In Practice

Contributions of an Unofficial Conflict Resolution Effort to the Israeli-Palestinian Breakthrough

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Since the widely publicized signing of the accord between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in September of 1993, there has been general recognition of the role that unofficial efforts have played — directly or indirectly — in making this agreement possible.

The Oslo, Norway talks themselves, from which this accord emerged, cannot be characterized as an instance of "unofficial" or "track two" diplomacy. Rather, the Oslo talks were a form of back-channel negotiations, which contained a mixture of official and unofficial — track one and track two — elements. The Oslo negotiations demonstrated dramatically, however, that private, unofficial individuals and settings can play a significant role in advancing a negotiating process that had reached an impasse at the official level. The heightened awareness of the potential contributions of unofficial inputs served to remind observers of the contacts and interactions between Israelis and Palestinians that had been organized over the years by a variety of unofficial third parties and that helped by the groundwork for the recent developments.

In this context, many observers of the Middle East peace process, as well as some news reports in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East, have referred to the activities in which my colleagues and I have been engaged over the years. For more than two decades, we have worked to bring together politically active and influential Israelis and Palestinians for private, direct communication. This work has involved the intensive application to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of the concepts and methods of interactive problem-solving — an unofficial third-party approach to conflict resolution derived from the work of John...
Contributions to the Peace Process

There are three steps in peace negotiations. The first step is to set the agenda, and to identify the issues that need to be addressed. This is important because peace negotiations are complex and multifaceted, and it is not always clear what issues are most important to address. The second step is to develop a strategy for addressing these issues. This includes identifying the key actors involved in the negotiations, and developing a plan for how to engage with them. The third step is to implement this strategy, and to work towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Negotiation process.

Development of agenda: The process of developing the agenda is critical to the success of the negotiations. It is important that the agenda is inclusive and that all parties have a say in the process. This is because peace negotiations are driven by the interests of the parties involved, and it is important that the agenda reflects these interests.

Agenda-setting: The agenda-setting process involves identifying the issues that need to be addressed, and prioritizing them. This is done through consultations with the parties involved, and through the use of expert knowledge. The agenda should be broad enough to cover all aspects of the conflict, but it should also be specific enough to allow for meaningful discussions.

Negotiation strategies: There are a number of strategies that can be used in peace negotiations. These include:

- Direct negotiations: This involves face-to-face discussions between the parties involved. This is the most direct way to address the issues that need to be resolved, but it can be time-consuming and challenging.

- Mediation: This involves a third party that helps the parties involved in the negotiations. A mediator is someone who is neutral and impartial, and who is able to help the parties reach a agreement.

- Arbitration: This involves a third party that makes a decision on the issues that need to be addressed. An arbitrator is someone who is neutral and impartial, and who has the authority to make decisions.

Implementation of strategy: Once the agenda has been set and a strategy has been developed, it is important to implement this strategy. This involves negotiating and finding solutions to the issues that need to be addressed. It also involves monitoring the progress of the negotiations, and making adjustments as needed.

Conclusion:

Peace negotiations are complex and multifaceted. It is important to have a clear understanding of the process, and to have a strategy in place to address the issues that need to be resolved. Through effective negotiation, it is possible to reach a peaceful resolution of the conflict.
the convention that both parties are genuinely interested in a peaceful solution, and a sense of possibility regarding the ultimate achievement of a mutually satisfactory outcome.

Assumptions about the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

In discussing the different types of contributions of our program to the recent peace process, I referred to the subjective ideas for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and how moving toward the negotiating table that has emerged from the workshops and related activities. These ideas were gradually inhaled into the political debate and political thinking in the two communities, and thus helped to develop the conceptual framework on which the recent accords were built. The Jewish and Palestinian participants, of course, played the most important role in injecting the insights and ideas emerging from the workshops into the political process. Third-party members, however, also contributed through the policy analyses conveyed by our women and seal presentations.

I have presented and published, starting in 1977, a series of papers that explored my particular analysis of the Arab-Israeli conflict, especially its Palestinian-black component. My disproportionate reference to my own publications on no way implies that mine were the only—or the most important—analyses that contributed to the framework for the recent Israeli-Palestinian breakthrough. I make no such claim. Indeed, I have drawn heavily on the works of other analysts over the years. My purpose here, however, is not to review the relevant literature, but to document the contributions of our particular program. I refer to my writings in that context. They developed the framework for conflict resolution at the macrolevel that underlay our work at the microlevel; they drew on the workshops as a source of their ideas, and they influenced, in turn, the structure and content of subsequent workshops. The focus of these papers has been on how to create the conditions for negotiations by overcoming the political and psychological obstacles that have stood in the way. According to my analysis, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been viewed in the past as a zero-sum conflict among national identities and existence. In light of this analysis, the key requirements for movement toward resolution have been mutual reassurance and mutual recognition.

My analyses have been based primarily on what I learned from the interactions between Israelis and Palestinians in the context of our workshops. These observations, of course, are combined with other sources of information (including regular visits to the region and conversations with officials, academics, journalists, and others on all sides) and filtered through my particular conceptual approach. It is important to note here that the relationship of my analysis to the workshops operates in both directions. The analysis derives heavily from ideas and insights that emerge out of the workshop interactions, but in turn it influences the way in which we organize and conduct workshops. The timing, form, agenda, structure, and composition of a given workshop or series of workshops are guided by our analysis.
Looking to the Future

The 1995 Oslo Agreement 

The Oslo Accords, signed in September 1995, were a significant milestone in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. They were the result of years of negotiation and were seen as a step towards a comprehensive peace settlement between Israel and the Palestinian people. The agreement was brokered by the United States and mediated by the Intifada, a series of protests and uprisings led by the Palestinian people against Israeli occupation.

The agreement included several key provisions:

1. The recognition of Israel and the Palestinian Authority as the parties to the conflict.
2. The establishment of a Palestinian Authority with limited autonomy.
3. The exchange of prisoners and the release of Palestinian prisoners.
4. The establishment of a joint committee to oversee the implementation of the agreement.
5. The setting of deadlines for the implementation of the agreement.

The Oslo Accords were a significant achievement, but they also faced numerous challenges. The implementation of the agreement was slow and difficult, and there were periodic flare-ups of violence. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains one of the most intractable problems of our time, and the Oslo Accords were only a first step towards a comprehensive and durable peace settlement.
self-determination — that have been postponed to the final-status negotiations. The group will explore these issues in the context of a broader discussion of the future relationship between the two societies and the policies that are envisaged as the long-term outcome of the final agreement. We hope that our new efforts will contribute directly and concretely to this new phase of the Israeli-Palestinian renegotiation process.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Alcoves (1999) and Lerner (1999).

2. See Kifner (1972) for the earlier and Kifner (1992) for the most recent presentations of the process to date.


4. See Braun and Klein 1989. The advisory workshop was organized and conducted in partnership with the President of Simon Fraser University, and we would like to acknowledge the program that is thank you for their support.

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6. We are grateful to the Human Rights Division of the United Nations, the United Nations, and the United Nations, and we would like to acknowledge the program that is thank you for their support.

REFERENCES


