
Presidential Address

The Political Psychology of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: How Can We Overcome the Barriers To a Negotiated Solution?¹

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Six political-psychological assumptions are presented as the basis for this paper's argument that direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations are necessary and possible and for its delineation of the requirements of such negotiations. The last of these assumptions—that neither party will enter negotiations that leave its right to national existence in doubt—is linked to the psychological core of the conflict: its perception by the parties as a zero-sum conflict around national identity and existence. This view has led to a mutual denial of each other's identity and right to exist and systematic efforts to delegitimize the other. Such efforts have undermined the steps toward negotiation that leaders on both sides have in fact taken because each defines the negotiating framework in ways that are profoundly threatening to the other. Negotiations are possible only in a framework of mutual recognition, which makes it clear that recognition of the other's rights represents assertion, rather than abandonment, of one's own rights. Such negotiations can be facilitated through a prenegotiation process conducive to differentiation of the enemy image, including a breakdown of the monolithic view of the enemy camp, a distinction between the enemy's ideological dreams and operational programs, and a differentiation between negative and positive components of the other's ideology and symbols of legitimacy.

KEY WORDS: international conflict; Middle East; national identity; delegitimization; differentiation of images; negotiating process.

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INTRODUCTION

The Arab-Israeli conflict, like most international disputes, is multifaceted, involving a range of issues in the relationship between Israel and each of its neighbors. The historical and psychological roots of the conflict, however, must be traced to the relationship between the Israeli Jewish and the Palestinian Arab peoples, both of whom claim the same territory for the fulfillment of their national identity. Ultimately, therefore, a peaceful termination of the Arab-Israeli conflict is possible only with a resolution of the Palestinian problem. Sooner or later—and preferably sooner—it is the Israelis and Palestinians who must make peace with each other.

By peace in this context I mean more than military disengagement and a nonbelligerency agreement. I mean a *resolution* of the conflict, an outcome that meets the basic needs of both parties and is responsive to their basic fears (cf. Burton, 1984). Such an outcome—even though it involves, of necessity, a negotiated compromise—would leave both parties better off and more secure than they are today and would be at least minimally consistent with their sense of justice. Peace in this sense of resolution of the conflict would be conducive to friendly coexistence, cooperative relations, and reconciliation between the two peoples. I maintain that such an outcome is not only *desirable*, because it can create a stable, genuine peace, but *necessary*, because of the nature of the land that both peoples claim. Demographic, geographic, economic, cultural, and emotional realities tie both communities to the whole of Palestine or Eretz Yisrael and to each other to such an extent that it would not be possible to maintain two hostile entities there, hermetically sealed off from one another. The two peoples must find a way of living *together* if either one is to prosper, develop, or survive at all.

One central implication of the view that I have expressed is that peace must be negotiated directly between Israelis and Palestinians (cf. Kelman, 1982). I know that such negotiations have to be embedded within a multiparty framework. Jordan must clearly be involved, since it will inevitably play a decisive role in whatever political arrangements emerge out of the negotiating process. Syria must be involved at some stage in view of its interests in the region and its proven capacity to block negotiations that exclude it. The superpowers and other parties, such as Egypt, are needed to provide incentives and guarantees. But within that larger framework, it is essential that Israelis and Palestinians find a way of dealing with each other directly, rather than through proxies as they seem to have preferred. They are the parties that have to live together. They need to communicate directly in order to develop an agreement that is responsive to their mutual concerns and to produce an outcome to which both feel committed.

Moreover, direct Israeli-Palestinian communication is not only essential in order to enhance the quality of the outcome of negotiations; it also seems to be the most promising way of getting negotiations started at this juncture. The process that began with the February 1985 agreement between King Hussein of Jordan and Chairman Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) held considerable promise, in my view, even though it tried to dilute direct Israeli-Palestinian contacts. I recognized the need for bringing in additional parties: the Israelis' need for dealing with Palestinians within a Jordanian-Palestinian context; the Palestinians' and Jordanians' need to deal with Israel within an international, multiparty context; and the preference of all parties for active U.S. intervention. I considered such compromises justified as long as they served as ways of making direct Israeli-Palestinian communication possible rather than as ways of evading it.

