

THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

Revised second edition, November 1993

PART II, LESSON FIVE: POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

HOW TO STUDY ETHNIC CONFLICTS

When social scientists study political conflicts (especially those rooted in ethnic differences) they ask certain questions:

First, what is the numerical ratio of the groups? Is it 88-12 (the White-Black ratio in the US) or 60-40 (the Protestant-Catholic ratio in Northern Ireland), or 15-85 (the White-Black ratio in South Africa)? Numbers are very important.

Second, is the minority dominant or subordinate? In South Africa the minority rules; in Northern Ireland the majority rules.

Third, does the minority group live in its own regions or are they spread around? A geographically-based group is a potential nation if it secedes. In Canada, most French speakers live in Quebec; in America, African-Americans are dispersed across the country. These differences affect how the group organizes and how effective it is.

Fourth, are group identities "hard" or "soft"? Some traits are not easy to change, like skin color or religion; others are less firm, such as difference between Northerners and Southerners in America.

THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN SITUATION

Inside of Israel Jews are a dominant majority of 82:18 percent. In Jerusalem (taking East and West Jerusalem together) Jews lead by a 53:47 ratio. When we add Israel and the Occupied Territories together, including Jerusalem, the proportion becomes 64:36. And since Palestinians have more children on average than Israelis, the ratio would approach 50:50 in time.

To a large extent Jews and Palestinians are geographically concentrated. Most Jews live in Israel and most Palestinians live in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. There are exceptions of course. Many Jews live in the new ring of suburbs around East Jerusalem and in the new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. And many Arabs live inside of Israel, particularly in Galilee, including Nazareth, and in the Negev Desert in the South.

FIVE POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

Let us look down the road 25 years. What could be the outcome of this conflict? Five possibilities come to mind. They are outlined below. Read these carefully and think of the costs and benefits of each. Which do you think is most likely (even if you would not want to see it)? Which outcome would you *like* to see? Which do you think most Israelis would like to see? Most Palestinians?

Outcome One: Status Quo

At the present time Israel controls all of the territory of Palestine, including the part inhabited mostly by Israelis and the parts inhabited mostly by Palestinians. There is considerable fighting in the Palestinian areas, where the Palestinians are resisting Israeli rule. Israel maintains a very high level of military activity in these occupied areas. The Palestinians seem determined to have their independence, and the Israelis do not seem able to defeat them. Israel has taken much Palestinian land for Jewish use and has placed Jewish settlers inside of the Palestinian territory. The US continues to provide considerable economic, military, and diplomatic support to Israel. The Palestinians are spread around the Arab world and seem unable to challenge Israel in any military sense. While the Arab states make speeches on behalf of the Palestinians they seem unwilling to use their military forces against Israel. For the time being Israel seems capable of defeating any combination of Arab armies.

The Option: The status quo means two things: a) Israel would continue to rule a large Palestinian minority in a non democratic way, and b) Israel would continue to control the land captured in 1967. A variant of the status quo might involve some form of autonomy in which Palestinians would have limited self-government under Israeli authority.

Many Israelis believe this is the most likely outcome. They say there is no reason to think that problems necessarily have solutions. The Irish have fought with the English for hundreds of years. These Israelis say they will simply have to deal with uprisings and revolts indefinitely. Perhaps tension, conflict, and social deterioration are natural in politics.

Outcome Two: Unification of Lands and Peoples

Would it be possible to unite Israelis and Palestinians into one country with equal rights for all and with a government that favored no religious or ethnic group? America has a government which in theory does not acknowledge religious or racial or ethnic differences. Canada has something similar, with special provisions for the French-speaking people of Quebec. Under this proposal Israel and the Occupied Territories would unite into one country. All Israelis and Palestinians now living on the land would have equal rights, and the government would no longer be "Jewish." Jews and Palestinians living overseas would either have the right to come to the new land or not, but on equal terms for both (probably with some understanding that any refugee or threatened person of Jewish or Palestinian ancestry would be admitted immediately). There might be regional government inside of the country, allowing for regions where Jews or Arabs would be dominant, thus letting the two groups govern their own local affairs (such as education). But the central government would be non-religious and would not differentiate between Jews and Arabs. This was the position of certain Jewish groups and individuals (including Judah Magnes and Martin Buber) in the pre-1948 period and was the PLO Secular State Proposal between 1974 and 1988. It is still the position of some Palestinians and some Israelis.

