demonic, while you are perceived as virtuous. For example, the Palestinians see Israelis as the people who took away their homeland and forced their people to become refugees. Israelis see the Palestinians as terrorists and murderers, who at any chance will kill their people. Resolution efforts must try to reverse the self-perpetuating aspects to the conflict by focusing on interactions conducive to sharing perspectives, differentiating enemy images and developing a language of mutual reassurance.

Transcendent Identities & Negative Interdependence

After looking at the history of the conflict, it seems clear that to achieve a long-term resolution to the conflict requires the development of a transcendent identity for the two peoples, which will not threaten either group's own identity. However, the protracted conflict between the Palestinians and Israelis impedes the development of a transcendent identity by creating a negative interdependence whereby asserting one group's identity requires negating the identity of the other.

According to Herbert C. Kelman, "[t]he development of a larger, transcendent identity, encompassing both Israelis and Palestinians, is a necessary condition for effective cooperation, long-term peaceful coexistence, and ultimate reconciliation between the two peoples in the wake of a political solution to their conflict." However, given their history, to replace each individual identity with one over-arching identity would be seen and felt as threatening their peoples own survival and would be met with resistance. It would indeed be a huge task to get the two sides to submerge their identity into a larger one, particularly one that it would have to share with its perceived enemy.

The problem confronting this conflict is trying to develop a transcendent identity for two peoples living in two separate states but of which must share the same small land and its limited resources. To achieve this there must be a readiness to distinguish between land and state. But is this even a remote possibility? The essence of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is the claim by two national movements over the same land. It is the relationship to this land that is at the heart of the national identity of each group.

Although in recent negotiations there is a willingness towards territorial concessions in order to end the conflict, they are based on pragmatic considerations. Much of the population within the two groups are not prepared to give up their ideological claim to an exclusive relationship to the land.

These feelings of exclusiveness and national identity are intertwined in the concept of negative interdependence. The Palestinian and Israelis both hold the perception that the conflict is zero-sum. This applies not only to territory, but also to their national identity and existence. As Kelman states, each "perceives the very existence of the other—the other's status as a nation—to be a threat to its own existence and status as a nation. Each holds the view that only one can be a nation: Either we are a nation or they are. They can acquire national identity and rights only at the expense of our identity and rights." At the heart of this zero-sum view is the battle over the same land which both claim as their national homeland. Giving land to the other is equated with relinquishing its own claim to that land.

The issue of territorial claims is tied to the more fundamental concern of national survival. Both sides see their nations as highly vulnerable and fear that the motives of the other is to destroy them. This fear is a driving force behind each group's behaviour, motives, theories and actions. Because it is irrational yet so paramount in the conflict, it is never abandoned. Even in the peace negotiations, neither side is convinced that the other will not try to destroy them. So walls are built up even in the negotiations which inevitably prevents the establishment of peaceful coexistence.

The negative interdependence creates an "us against them" way of thinking. The negative relationship to the other party brings out negative elements in one's own identity. This includes the view of oneself as "weak and vulnerable" on one hand, and "violent and unjust" on the other. For example, Palestinians feel weak because of Israel's power derived through success at war, achievement of statehood, military strength and economic resources. In contrast, Israelis feel vulnerable because of their small population, especially after the Holocaust, and the hostile surroundings (the Arab states have denied the legitimacy of Israel as a nation, and the constant terrorist attacks remind them of this historic vulnerability).

In the other negative element of one's own identity - "violent and unjust" - are generally viewed by the rest of the world and cannot be entirely avoided. In the case of Israelis, it is the image of occupiers, oppressors, and racists responsible for expulsions and bombings. For the Palestinians, it is the image of violence prone, uncivilized fanatics who attack children and innocent civilians. These are not representations that either group wishes to portray and are inconsistent with how they view themselves. They present themselves as victims not victimizers, as decent not cruel, as resorting to violence only when there are no other options available. But are there not always other options, rather than violence?

It is this negative interdependence and way of thinking that has created the conditions for a protracted conflict and placed obstacles in the way of its resolution. The empathy required for negotiating a mutually accepted settlement are absent. The parties are impaired in their ability to take into account the other's perspective, which is an essential step in obtaining mutual accommodation. They are hampered in their pursuit for integrative, win-win solutions, which requires thinking of what may benefit the other. Rather, they interact in ways that create self-fulfilling prophecies and therefore leads to an escalation and continuation of the conflict.