Despite these compromises, however, that particular initiative has collapsed for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was the failure of the United States to play the active, independent role that this initiative required of it. In the wake of this recent setback, there is increasing recognition that the best hope for a new peace initiative lies in a joint effort by the two parties that have the most pressing motives and the most profound long-term interests in negotiating a solution to the conflict: the Israelis and the Palestinians.

POLITICAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS

My analysis of the need for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, their promise, and the requirements they must meet is based on six political-psychological assumptions. Though I state these assumptions in symmetrical terms, I am not proposing that there is complete symmetry between the two sides, either empirically or morally. But there are certain significant parallelisms that emerge out of the dynamics of conflict in general and out of the dynamics of this particular conflict. These parallelisms contribute significantly to the perpetuation and escalation of the conflict. At the same time, insight into them can provide both substantive and procedural tools for deescalation and resolution of the conflict. With this proviso, let me briefly describe my six political-psychological assumptions in symmetrical form.

Nationhood

Both Jews and Palestinians perceive themselves as nations and have shown themselves ready to define their identities, pursue their interests, and

engage in costly and self-sacrificing actions in keeping with that perception. Like other nations, they have used a variety of cultural and ethnic elements held in common by the group—values, traditions, languages, religious beliefs and practices, historical experiences, collective memories, future aspirations—as building blocks for their national identity. Whatever may have been the structure of these groups in the remote or recent past, they clearly are nations today: They have all the characteristics by which nationhood is generally defined (cf. Kelman, 1969).

Sharing the Land

For both peoples, the search for political expression of their national identity centers on the same small territory: the land between the River Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea, which constituted the British mandatory territory of Palestine between 1922 and 1948. There can be no resolution of the conflict unless each of the peoples ends up with at least some share in that land—some sense of ownership of part of the land—*as a people*, with the opportunity to give political expression to its national identity there (cf. Kelman, 1982).

For the Jewish people, which has already exercised its right to national self-determination in that land through the creation of the State of Israel, this requirement means assurance of the secure existence of Israel and acceptance of its legitimacy as a sovereign state. For the Palestinian people, this requirement has come to mean the right to some form of national self-determination in the West Bank and Gaza—the parts of Palestine that remain outside the political boundaries of the State of Israel. Most Palestinians seem prepared to accept self-determination in the context of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation as the irreducible condition for fulfilling their national identity and for ending the struggle with the sense that minimal justice has been done.

Once both peoples' right to self-determination in the land they claim has been assured, the psychological healing process can begin. Denial of any share in the land to either people would be experienced by that people as total defeat—a defeat seen as equivalent to national destruction. Given the nature of this conflict, such an outcome cannot serve as a basis for stable peace and reconciliation.

Role of the Diaspora

Both Israeli Jews and Palestinians living in Palestine see themselves as members of a larger people, part of which lives in its ancestral homeland and

part in the diaspora. In each case, there are significant differences in the political status, experiences, and interests of those living inside and those living outside. Nevertheless, the sense of common peoplehood for these two subcommunities is a central element of the national identity and political ideology of both Israelis and Palestinians.

In the period before the establishment of Israel, it would have been inconceivable for the Yishuv – the Jewish community in Palestine – to think of the establishment of a state designed to serve its own interests without regard to their fellow-Jews in the diaspora. Such a separation would have been entirely incongruous with Zionism, with the historical circumstances that gave rise to it and the institutions that promoted it. Even today, when Israeli Jews and diaspora Jews clearly belong to separate political communities and when an Israeli identity separate from Jewish identity is evolving, the unity of Israeli and diaspora Jews is central to Israel's self-concept and policies.

