

## Pipes of Peace? Smoking is Bad for You...

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Anecdote one: Juliano Mer-Chamis. An Israeli-Palestinian-Judeo-Christian-communist-liberal-actor-activist-IDF soldier was recently assassinated in Jenin, by those who considered him a menace to (conservative Islamic) society. Zaccharia Zbeidi, his partner in running the Jenin Theatre of Freedom, a former Fatah fighter and local leader, mourned him by asserting those who shot Juliano Mer are enemies of the Palestinians...

Anecdote two: Gilad Shalit. An IDF soldier-hostage-prisoner of war-criminal, is being imprisoned over 5 years now by Hamas. No sign of life. No news. No visits. Not even by the Red Cross. Not even once. Thousands of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli facilities. Regular visits, education, medical treatment. In some prisons they practically run the place. In others they devise their next terrorist network, conduct organized training. There was a public debate within Israeli policy-makers whether to grant them the same privileges Shalit enjoys... it was denied. Originally Shalit was captured by an illegitimate political entity. Is Hamas post reconciliation with Fatah legitimate? And if so, where are his duties?!

Strategy is first and foremost a philosophy, or theory about the world. Shimon Naveh suggests, when reality changes, that is, when the framework within which we perceive the world becomes incoherent with our observations, our theory is no longer relevant and we must come up with a new one.

What is the theory or conceptual framework within which the Israeli-Arab (Palestinian) peace process has been conducted? Is it still relevant, or is it hindering any potential for a reconciliation in this region?! –

**Peace is a modern invention**, claims Michael Howard. Yet this conflict runs back 1500 years;

**Peace is signed between nations**, it is a crucial element of the UN charter post two world wars. Yet, peace agreements in the Middle East are based on personalities. What happens when they are no longer with us? Or when their impact is dissolved? (Sa'adat, M'barac, J'maiel, Arafat, Rabin, Sharon – are but a few examples);

**Peace is made between democracies.** Israel is a democracy, it is a Westernized creation. What is the Palestinian Authority? What will it become post Fayyad and post reconciliation with Hamas? What are Arab Nations evolving to in this midst of revolutions?;

**The current strategy-theory for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority is founded on principles set in the early 70s.** Yet the world has not stood still... In fact, we are in the midst of major Global, regional and internal transitions, which merit critical review of these principles:

1. **To begin with, we are witnessing the rise of an alternative normative system** led by Russia, China and Brazil (and followed by their protégées), questioning the current Western-based UN model for international relations. In fact, the Western world is

already in a defensive posture, a ruling minority in itself that battles its decline. The West is exercising force, not persuasion. Israel has chosen sides. Whose team are the Palestinians on?

2. **The nature of Arab countries is evolving**, but to what direction is yet to be determined. We are witnessing a blurring of traditional dichotomies such as Sunni/ Shi'a, religious/ secular, liberal/ autocratic. Friends become foes; enemies become political partners. But one thing is common to all – the contempt for the legacy of failing-falling rulers, even if it is against its interests. It is no wonder then, new Egypt is contemplating abolishing the peace with Israel. Once more, whose game will the Palestinians play?
3. **The nature of Israeli society is also evolving** toward increased heterogeneity, in the roaring absence of structuring government and civilian institutions. Israel is under grave internal pressures that affect its outer posture as well. There are those who argue, Israel's major challenges are internal, not external: an immigrant society in a hostile environment struggles with scarce natural resources, decreased participation in civil society and the labor force, while gaps are mounting between rich and poor, secular and religious, liberals and zealots. These undercurrents characterize both Zionist and non-Zionists sub-societies, and if it wasn't for the external Palestinian dimension that deepens the divide, new coalitions may have been erected between elements in Israeli and Arab communities.