Outcome Three: Partition into Two States

In 1947 the UN proposed partitioning Palestine into two states, one Jewish, one Arab. The UN assumed that Jews and Palestinians could never live peacefully in a single country and that partition was the only realistic option. In 1988 the PLO endorsed this "two-state solution." Various Israeli parties have also

endorsed it, among them Meretz which joined the cabinet in 1992. This outcome would have several advantages: It would give both Israelis and Palestinians their own government and land; it would reduce tensions and allow money to be shifted to human development instead of military use; once there was separation, Israel and Palestine could cooperate economically; and the US would give aid to both sides to make sure the peace worked.

Outcome Four: Expulsion of the Palestinians

In the 1970's extremist American Rabbi Meir Kahane moved to Israel and formed a political party. He described Arabs as a cancer and vermin that had to be expelled. He said the presence of non-Jews in Israel was a corrupting force that compromised Jewish civilization. His position (not supported by historical evidence) was that Palestinians were not truly a people but were just Jordanians, Syrians, Egyptians, or Lebanese who had come across the border to work. They should go back to where they came from. Although Kahane was assassinated in 1989, today there are two Israeli parties that advocate expulsion of Palestinians. And some public opinion polls say almost 40% of the Israeli public would consider some form of expulsion.

While expulsion would be a radical outcome, there are reasons why it might happen. The Jewish settlements are in place in the Occupied Territories and have taken much of the Palestinian land. They could be used as assault points on the Palestinian population. Also, large numbers of Jews might come from Russia, perhaps a million or more. They could be used to push out the Palestinians. Other efforts to work out a solution might fail. Also if America and other big countries were involved in a war somewhere else (perhaps in Asia or Latin America) expulsion might occur without anyone being able to stop it. Israel's leaders might decide that the threat of an uprising is so great that the dangers of expulsion are less than the dangers of not expelling. Also, some Israelis favor an effort to get Palestinians to leave through economic pressure: denying them jobs or a way to make a living. This is dramatically reducing the ancient Palestinian Christian population, descendants of the people converted to Christianity by the apostles. In the past twenty years the percentage of the Palestinian population that is Christian has fallen from 15% to 3% of the total. If half the Palestinians in the West Bank left and if Gaza were given to Egypt and if 500,000 Russian Jews came to Israel, then the remaining Palestinians would be a much smaller minority who might be kept under control. Israel might then annex the Occupied Territories.

Outcome Five: Elimination of Israel

Radical Palestinians (such as those in HAMAS) and even some Arabs who are not Palestinian feel that Israel has treated its subjects and its neighbors badly and cannot be trusted. They reject the idea of a Jewish state in the midst of the Arab and Muslim world as something that should not be allowed. These radicals will resist any settlement with Israel. At the present time, they are not in power, but the Arab world stretches from Mauritania to Iran and contains 170 million people. In contrast there are less than four million Israelis. So far, there is only one Arab state (Egypt) that has a peace treaty with Israel. Since 1948 Israel has had wars with all of its neighbors, sometimes with the Arab states attacking first. If at some time in the future, radical governments come to power in Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia and other countries, the situation could become different from today. If the US were to be involved in a war elsewhere, and if the Arab states were to form a common military alliance, they might defeat and conquer Israel. Many Jews could be forced to flee, with the remainder living under Palestinian rule.

THE ISRAELI-PLO AGREEMENT

In September, 1993 Israeli leader Rabin and Palestinian leader Arafat met at the White House and shook hands on a historic agreement to end the conflict between their two peoples.