By the same token, West Bank and Gaza inhabitants cannot be separated from their fellow-Palestinians in the diaspora. The new Palestinian nationalism and sense of Palestinian uniqueness that evolved in the 1960s spread from the diaspora to the West Bank and Gaza. The inhabitants of the territories see themselves as part of a national, all-inclusive Palestinian movement, not just a community pursuing its own local interests. Much as they may be tempted to accept a solution to their own problems, they consider it inconsistent with and disloyal to their sense of Palestinian identity to make a separate peace at the expense of the Palestinian diaspora. Indeed, because they themselves are under occupation, they look to the diaspora for leadership in the pursuit of their national rights.

Legitimate Leadership

Negotiations conducive to resolution of the conflict must be conducted by political leaders who are legitimate in the eyes of the communities they represent. Only representatives chosen and acknowledged by these communities themselves are consistent with the principle of self-determination on which, I have argued, the negotiations must be predicated. Representatives lacking these characteristics are unable to negotiate with the required flexibility and confidence and to produce outcomes that their constituencies accept and to which they feel committed.

On the Israeli side, there is no ambiguity about the identity of the leaders who can legitimately represent the community in negotiations, since Israel is an established state with a democratically elected government. What needs to be stressed here is the futility of any attempt to bypass this leadership by negotiating with a proxy, such as the United States, on the assumption that

it will then impose a settlement on Israel. The United States can certainly play a constructive role in negotiations by using its influence on Israel, but only an agreement negotiated directly with legitimate Israeli leaders is likely to generate commitment in the population and to create the conditions for resolving the conflict.

On the Palestinian side, the question of who is to represent the community in negotiations with Israel remains a matter of considerable controversy. The evidence strongly suggests that it will be neither possible nor helpful to find an alternative to the PLO as the Palestinian interlocutor. Despite its divisions and weaknesses, the PLO under Yasir Arafat's leadership continues to be the only agency accepted as legitimate by the majority of Palestinians in the territories and in the diaspora. It is the repository for Palestinian nationhood and is perceived as the only Palestinian voice that speaks with any degree of independence. Alternative leaders are diminished as potential negotiators because they are perceived to lack independence—West Bank and Gaza leaders because they are under occupation, and diaspora challengers to Arafat because they are beholden to one or another Arab state. As of now, at least, it seems that only the PLO can legitimize negotiations with Israel and come to an agreement that will be accepted by Palestinians and to which they will feel committed.

Interest in Negotiations

There is strong interest within both Israel and the Palestinian community in finding a negotiated solution to the conflict. To be sure, both communities are sharply divided and contain powerful elements that prefer the status quo to any compromises that would mean abandoning their quest for total victory. However, other significant elements within the political leadership and the general population on both sides consider continuation of the status quo to be extremely dangerous.

Many Israelis, not only on the left but also toward the center of the political spectrum, see the incorporation of the West Bank and Gaza into Israel as a threat to the democratic and Jewish character of the state and to the integrity of their Zionist and humanistic principles. West Bank/Gaza Palestinians see the continuation of present trends as spelling an end to the possibility of extricating themselves, within the foreseeable future, from Israeli rule. Furthermore, they are afraid that the future—under a Sharon government, for example—may bring concerted efforts to remove them from the land altogether. Diaspora Palestinians see the continuation of present trends as leading to the loss of any territorial base at all for exercising Palestinian self-determination.

What is particularly significant is that top leaders in both communities share these concerns. Both the leader of the Israeli Labor Party, Mr. Peres, and the Chairman of the PLO, Mr. Arafat — despite the ambiguity of their statements and the inconsistent and often self-defeating character of their actions — have given many indications of their seriousness in the search for a negotiated solution. Thus, I would argue that the motives and interests for moving into negotiations, and hence the possibilities for doing so, are present. What is needed is creation of the right conditions that will put the leaders' will and capacity to negotiate to the test.