**Peace is considered a foreign affair, yet the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has major implications internally**, for the relationships between these communities within Israel. The fundamental logic of the process is of separation, and of numbers (demography). However, Israelis and Palestinians are Janus faced ecologically, economically, politically. There are those who argue, one cannot understand the evolution of Palestinian identity separate from the Zionist one. None of these considerations has found a way into the negotiation tables.

**Peace is structured by military thinking.** "Pipes of Peace" entails, soldiers are those who fight, but also sign peace agreements. Yet issues at hand are not solely in the realm of security; they are first and foremost normative. Israel did not witness such conflict with Egypt or with Jordan. But this is what defines the collision between Israel and the Palestinians. We need philosophers, and people of faith, and many more civilians, who can come up with a concept of living that is able to take the discussion beyond security agreements.

**We want Peace to be lasting, perfected. We want to impose this idealistic model on reality, but reality keeps betraying it.** We want a final agreement, but none of the sides is ready for it. We keep bashing interim solutions, instead of considering them a series of experimentations in the path for a peaceful resolution.

**In a region that has yet to decide what it is culturally, politically, religiously, ecologically – we want definitive answers.** We either rush processes that require more time to mature, or attribute too much to what already is. The PA is in its teenage phase; Israel has just celebrated its 63th birthday. In States' time, we are at the very beginning – the Palestinians have a nation to build, one that is self-sustained. The Israelis have to find a way to translate 3,000 years of evolution onto modern institutions that can successfully harmonize its internal tensions.

**So is there an alternative to that hegemonic, middle-aged framework** we are failing time after time to instrument? Here are but three avenues that could be exploited towards generation of positive potential to the peace process –

- 1) Build trust prior to commitment: develop a bottom-up, civilian-led approach that ensures sustained potential for living for both communities, who happen to share one ecology and serious existential challenges. Initiate projects that advance solutions for water, energy, agriculture, communications and transportation. Improve the lives of civilians despite political disagreements. Ensure that when the political agreement comes about, we can still live here... such approach may also call for reexamination of the current core issue of negotiations which deal with permanent solutions, but fail to address current concerns.
- 2) Explore alternative political arrangements to the 2-state solution. It is widely accepted that Judea and Samaria (the 'West Bank') and Gaza strip are habitats to two distinctive societies that have very little in common politically, culturally and socially. Hamas and Fatah exercise distinctly different vision for a future Palestinian State, let alone relations with Israel. Yet, the current peace process insists on artificially bringing them together. The PLO has not been a legitimate representative of the Palestinians long ago. But since the West seeks a Palestinian partner in its image, we give the PLO false power, and then become surprised its leaders cannot deliver. Suppose a 3 state-solution is debated for example – A Israeli State, a Gaza State and a 'West Bank' State – separate agreements, differing in quality, intensity and cooperation, could have already taken place (we are already witnessing Hamas and New Egypt expanding cooperation). The Palestinians in Gaza could have enjoyed greater freedom and independence; the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria may have developed unique political arrangements with the Palestinian majority in the Kingdom of Jordan. Later on, both Palestinian states could have united in a confederative manner. Israeli Palestinians may also find better ways to express their desires under such conditions.
- 3) Promote a regional approach. The debate between minimizers and maximizers of the scope of the conflict has not been won yet. Some argue it is a local problem involving Israelis and Palestinians; Some suggest it is a Israeli-Arab or a Jewish-Moslem problem; Some insist, it is a clash between civilizations in which Israel takes the heat for the entire Western world. Yet, although Israel is solely responsible in its end, the PA represents the Arab world. Yet, the Arab world has other interests in mind that may hinder local compromises. At the same time, the refugee problem has taken a toll from all neighboring countries, hosting large Palestinian populations in transition. The only way to settle these issues is through a regional commitment including Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. It is also inconceivable that the status of the Holy Basin shall be determined solely by the Palestinians, who consistently persecute Christian Arabs off their territories on the one hand, and refuse to accept its Jewish legacy... There are many stakeholders in this conflict, and all of them have to either invest or stop speculating.