To be able to agree on a compromise requires accepting the reality of one's own weaknesses. By acknowledging the others' rights means admitting that one may have treated the other unjustly in the past. Conflict resolution, if it is to lead to reconciliation, requires a revision of one's own identity, taking into account negative elements that in the past were chosen to be overlooked.

Unofficial Third Party Intervention

In the hopes of ending deep-rooted conflicts and changing the antagonistic relationship between the parties, a new way of approaching conflict resolution has been identified. What has traditionally been employed is the state-centred theory of conflict, including diplomacy, force, mediation and negotiation. What is so often witnessed, are leaders of nations amassing economic and military power to pursue interests in a zero-sum contest with other states. But conflict is a dynamic process, not a contest between static interests. Therefore, moving towards resolution should encompass a broad, continuing process, rather than a one-time event. Especially with protracted conflicts, there is so much to work through, develop and understand, that it seems almost inconceivable that a settlement can be ironed-out in a few negotiations. Deep-rooted human conflicts are not ready for formal mediation or negotiation because people do not negotiate about their identities, fears and historic grievances.

Despite a majority of work to settle a dispute will be done around the negotiating table - the official setting - it may not be an ideal setting for the negotiation of identity. Therefore, there was a move towards creating unofficial efforts to complement the official process at all stages, to help the parties move towards the negotiating table, negotiate productively and build a lasting peace after a formal agreement has been reached.

Unofficial third-party intervention, also referred to as "track two diplomacy", involves "unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversarial groups or nations with the goal of developing strategies, influencing public opinions, and organizing human and material resources in ways that might help resolve the conflict." Other objectives include "the reduction or resolution of conflict between groups or nations by improving communication, understanding, and relationships, and lowering tension, anger, fear, or misunderstanding by humanizing the 'face of the enemy' and giving people direct personal experience with one another."

An example of a third-party intervention is the interactive problem-solving workshops. This approach has been applied since the early 1970s for Palestinians and Israelis and was a stepping stone to the 1993 negotiated Oslo Accords. It is one of the earliest and most consistent enterprises of this type and has reached deeply into the political elites of both communities. Participants included parliamentarians, leading figures in political parties or movements, former military officers or government officials, journalists specializing in the Middle East and academic scholars who are analysts of the conflict.

The workshops bring together these politically influential individuals within the two societies for direct communication in a private, confidential setting. There is no audience, publicity or record kept. These features are designed to enable and encourage participants to engage in a communication that is not normally available to parties involved in an intense conflict relationship.

The workshops are structured to enable participants to interact on a basis of equality, to listen and speak freely, to examine the conflict analytically rather than polemically and to seek solutions in a non-adversarial, problem-solving framework. It is within this setting where parties can have an opportunity to explore each others' perspectives, gain an understanding of their concerns, needs, fears, priorities and constraints, and generate new ideas for solutions to the conflict that are mutually satisfying.

The ultimate goal is to transfer these new insights and ideas into the official political debate and decision-making processes of the two communities. It also feeds ideas back to the public, without which a change in the perception of the "enemy" will not allow for a durable, lasting peace. The information is fed into each community by way of participants' political discussions and political work, through their public communications in speeches, articles and media appearances, and through their private communications to political leaders and colleagues. By transmitting what was learned in the workshop it helps create a political atmosphere conducive to negotiations.

According to Kelman, the reason why this method was chosen to be used in this conflict was to find a way to create conditions for negotiations that would overcome the political and psychological obstacles that have stood in the way. He further stated that "the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been viewed by the parties as a zero-sum conflict around national identity and existence. In light of this analysis, the key requirements for movement toward resolution have been mutual reassurance and mutual recognition."

The workshops helped with the gradual evolution of a new relationship between the parties by encouraging the development of more differentiated images of the enemy, a de-escalatory language, a new political discourse attentive to the concerns of the other party, a working trust based on the belief that both parties are interested in a peace solution and a sense that a mutually satisfactory outcome is possible.

The process also helps surpass some of the obstacles prominent in protracted conflicts, like exploring the other side's identity, differentiating between positive and negative components of the other's ideology and symbols of legitimacy, and in the intersocietal context of creating an environment conducive to mutual peaceful resolution.