The Right to National Existence as the Sine Qua Non of Negotiation

Finally, no matter how strong their interest in negotiation, no Israeli or Palestinian leaders will enter into negotiations under conditions that leave their right to national existence in doubt. It is difficult to imagine any negotiations in which the question of the very existence of one or the other party is placed on the negotiating table. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in view of both sides' profound sense of vulnerability, each is particularly insistent on explicit assurances with regard to its right to exist as the one essential precondition for negotiations.

Israelis (at least of the Labor persuasion) may be willing to enter into negotiations without preconditions about the precise borders of their state or about the precise security arrangements that are to be worked out, but not without a clear understanding that Israel is here to stay, as a sovereign state entitled to exist within secure and recognized borders. One reason that Israelis cite for their refusal to deal with the PLO is that the PLO remains officially committed to an ideology that considers Israel illegitimate and has given no explicit indication of willingness to accept the concept of Israeli sovereignty even in the wake of a peace agreement. Some may question this Israeli formulation, but I have no doubt that it reflects an Israeli concern that must be taken seriously; even Israeli leaders who acknowledge the central role of the PLO will not agree to negotiations with it until this issue is resolved.

Similarly, Palestinian leaders may be willing to accept UN Resolution 242, direct negotiations with Israel, and a moratorium on the armed struggle against Israel in order to acquire a place at the negotiation table, but not without a prior acceptance of their right to self-determination, at least within the context of a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation. Indications are that the latest peace initiative failed precisely because the Palestinians were unable to obtain an explicit statement about self-determination. The absence of such a commitment, from a Palestinian point of view, means that their right to

national existence itself is a matter to be negotiated rather than to be taken for granted. Palestinian leaders cannot enter into negotiations on these terms any more than Israeli leaders can enter into negotiations that leave Israel's right to exist in doubt.

MUTUAL DENIAL OF IDENTITY AND DELEGITIMIZATION

The failure to understand the seriousness of this last point, or at least to deal with it in a thoughtful way, has been a major impediment in the movement toward the negotiating table. Each party's need for assurances about its continued national existence is probably *the* central issue in the conflict and in efforts to resolve it. This issue is directly linked to what I see as the psychological core of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The psychological core, I propose, is that it is perceived by the two parties in zero-sum terms, not only with respect to territory but also, most significantly, with respect to national identity and national existence. Each party perceives the very existence of the other—the other's status as a nation—to be a threat to its own existence and status as a nation. Each holds the view that only one can be a nation: Either we are a nation or they are. *They* can acquire national identity and rights only at the expense of *our* identity and rights.

This zero-sum view is a direct consequence of the fact that the two national movements—Zionism and the Palestinian movement—focus on the same land. Acknowledgment of the other's nationhood implies acceptance of the other's right to establish a state in the land they both claim—which each side sees as tantamount to relinquishing its own claims, or at least making them more ambiguous. The issue of territorial claims touches directly on more fundamental questions of national survival. Israelis and Palestinians both see their nations as highly vulnerable. In their very different ways, both have lived on the edge of national oblivion. The themes of destruction, of physical annihilation, and of nonexistence play a central role in their national self-images.

Each party feels convinced that the ultimate intention of the other is to destroy it—in fact, that its destruction is *inherent* in the other's ideology. For Israelis, the PLO's project of liberating Palestine is synonymous with the liquidation of Israel. The PLO's proposal to establish a West Bank/Gaza state is perceived as a tactical move toward taking over the whole of Palestine. In the Israeli view, a PLO state would of necessity be irredentist. Acknowledging Palestinians' right to a state anywhere in Palestine would be like stepping on a slippery slope: If they have a right to Nablus and Hebron, who is to stop them from claiming Haifa and Jaffa?

For Palestinians, on the other hand, Zionist ideology is inherently expansionist and ready to eliminate Palestinian communities that stand in the way of achieving its goals. Israeli policies on the West Bank and Gaza are perceived as a replay of 1948, designed to subjugate and push out the Palestinian population. Acknowledging Israel's right to exist might spell the end of their own national struggle: If the Israelis have rights to Palestine, where does that leave Palestinian rights?

