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Solving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Since the Six-Day War in 1967, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has intensified because of the measures taken to control the Palestinian population in the occupied territories. The conflict is a regional clash that involves rights to religion, land, and political representation. It is a struggle that has strongly favored the Israelis and in order for the Palestinians to achieve equality and recognition they need to make a series of changes in how they handle the conflict. During the Six-Day War the Israeli Army took control of territory that was not originally given to them by the UN agreement that established Israel’s borders. This land is called the Occupied Territory (OT) and it includes the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. There are three purposes of this essay. The first purpose is to prove that the Israeli government has implemented tactics of separation and colonization to establish unjust control in the Occupied Territory. The second is to identify and examine three different solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. After the solutions are identified, the best possible solution of the three will be determined. Finally, the last purpose of this paper is to explain how the Palestinians should go about changing their situation and achieving the best possible solution aforementioned.

The Problem

Many people around the world are not aware of the amount of human rights violations that occur against the Palestinians. The Israeli government established separation policies in the OT to control the Palestinians via boundary changes, land seizures, restrictions on development, and fragmentation of society. These policies separated the Palestinians from not only the rights to their land, but also from the political and economic spheres in Israel. Israeli expansion excluded the Palestinians politically and economically in the OT. The original intention for the occupied territories was to return them “in exchange for peace and recognition”. However, the choice of what to do with the OT, gave Israeli officials the opportunity to expand their territory (Migdal, 2000). The expansion of Israel’s territories caused social crisis because it called for a redefining of what society should be. Thus the state and society excluded the many Palestinians living in the territories. They were denied citizenship and had no voice in society or politics. Economically, Israeli war policy led to a high number of low-wage Palestinian workers in the occupied territories. This perpetuated the economic misfortunes of the Palestinians. Their exclusion from the skilled labor market signified a social gap that visibly separated them from the Israeli population.

Furthermore, Israel’s policies before the second intifada (second uprising) gave the “statist illusion” of a temporary presence in the OT, but were speciously benevolent. The government used both colonization principles and separation principles. The colonization principles are a means of extracting resources from an area while managing the population present in the territory. On the other hand, the separation principles are a means of extracting resources from an area without regards to the present population (Gordon, 2008). An example of the former principle is the Israeli policies and agencies that helped Palestinians build and run universities. Unfortunately, the information going into and coming out of these universities was highly regulated. They monitored the textbooks, what was taught, and how it was taught. By doing this they attempted to disassociate the Palestinian population from their sense of heritage or shared history. In addition, when Palestinians left the universities they could not actually use the knowledge they received. An example of the latter separation principles is the various methods of control the Israeli government used to fragment Palestinian society. Fragmentation policy is exemplified by the use of permits. During the “permit regime” Palestinians had to have and carry permits to work, reside, and publish in the OT. These permits allowed the General Security Services of the Israeli government to closely monitor and keep track of Palestinians (Gordon, 2008). These policies restricted movement and development. Underneath their specious tactics, the Israeli government was implementing policies that attempted to normalize and legitimize the occupation in order to push for a permanent presence in the OT.

These tactics of colonization and separation give rise to theories of a possible Apartheid in Israel-Palestine. Apartheid is defined as a division of the population based on ethnic or racial characteristics that involves the creation of special reserves or the confiscation of land (Yiftachel, 2009). Using the term Apartheid is controversial because the separation of Israeli and Palestinian population is covert and not as blatant as it was in South Africa. The separation of the Palestinian people deserves its own title: “hafrada”, which is the Hebrew word for separation (Peteet, 2009). With “hafrada” in mind, the plight of the Palestinians is without a doubt an issue worth fighting for and defending. The Israeli government cannot claim to be democratic if their laws do not apply to a large portion of their population and if this part of the population does not have equal representation in the government.

What to Do...

There are three main solutions that political scientists have looked at in order to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The first two are one-state solutions and the last is a two-state solution. In the first one-state solution, the Israeli government continues to push the Palestinians off their land. Palestinians would become refugees in the surrounding Arab countries, mostly in Jordan. In the second one-state solution, Palestinians and Israelis share the government. Palestinians are equally represented in a justly democratic system with checks and balances. The last, two-state solution consists of Israelis and Palestinians separating into two separate nations and redrawing borders.

The most plausible solution of the three is the latter one-state solution in which the Palestinians and the Israelis share power. Continuing to push the Palestinians off their land would be seen as a huge violation of human rights, and the United States would not be able to support Israel. In all likelihood, creating another state would create more problems than it would solve. Redrawing borders would create a power struggle and uproot or displace thousands of people. Therefore, a one-state solution in which the Palestinians and Israelis share the government seems to be the solution that is most likely to occur. Of course, this requires the Palestinians to make some great changes in their freedom strategies.

...And How to Do It

Two factors are essential for the Palestinians to have in order to change their circumstances. Firstly, they need a strong sense of nationalism. Secondly, they need extraordinary leadership to evoke that nationalism. This battle is about changing hearts and minds and without the proper leadership the Palestinians are not likely to achieve their goals. This leadership is far different authority and it is crucial because good leaders are inspirational, open minded, visionary, and people oriented rather than demanding, close minded, goal seeking, and task oriented (Burke, 2008). Three moments are necessary in order to use nationalism to combat Israeli colonialism and “hafrada”: the Moment of Departure, the Moment of Maneuver, and the Moment of Arrival (Chattterjee, 1986). These moments require strong leaders to guide the Palestinians. These leaders must be change initiators, change facilitators, and change implementers, respectively.