Although the workshops cannot create peace between Israel and the Palestinian people, it helps get the two sides talking with one another in an informal manner which opens the door to create a new understanding of the other. In the short run, the workshops helped keep alive a sense of possibility, a belief that a negotiated settlement and peace were within reach of the parties. In the long run, they helped start the process of transforming the relationship between former enemies.

Conclusion:

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is most certainly an intractable one, where despite efforts over the last decade, persists today with ever-increasing force and violence. It is clear that peace is not an easy goal to attain, however within this context the question becomes, is it possible at all?

The theories behind international, protracted conflicts are very much applicable to the Middle East. The needs and fears of both parties have imposed perceptual and cognitive constraints on processing new information about the other that is contrary to their firmly entrenched ideas. This has caused each party to underestimate the occurrence and possibility of change. The combination of demonic enemy images and virtuous self-images on both sides have led to the formation of mirror-images which have contributed to the escalatory dynamic of their conflict interaction and resistance to change. In addition, interaction is governed by a set of conflict norms that encourage each party to adopt a militant, uncompromising, threatening posture, which reinforces the enemy's hostile image and creates self-fulfilling prophecies. The conflict dynamics entrench the Israelis and Palestinians in their own perspectives of history and justice, and therefore makes it even more difficult to acknowledge the perspective of the other.

It is clear that efforts to resolve this conflict require a type of interaction that will help reverse the escalatory and self-perpetuating dynamics, through the sharing of perspectives, changing the enemy image, and through reassurance and mutual understanding of the other. The fear must turn into trust. Once this happens, positive steps can be made that will change threats into positive incentives and promises. A joint discovery could be made towards win-win solutions and an overall transformation of the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians.

Obviously the lack of widely held beliefs and perspectives concerning the conflict prevents much headway from being made. It is for this reason that dissemination of information is of the utmost

importance. Once there is strong and true support towards the peace process, it will be easier for the leaders to negotiate a lasting peace agreement. In 1993, when the Oslo Accords were signed, the leaders took a giant step forward without preparing their people for change. This would mean great difficulty in finalizing a peace agreement and resolving the very large and crucial issues that were left to be dealt with, because the leaders would run into great opposition by segments of each society.

The people of both sides have, for a long time, lived a certain way of life and in the process have developed ideas and beliefs, of which, at the core lies a strong hatred for the other. This cannot be transformed so quickly, just because their leaders have said so. For this reason, the attempts over the last decade to negotiate and come to resolutions, have failed.

The Oslo Accords were a very positive sign that at least the two leaders could talk, come to some understanding and eventually etch out an agreement. After years of fighting, it was indeed an achievement that would put hope into each individual that the violence and killing would stop. But with the murder of Rabin, the frequently changing Israeli leadership who have different ideas and goals for peace, and the various opinions as to what should or should not be conceded, left the fulfilment of Oslo and the possibility of peace on very shaky grounds.

So the question remains: what can be done to achieve peace? Interactive workshops, negotiations, and third party intervention have all been used to help both sides get past their differences and work through their issues and concerns. Yet, nothing has helped. Today, force, destruction and violence have continued to be employed by both sides. So although these theories of international and protracted conflicts exist, what do they mean in relation to the Middle East? Can a transcendent identity be developed? Can the hostile perceptions and negative interdependence be worked out, even when at the heart of the conflict lies fears about one's identity and survival?

In my opinion, at this time, they cannot. The Israeli and Palestinian people are not yet ready to come to terms with their irrational beliefs and open their minds to the other side's perspective. They have not worked through their hatred, anger and hostility that would allow them to feel compassion and understanding so to attain peace. Even if a peace agreement was reached tomorrow, I do not think it would last. Not enough people believe in it. They have been disillusioned because of the failures in the negotiations this past decade. If not enough people believe that peace could be a reality, then all it would take is one extremist on either side to wage violence, for retaliation to start up again and for peace to die. However, once enough people on both sides truly want peace, then rabble rousers become an aberration and could easily be silenced, and the leaders could negotiate a peace settlement. In my opinion, when a majority of popular support pushes for peace and has an open mind about the other side, then the hurdles that seemed so high to get over, will be easier to iron out. This would make living side by side, not such an abhorrent idea.

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