In short, the perceived intentions of the other create fundamental concerns in each group about its own existence. Fulfillment of the other's national identity is experienced as equivalent to destruction of one's own identity.

The zero-sum view of the conflict has led to a mutual denial by Israelis and Palestinians of each other's identity and right to exist as a nation (Kelman, 1978). Among Palestinians (and other Arabs) we frequently find denial of Jewish peoplehood ("the Jews are a religion and therefore not a true nation") and of the authenticity of the Jewish national movement ("Zionism is a form of racism or settler colonialism"). Among Israelis, we frequently find a denial of Palestinian distinctiveness ("they are Arabs"), of their national status ("they are an ethnic minority"), and of the territorial focus of their nationalism ("Jordan is Palestine"). To be sure, there has been an evolution in the thinking on both sides and different views are being heard; yet the effort to deny the other's identity remains a powerful feature of the conflict, reflecting the extent to which the national identity of the other continues to be problematic to each side because it casts doubts on its own claims.

In political terms, the denial of the other's identity translates into systematic efforts to delegitimize the other (cf. Bar-Tal, 1987). Extreme manifestations of such efforts are the equating of Zionism with racism on the one hand, and of Palestinian nationalism — as represented by the PLO — with terrorism on the other. The point here is not that the State of Israel is accused of racist policies or that the PLO is accused of terrorist acts. The point is that Zionism is described as *inherently* racist and that the Palestinian movement as *inherently* terrorist.

Such accusations imply that the movements and the nationalisms they represent are by their fundamental nature and by definition illegitimate. Racism and terrorism are universally condemned; they are beyond the pale, completely outside the range of what the human community can tolerate. Thus, these extreme delegitimizing efforts carry a dangerously dehumanizing message. The epithets of racism or terrorism are intended to place the national groups at which they are directed outside the human family. To be told that your national movement is racist or terrorist in its essence — that your mere claim of the right to nationhood automatically brands you as a racist or a terrorist — is to be told that your people has no right to exist.

These and other efforts at mutual delegitimization constitute major impediments to a potential negotiation process. The rhetoric of delegitimization creates an atmosphere antagonistic to negotiation. To induce each other into negotiation, each must offer the other reassurances that the process is safe, that the other will not jeopardize its national existence by entering into it. Instead, Israelis and Palestinians reinforce each other's fears by repeatedly communicating their nonacceptance of the other. These messages are conveyed not only through rhetoric but also through a variety of concrete actions.

Palestinians become confirmed in their belief that Israel is not prepared, under any circumstances, to accept their right to a national existence by such Israeli acts as the bombing of the PLO headquarters, the exclusion of PLO representatives from any role in the negotiating process, the systematic effort to link the PLO to terrorist acts and to categorize it as a terrorist organization, the expressions of satisfaction at the break-up of the Hussein-Arafat coalition. For Palestinians, all of these actions—and, most graphically, the bombing—suggest that Israel wants to delegitimize their movement, to eliminate their legitimate leadership from the negotiating process, and to achieve an agreement without accommodating their national aspirations.

Israelis, in turn, become confirmed in their belief that the PLO is not prepared, under any circumstances, to come to terms with Israeli sovereignty by such PLO acts as the sponsorship of attacks against Israeli civilian targets, the exclusion of Israel and the occupied territories from the renunciation of terrorism in Arafat's Cairo Declaration, the failure to accept UN Resolution 242 unequivocally, the reluctance to negotiate directly with Israel, the rejection of the Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement as illegitimate. For Israelis, all of these actions suggest that the PLO has not really abandoned its ideological position about Israel's illegitimacy and its long-term goal of destroying Israel. Again, violence has an especially important emotional impact on Israelis because in their eyes it concretizes the PLO's desire to destroy Israel and symbolizes the ultimate denial of their right to exist.