The Moment of Departure is the point where a sense of nationalism is realized; common ground and shared experiences are both recognized and celebrated. In the case of the Palestinians, the Israeli government implemented policies that unintentionally created common ground and shared experiences. Policies such as regulating the education system were meant to separate and fragment the population. However, the Palestinian population gained solidarity through the shared experience of Israeli repression. For example, because they could not learn about their shared history in school, students made extra efforts to learn their history outside of school.

The Moment of Departure is already on its way in Israel-Palestine and a change initiator will help this moment to fully reach its potential in the nationalist movement. The change initiator that is needed for this moment does not necessarily have to be one leader. The leader or leaders must work behind a socially and ethnically cohesive idea. This idea can be in the form of a song, a poem, a slogan, or other forms of media that can be spread rapidly through the masses. The leaders must target the hearts and emotions of the people, but still believe what they are saying. The purpose of the Moment of Departure is to establish a base for the next moment. The first moment begins the unification process and establishes nationalism as a feasible and effective achievement. Charisma is not completely needed until the Moment of Maneuver but it is helpful to have.

There are possible problems with the launching of this first moment. For example, the Palestinian population could put too much emphasis in their support of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA). The population is already easily divided because there is an elite group within the Palestinian society. This elite group mostly makes up the PA and is trying to lead an effective social uprising. However, an elitist leader cannot connect with the masses. He does not spread a message that is universally binding because he does not fully understand his own people. On the other hand, elites do have access to greater resources and are generally more intelligent than their constituencies (Chatterjee, 1986). With that in mind, the leader of the next moment must balance being well-educated with also being humble and down-to-earth.

The Moment of Maneuver is where the visible struggle begins. The leader of this moment must not be involved in the politics of the Palestinian effort. The Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Liberation Organization have too many internal problems and too much corruption within them. The Palestinian masses will not readily trust either of these organizations or their leaders. During this moment, the “passive revolution” spreads to the Palestinian masses and they become a force that the Israelis can no longer ignore. It is up to the leader of this moment to completely understand the Israeli government. In order to challenge an enemy you must know their motives and how they will react to the obstacles you present (Alinsky, 2009). On the same token, this leader must completely understand his people and know their strengths and weaknesses. In order to change minds, the leader must use resonance (appeals to emotions), resistances (knows the possible losses and pitfalls), and redescriptions (spreads message in different ways) (Gardner, 2006). His charisma and oratory skills must be notable because he needs to convince the Palestinians that non-violence will indeed help their cause.

In the past, the Palestinians have staged two intifadas, or uprisings, that have both failed. A main reason behind the failure of those uprisings is because they were violent revolts. Violence requires justification that is generally immoral. Nonviolence is crucial because it is rooted in universal morals and values (Moyer, 2001). Humanitarian rights, justice, and equality are some of the universal values that non-violence defends. For the Palestinians, peaceful protests and international recognition should be the two main methods of non-violence. Civil disobedience is the best way to grab global attention because it has such a long and successful history in the modern world. If the Palestinians receive more global attention, their cause is far more likely gain support. Non-violence has to be effectively spread by a leader who practices what he preaches. The Palestinians will not be able to follow a hypocritical leader. For example, an effective Muslim leader does not pray so that his followers believe that he is faithful. He prays because his faith is actually strong.

The possible obstacles that could arise from the second moment are countless. One obstacle could be religion which plays a big part in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The ideals that guide the Moment of Maneuver are supposed to transcend religious boundaries and societal norms. However, it will be very difficult to convince the Palestinian masses that there are ideals, morals, and values beyond their religious beliefs. This will be especially difficult because the Palestinians are generally homogenous in terms religion, as are the Israelis. Another problem can arise if non-violence does not seem to be yielding short-term results. Angered and frustrated followers will take it upon themselves to make results. Often they will resort to violence, diminishing the “passive revolution”.

The Moment of Arrival is the final step that will solidify the Palestinian fight. The leader of this moment has the most important job of the three. It is up to this leader to continue the legacy of the previous leaders. Like Nelson Mandela in South Africa, it is up to this leader to join and support the people that oppressed him for so many years. After the Palestinians achieve the goal of having a joint-government, they must work together with the Israelis that they have just fought. This will be incredibly difficult because the Palestinian struggle is not only political, but also social and ethnic. The leader must use reason and resources and rewards in order to convince both the world and the state that the Palestinian cause was effective (Gardner, 2006). This is a moment that really has no end. It is an ongoing struggle that will require immense cooperation from both ends.

Sustainment and passing on the legacy of the “passive revolution” is the most challenging barrier that the leader of the last moment must overcome. This leader has to help form a new government and make sure that it is reaffirming and establishing the rights for which the Palestinians fought. His job entails showing the rest of the world that the joint government is capable of having external and internal efficacy. The even harder battle is showing the Palestinian people that their struggle was not in vain and that positive change will happen for them. This leader must also pass on the legacy of the “passive revolution” by teaching the new shared history of the Palestinians and Israelis to the next generations.

An Ongoing Struggle

Claiming that all these changes could “solve” the Israel-Palestine conflict is unfortunately, an overstatement. Truthfully, it would take a lot more than just one leader continuing the legacy. As mentioned before, these kinds of conflicts require a massive change in hearts and minds. It is nearly impossible to win everyone over. Even if the Palestinian leaders were to implement these changes and apply the three “moments”, they would still have an immense amount of work to still do. Because the Middle Eastern region is as volatile as it is, redrawing borders and creating new governments and alliances would involve more than just the Israelis and the Palestinians. For example, if the Israelis and Palestinians were to share power in a joint government, other Arab nations may disapprove and withdraw their support for the Palestinians. A joint state would require many years to establish internal and external legitimacy and recognition. However, the prospects do improve if the Palestinians unite at the right time and under the right leadership. The multitudes of factors that are involved in creating this type of change make it difficult to produce, but it is possible for the Palestinians.

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