

Conceptual Foundations U6800

Question #2

The formation of a Palestinian state next to Israel is, by most accounts, a simple matter of time. In the interim it is useful to consider the features of a Palestinian state that would best promote peace. This paper evaluates four alternatives: a nuclear armed Palestine, an educational system teaching the common values of Israelis and Palestinians, a free-market economy, and a democratic government. Several of these features have pacifying effects, but a Palestinian democracy ultimately provides the best prospects for peace in the region.

Nuclear-Armed Palestine

Nuclear deterrence may have worked during the Cold War, but several features of the Israel-Palestine relationship suggest that a nuclear-armed Palestine would invite, not avert, conflict. Effective nuclear deterrence between the two countries hinges on three unlikely conditions. The first requires Israel to refrain from a preventive strike during Palestine's nuclear build-up. Israel, surrounded by hostile states, has a history of preventive action; in 1981, facing world condemnation, Israel bombed a nuclear reactor in Iraq. Deep-rooted mistrust between the two sides and Israeli fear that terrorists could acquire nuclear arms make preventive action a near certainty. Ä

The second requirement for successful deterrence is credible Palestinian second-strike capabilities (p.20 Waltz 2003.) Sagan identifies several cases in which "poorly designed organizational routines" in new nuclear states exposed second-strike vulnerabilities (p.173 Sagan 2003). Furthermore, since 1991 Israel has spent considerable resources acquiring anti-ballistic missile technology. If Israel were confident that it could destroy all of Palestine's nuclear capabilities in a first strike or

intercept Palestine's second-strike missiles, it would likely attempt a violent disarmament. Ä

A third requirement is that state leaders are rational and sensitive to the costs of a potential second-strike. After Iraq invaded Kuwait, Israeli Prime Minister Shamir threatened that any attackers of Israel would bring upon themselves "great disaster" (p.176 Sagan 2003). An undeterred Saddam Hussein fired Scuds at Israel anyway. Hussein may be a special case, but it is not inconceivable that a future head of state, especially one motivated by ideology, would take a similarly reckless gamble.¹

Promoting Common Values through Education

Constructivists correctly claim that recognition of common identities encourages harmony between citizens of different countries. Unfortunately Israelis and Palestinians do not share the values that are most important. Liberals contend that democracies and market economies can promote common identities, but in recent times cultural, ethnic, and religious identities have trumped political and economic ones. This last decade has witnessed a huge increase in what Samuel Huntington calls "civilization rallying," a phenomenon characterized by states with common cultural and religious identities uniting and polarizing against other civilizations (p.7 Huntington 1993). Ä

From a cultural, ethnic, and religious perspective, Israel sticks out like a sore thumb in the Middle East. Unlike Palestinians, most Israelis trace their histories to Europe, and Israelis are more secular and Western in their familial and civil lives. That said, certain overlapping values – such as common religious origin and a shared Semitic

heritage – do exist and should be taught in a reformed Palestinian educational system. (At the same time anti-Jewish teachings should be removed from Palestinian curricula.) This education reform might not have an immediate effect, but over a course of years it would likely bridge some of the identity gap.²

A Free-Market Economy

A Palestinian free-market economy has three potential pacifying effects, all of which ultimately offer uncertain prospects for peace. The first effect, contingent on Palestinian trade with Israel, is that economic interdependence would discourage fighting by raising the material costs of war. This theory depends on certain conditions – namely that the beneficiaries of trade have political influence and that leaders are highly sensitive to material losses. Unfortunately, the Middle East abounds in non-materialist causes. Richard Rosencrance, one of the theory’s most articulate advocates, concedes that it might not apply to “the Arabs and Israel” where “ideological conflicts...may still produce wars between protagonists even though the cost is high and benefit low” (p.33-34 Rosencrance 1986). Even worse, economic interdependence could ultimately contribute to regional *disharmony*. A commercial relationship perceived as asymmetric or exploitative could sow resentment among Palestinians and create class friction between the two societies.

The second effect of a free-market economy is that by opening domestic markets to the flow of foreign trade and investment, Palestine would expose itself to Western

¹ This analysis ignores the risk of an accidental war and the potential for criminal acquisition of weapons (Sagan 167).² These risks alone raise serious doubts about the wisdom of a nuclear-armed Palestine.

² The rise of a common enemy would also expedite the recognition of shared values.

social and cultural norms. On the one hand, this phenomenon could promote a closer identification with Israel, but if Palestinians resent the intrusion of Western values, it could easily generate the opposite result. The third effect is that a free-market economy could lead to faster economic growth, which in turn could generate a larger middle class, liberal values, and a stable, nonmilitant government. Alternatively, increased economic parity with Israel could pose a threat to Israel and buttress Palestinian military confidence.

Democratic Government

A democratic Palestinian government might lack stability in its transitional stages, but in the end it offers the best prospects for peace. The democratic peace – the notion that democratic governments are peaceful in relations with other democracies – has prompted a variety of explanations. Bruce Russett attributes the phenomenon to democratic norms and structural constraints. Leaders in democracies follow the “norms of conflict resolution that characterize their domestic political processes” while institutional checks and balances slow down or block authorizations of force (p.35, 40 Russett 1993).

Russett concedes, however, that democratic ideals take time to sink in; new democracies will not necessarily have experience in compromise and peaceful conflict resolution (p.37 Russett 1993). The Palestinian authority’s notorious deficiency in these areas raises concern that Arafat’s old habits may be hard to break for a new government. However, unlike citizens of many new democracies, Palestinians have been exposed to the concept of liberal democratic rule for decades. Bernard Lewis points out that many

Palestinians are “struck by the spectacle of Israeli democracy on television” and that “some students learn Hebrew just to understand what the Israeli politicians are screaming at each other” (p.1 Lewis 2002).

Zakaria, meanwhile, warns of the proliferation of “illiberal” democracies, noting that in “the Islamic world, democratization has led to an increasing role for theocratic politics” (p.5 Zakaria, 1997). In addition, a Palestinian democracy, by encouraging greater citizen participation in the state, could be more vulnerable to nationalism (p.4 Jervis 2002). These are legitimate dangers – and liberal institutions would ideally accompany elections – but these risks should not obscure the fact that democracy would also give voice to a vast number of Palestinians who are sick of conflict. Advocates of peace within Palestine are severely underrepresented in the current system. Furthermore, even if fundamentalist or imperialist leaders were elected, the structural checks and balances built into a democratic system would help to constrain their ability to act on belligerent impulses. A democratic Palestine would not guarantee lasting harmony between Israel and Palestine, but it would give peace the best chance.

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