It is not my intention here to evaluate these various actions or their perception, but merely to point to their effect in undermining any possible movement toward negotiations. It is difficult to take the risky steps that might make negotiations possible with an adversary who, in a variety of ways, denies one's legitimacy. It may be useful here to distinguish between *affirming* the other's legitimacy and *ceasing to deny* it. Perhaps a process conducive to negotiation could move forward without positive declarations of acceptance, but it cannot very well move forward when the parties continue actively to deny each other's legitimacy and thus persuade each other that their goal is still the other's annihilation. This kind of interaction is bound to create the self-fulfilling prophecy that the other is intransigent.

There is an asymmetry in the effects of the denial of legitimacy on each side. The Israeli actions can actually block PLO participation in the negotiation process and so far have been successful in doing so. The Palestinian actions cannot block Israeli participation, but they can and do have the effect of further reducing Israel's willingness to accept the PLO as a negotiating partner. Thus, both sets of delegitimizing actions have contributed to blocking the *process*. They have made it politically and psychologically more imperative for each to reject the other as a negotiating partner. They have also made it easier to do so: Israelis feel they do not need to deal with the PLO because, in view of PLO intransigence, no one is pressing them to move in that direction; the PLO feels it cannot afford to deal with Israel because, in view of Israeli intransigence, Palestinians have been offered nothing in return for their entry into a negotiating process. Each can, with at least some justification given the reciprocal nature of the process, place the blame on the other. In the meantime, the movement toward negotiation is impeded.

There is an irony in this impasse in that top leaders on both sides—as I have argued in my fifth assumption—have shown a considerable degree of interest in moving toward accommodation. Both Yasir Arafat and Shimon Peres have made significant concessions and issued statements or proposals that suggest some readiness to accept the national existence of the adversary. Yet at the same time they continue to make statements and engage in actions that contradict and undermine their own efforts to move toward the negotiating table. Their rhetoric, their condoning of violence, and their definition of the negotiating framework continue to deny the other's legitimacy and are thus profoundly threatening to the other.

From the Palestinian perspective, the Israelis are seeking negotiations from which the Palestinians will be excluded and in which others will determine their fate; from the Israeli perspective, the Palestinians are seeking negotiations in which Israel will be outnumbered, overwhelmed, and dictated to. Thus, while with one hand each leader is—genuinely, in my view—trying to offer his adversaries gradual acceptance, with the other hand he repels them by conveying the implicit message that his goal is still their annihilation. These contradictory and self-defeating strategies reflect the political constraints under which both leaderships operate, which are a direct consequence of the profound divisions within each community. At a deeper level, they reflect the psychological constraints under which both leaderships operate, arising from the inherent dynamics of a conflict in which national identity is perceived in zero-sum terms.

The road to negotiations is obstructed by a real dilemma. Each side needs recognition (in the psychological sense) *from* the other, to satisfy its need for identity, justice, and security. Yet each side is reluctant to extend

recognition *to* the other because it views such an act as fundamentally dangerous: Each is afraid that, in recognizing the other, it would be relinquishing its own rights and compromising its own legitimacy. The question is how to make it possible for each side to reassure the other without feeling that it is thereby endangering itself. In other words, how can each side enter into a process that raises the other's hopes without raising its own fears?

This dilemma can be resolved only in a negotiating framework based on *mutual recognition* of the other's right to national self-determination in the land they both claim. In a context of mutual recognition, acceptance of the other's rights is part of a package that simultaneously entails *assertion* of one's own rights rather than abandonment of these rights. In contrast to unilateral recognition, which is constantly being demanded as a precondition for negotiations, a negotiating framework based on mutual recognition has the capacity of reversing the zero-sum definition of the conflict. Recognition of the *other* occurs in a context in which, at the same time and by the same act, one's *own* rights are being acknowledged rather than compromised.

