

Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Resolution

Based on Mutual Recognition of National Aspirations

By Prof. Ada Aharoni

*Presented at a global Think Tank workshop
on the Palestinian refugee issue, February 2014.*

General view concerning the conflict

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has taken various forms during the last decades; eruptions of armed struggle have alternated with periods of negotiations, and with periods of preparation for further confrontations. We are still going through a period of violence that has caused tremendous suffering to both sides and that can turn into still greater and more dangerous conflagrations. Every effort that may contribute to reestablishment of rest and promotion of peace is of great importance.

Unprejudiced scrutiny of the conflict and of the current situation shows that peace can only be attained if both sides have the possibility to achieve their right of living with security in a nation of their own. The Israeli authorities must accept the legitimacy of a Palestinian State, and the Palestinian authorities must accept the legitimacy of the Israeli State. From the Israeli side, this implies ending settlements and any other imposed presence in Palestinian territories. From the Palestinian side, this implies accepting that the refugees interested in living in a Palestinian nation should be settled in the Palestinian State to be created, and renounce the aspirations to turn Israel into a Palestinian State with a Jewish minority.

The States of Israel and Palestine will be interested to collaborate in economic and other fields for the benefit of both sides.

Discussion of points that are often the subject of controversy

1. Can two different national entities claim the same territory?

At the basis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the fact that both sides have claims on the same territory and both believe that their claim has a sound historical and ethical basis.

Historical circumstances have led to this situation. It is known that human history has been widely shaped by conquests; in most instances conquests have caused the defeated population to disappear from the course of history as a recognizable entity following mixing with the victorious population or annihilation, and the conquered territory has become an undisputed property of the conquerors with nobody left to claim it back. Few exceptions to this rule are known, the destruction of the ancient Judean kingdom two millenniums ago has not been accompanied by the disappearance of the Jewish people. This people have survived during a remarkably long time at the precarious Diaspora conditions, living out of a national territory while preserving distinguishable national characteristics. Concrete steps for the rebuilding of a Jewish State were taken since the beginning of the twentieth century. The Holocaust that occurred during the Second World War, and the fact that the survivors in Europe had turned into displaced persons induced the international community to recognize the national rights of the Jewish people and to advocate the formation of a Jewish State the legitimate State of Israel.

An important but often unacknowledged assistance to the creation of a Jewish State was provided by the Arab countries. Most of the Jewish populations that lived in these countries for thousands of years, were expelled and this significantly increased the formation of the Jewish State. More than half of the Jewish population of Israel today consists of Jews from Arab countries and their descendants.

The territory that had been the homeland of the Jewish people, since the time of the Bible, has since been the scene of various migrations and the subject of various conquests. The Palestinian people see it as their homeland and see themselves at the same time as a part of the Arab world.

2. Two States solution and one State solution

There are now two distinct entities: (a) The state of Israel (80% Israeli citizens of Jewish nationality and 20% Israeli citizens of Palestinian nationality), with a democratically elected government. (b) The Palestinian autonomy with a Palestinian population under the administration of a Palestinian authority and Israeli representatives.

It also contains Israeli settlements that disregard totally the Palestinian authority. This situation is considered by both sides as transitional.

A workable solution that can satisfy both sides is the Two States solution. A Palestinian State should be created, governed by a Palestinian government without any Israel interference. Agreed borders between Palestine and Israel are to be defined; Jewish settlements in Palestinian territory are to be dismantled, except for those that can be incorporated into the Israeli territory on the basis of agreed definition of the borders.

Solutions based on a single state have been advocated, the proponents of these solutions generally deny any right of the other side. There are factions in Israel that disregard any Palestinian national rights, they rely on the Israeli might and advocate a single State solution with exclusive rights to the Jewish population. There are similarly Palestinian factions that imagine that the State of Israel can be eradicated and all the territory would become a Palestinian State. During the years 1950s and 1960s the Palestinian institutions disregarding any Israeli national rights and relying on the might of the Arab countries, advocated a single State which they would run with the prerogative to decide which Jews are to be admitted in that state. The idea of a solution based on a single State emerges from time to time in the ideology of groups on both sides that disregard reality.

It has to be noted that a Two States solution does not imply disconnection between the Israeli and the Palestinian States. There are issues which they cannot manage separately such as care of water resources, environment, tourism etc. and in many other issues it is in their best interest to collaborate closely. Nevertheless it is important for the two sides to arrive to common decisions in the matters of interest to both sides without any feeling of coercion.

3. Palestinian Refugees Problem

Any solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must comprise a solution of the refugees problem.

From an economic point of view it is noted that the expenses for settling the Palestinian refugees problem are likely to be small in comparison with the savings on armaments that both sides involved

in the conflict can make. Moreover the economic advantages resulting from the settlement are likely to compensate for its costs.

The Palestinian State that will be created should be given the support needed in order to resettle the refugees that desire to live a Palestinian national life. Settlement in the State of Israel has to be very limited. Processes that take place in a society are rarely reversible processes; repair of wrongs and compensation on suffering cannot usually be accomplished by a return to the previous situation, but by the creation of a new situation that is beneficial and appropriate to the new conditions. The Palestinian refugee that longs for the way of life he had at the place that has become part of Israel will not find it if he "returns", he will find himself in a place which is foreign to him.

The "right of return" is a convenient slogan used by Palestinian politicians who wish to destroy the particular character of Israel and turn into a second Palestinian State. This objective is morally wrong and practically unattainable.

It is also important to investigate and clear the moral aspects of the events that have led to the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem, and the responsibilities of the Israeli and of the Palestinian leaders of that time. The uprooting and expulsion of the Jews from the Arab countries and the destruction of their communities that took place at the same period should also to be considered.

4. Ending the Occupation of Palestinian Territory

The implementation of the two States solution obviously involves ending of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

One hears eventually claims that "the end of the occupation" should be independent of an agreement on the two States solution and should precede negotiations. This view is based on a superficial analogy between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and historical conflicts such as the France-Algeria or the USA-Vietnam conflicts in which ending the occupation was a precondition to any solution. It is noted that in these cases the definition of the borders of the occupied territory was totally unrelated to the definition of the borders of the occupying power, and the occupied power could not present any security threat to the occupying power after it had ended the occupation; in such cases the decision to end the occupation can be a unilateral decision of the occupying power.

These conditions do not apply to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Israel cannot end the occupation of Palestine without a mutual agreement concerning the borders of Palestine because this also means an agreement concerning the borders of Israel. Likewise Israel cannot end the occupation of Palestine without an agreement concerning its own security because Palestine has the capability of threatening it. A solution of the conflict based on the two States solution has to be reached on the basis of negotiations and the end of the occupation can only be a part of this solution.

Both sides, the Israeli and the Palestinian, should be tolerant and give a chance to the US Secretary of State Kerry, who has already come to Israel and Palestine 12 times to help solve the conflict and to transform both nations into good neighbors that can achieve reconciliation and peace. It is certainly in the interest of both nations.

Copyright (c) Prof. Ada Aharoni

IFLAC Founding President

<http://www.iflac.wordpress.com> – <http://www.iflac.com/ada/>