Millions saw it as a breakthrough that would end a hundred-year war between Jews and Palestinians. Other saw it as a flawed document that would solve nothing.

What do you think? Look at the following summary. Is it close to one of the five outcomes above? Will it solve the conflict? Will it lead to a Palestinian state? Your teacher may want you to read the original document.

PALESTINE GOVERNMENT: There will be a Palestinian government with a base in Gaza and Jericho, but with authority over the whole of the occupied territories (with some exceptions). The size of the territory controlled by the Palestinians will increase over time.

PALESTINE COUNCIL: There will be an elected council chosen in a free election monitored by international observers. The Document says "In order that the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip may govern themselves according to democratic principles, direct, free and general political elections will be held for the Council under agreed supervision and international observation, while the Palestinian police will ensure public order."

WHO CAN VOTE? All eligible Palestinians, including those who live in East Jerusalem.

LIMITS ON COUNCIL AUTHORITY: The council will have authority over all Palestinians in the Occupied Territories but will be temporarily limited in other areas: "Jurisdiction of the Council will cover West Bank and Gaza Strip territory, except for issues that will be negotiated in the permanent status negotiations: Jerusalem, settlements, military locations, and Israelis."

ISRAELI WITHDRAWAL: Israeli troops will withdraw from populated areas. Foreign forces will be brought in for a transition period. There will be no Israeli soldiers around during voting.

PALESTINIAN POLICE: There will be "a strong police force." (Why do you think they put in the word "strong"?)

TRANSITION PERIOD: There will be five years to work out final arrangements through negotiations. During this time there will be discussions on "Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbors, and other issues of common interest."

NEGOTIATIONS BASED ON RESOLUTIONS 242 AND 338: The final outcome "will lead to the implementation of Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338." These proclaim it inadmissible to acquire territory by force and call for Israel's withdrawal. (This is a good time to review those resolutions, especially 242.)

REFUGEES: The document makes little provision for refugees except to say that their situation will be discussed in the future. The refugees in Lebanon and Jordan and elsewhere felt betrayed.

JERUSALEM: There will be negotiation over Jerusalem. Arafat has said the Palestine government will soon have its capital there. When asked about this, Rabin said if Arafat wanted Jerusalem he could "forget it." Asked about Rabin's comment, Arafat said "He is talking of Jewish Jerusalem, not Arab Jerusalem."

QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES FOR LESSON FIVE

1. Do you understand the following words and why they are significant: dominant, subordinate, hard and soft identity, ratio, monotheistic, patriarch, conversion, status quo, mobilization, reserve duty, extremist, inevitable, option, vermin, expel, coup.
2. The author outlines five scenarios or outcomes. Has he missed any possibilities?
3. Talk to friends or neighbors who are Jewish or Arab and ask them what they think. Report back to the class.
4. If you have Jewish or Arab organizations in your town, ask to interview one of their officials. Try to find out what they would like to see as an outcome. (You might find that different organizations on a given side have different perspectives).
5. It might be interesting to invite Jewish and Arabic leaders to visit your class to discuss their positions. If you do this be sure to invite people from both sides.
6. Write to Israeli and Palestinian officials at the United Nations and ask them what their position is on negotiations and what outcome they would like to see.
7. Thought Question: The US is a major world power. We give more than \$3.5 billion dollars a year to Israel in economic and military aid, plus additional subsidized loans. (The grand total in 1993 is estimated at \$6.0 billion.) Should we use our influence to promote one of these outcomes? Which one?
8. Essay (unit evaluation). Choose one of the five options (or your own solution) and explain why you believe it is the best solution. Explain your position. Will your solution need to be enforced? If so, by whom? Who will pay for the enforcement? Is it fair for everyone, or will it provide the seeds for new problems?
9. Review the earlier discussion about the different parts of Jerusalem. Is there any way both Jews and Arabs could have their capital in Jerusalem? Do you think sharing or dividing would work? If so, what arrangement?
10. Do you see any section of the document that supports Rabin's position? Arafat's position?

This is the end of Part II.

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