Mutual recognition, in the diplomatic sense — with all its formality and detail — can only come at the end of negotiations. But negotiations can begin only if each side feels assured that the other is prepared to accept the principle of mutual recognition and to negotiate on that basis. In other words, each side must feel assured that its right to national existence is not on the negotiating table. Without such assurances, the parties do not consider negotiations safe and will avoid them. But how can the parties provide such assurances to each other in advance of negotiations?

THE PRENEGOTIATION PROCESS: LEARNING TO DIFFERENTIATE THE ENEMY IMAGE

What is needed for this purpose is a prenegotiation process that uses an imaginative mixture of official and unofficial diplomacy in order to create the conditions for negotiations (Kelman, 1982; Saunders, 1985). The problem-solving workshops that my colleagues and I have organized (Kelman, 1979, 1986; Kelman and Cohen, 1986; see also Burton 1969, 1979, and 1984; and Kelman, 1972), and related vehicles for direct, analytical communication between politically influential representatives of the two parties, are suitable contributions to such a prenegotiation process.

They provide an unofficial setting and a nonthreatening framework in which the parties can jointly explore possibilities for negotiation with relatively low commitment and in greater safety. They entail a process that allows them to discover each other's concerns about identity, security, justice, and acceptance, and to share their differing perspectives. Through interaction in

this context the parties can develop a language of deescalation and a strategy of mutual reassurance to counteract the mutual denial of legitimacy that currently undermines the path toward negotiations. The insights and concrete ideas produced by such interactions can then be injected into the political debate on each side and, through a process of successive approximations, influence official decisions about the possibility of negotiations and the appropriate framework for carrying them out.

A central substantive requirement of the prenegotiation process, to which problem-solving workshops and similar opportunities for communication can make a significant contribution, is learning to differentiate the image of the enemy. I shall describe three aspects of differentiation of the enemy image that can facilitate negotiation and that we have been able to observe in the course of problem-solving workshops.

Breakdown of the Monolithic View of the Enemy Camp

If there is to be any possibility for negotiation, those interested in the process have to learn to distinguish between the elements on the other side that are opposed to negotiation (and, of course, powerful opposition to any negotiation exists in both communities) and those which, at least under the proper circumstances, are available for it. My conclusion that Chairman Arafat was potentially available for negotiation, after my first conversations with him in 1980 and 1981 (Kelman, 1983), was considerably influenced by my impression that he himself had a differentiated view of the enemy camp.

When I told him in 1980 that not much movement on the Palestinian issue can be expected from the Begin government itself, he interrupted me with the approximate words: "You can't say that; they are not all the same." He then proceeded to talk about differences within the Begin cabinet. By contrast, on the same day a Palestinian scholar told me that there was no difference between Menachem Begin and Matti Peled (a leading Israeli advocate of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza and of negotiations with the PLO)—because "they are both Zionists" (Kelman, 1983, p. 211).

In the course of workshops and similar interactions, participants can learn, as a minimum, that there is someone to talk to and something to talk about on the other side. Gradually, the view of the other becomes more finely differentiated and people learn about the potential availability for negotiation of different elements under varying circumstances—often, circumstances that they themselves might help to create. It is important that these potential interlocutors are, and are perceived as, part of the political mainstream on the other side.

On the Israeli side this means that they have to be within the Zionist camp and as close to the political center of that camp as possible; on the

Palestinian side it means that they must be representatives or supporters of the PLO. Otherwise, their readiness to negotiate is not politically relevant. Moreover, the political relevance of differentiation depends on the recognition by Palestinians that it is in fact Zionists who are ready to negotiate, and by Israelis that it is in fact PLO supporters who are ready to negotiate—not people who have abandoned their national cause.

In view of these considerations, politically relevant differentiation of the enemy camp must be sophisticated and nuanced. There is often a tendency to assume that those on the other side who are willing to negotiate must agree with one's own position and accept one's own priorities and view of reality. Such an assumption is bound to lead to disappointment and even a sense of betrayal.

A differentiated image must be based on the realization that even the pro-negotiation elements on the other side—if they are, as they need to be, part of the political mainstream—have not been converted to one's own ideology; they have not abandoned their national commitments, their sense of rights, even their dreams. They are operating out of their own perspective and within their own political context. If they are ready to negotiate, it is primarily out of pragmatic reasons, because they have concluded that a negotiated agreement is in their own community's best interest.

One has to be prepared, therefore, to find that even the "good" people on the other side may at times, particularly when they feel threatened, sound polemical, intransigent, or insensitive. A differentiated image of the enemy camp does not distinguish between enemies and allies, but between enemies who are not willing to negotiate and enemies who are open to negotiation (and who may in the future become allies).

Distinction between the Enemy's Ideological Dreams and-Operational Programs

Ideological change is typically a gradual process. Even those who are ready for negotiations do not simply replace one set of ideological beliefs with others, nor do they abandon the myths and dreams that are associated with the original ideology. As new realities and new relationships with old enemies become established, new beliefs evolve and the old myths and dreams become irrelevant. They turn into ritualized pronouncements trotted out on sacred occasions and eventually wither away.

Movement toward negotiation requires an ability to differentiate between those elements of the enemy's ideology that represent operational programs, that are meant to be put into practice and govern current decision making, and those that have been effectively abandoned, even though they continue to appear in ideological documents, in the obligatory rhetoric of

ceremonial and inspirational occasions, and in the fond dreams of leaders and masses [Kelman (1978, pp. 180-181); see also Harkabi (1986) for a similar distinction between “grand design” and “policy”].

To determine the other side’s operational programs, as distinguished from their ideological dreams, it is necessary to go beyond old documents, such as the Palestine National Covenant or various Zionist proclamations – which are rarely repealed and tend to remain unchanged – and to look at structural changes and binding political actions.

This differentiation is not always easy to make, because as long as the conflict remains active, the ideological dreams tend to be reiterated and may even reemerge as operational programs. Efforts to translate such dreams into policy may reassert themselves out of a sense of frustration or a sense of opportunity. There is thus no point at which one can say definitively that the ideological dreams have become totally irrelevant. Nevertheless, it is necessary and possible to differentiate the two levels of political discourse and to develop criteria and indicators for establishing which pronouncements are meant to be rhetorical and which operational. In the course of direct communication, the parties can help each other in making this discrimination.

Differentiation between Negative and Positive Components of the Other’s Ideology and Symbols of Legitimacy

A major barrier to conflict resolution is the fact that each party’s national movement has diametrically opposite meanings for the two sides. For each side, the ideology of its movement – Zionism or Palestinian nationalism – is a source of positive identity, of national liberation, of cultural revival. The political institutions established by the movement – the State of Israel or the PLO – and the social, economic, and cultural institutions associated with each, are central symbols of legitimacy.

For the other side, however, this same ideology has a totally negative connotation and these same institutions symbolize the threat to its own existence. There is a strong tendency to see the other’s movement and its ideology as *exhausted* by – exclusively dedicated to – the desire and purpose of destroying one’s own national existence. For Palestinians, Zionism tends to have only one meaning – the eradication of Palestinian nationhood; they see the State of Israel – the central symbol of legitimacy for the Jewish people – as a symbol for this Zionist project. For Israelis, Palestinian nationalism tends to have only one meaning – the destruction of Israel; they see the PLO – the central symbol of legitimacy for the Palestinian people – as a symbol for the elimination of the Jewish state.

In the course of interaction in some of our workshops, participants have come to understand that the destruction of their own nation does not ex-

haust the meaning of the other's ideology (Kelman, 1986). Palestinians have learned that for Israelis, Zionism may represent a positive vision of national renewal and social change; Israelis have learned that for Palestinians, the quest for national self-determination may represent a similar vision of a desirable future. This does not mean, of course, that they accept the other's ideology, but the mutual penetration of the other's perspective enables them to think about the possibility of developing a common vision of the future for the land they share, in which fulfillment for one people does not presuppose destruction for the other.

The increasing differentiation of what has been a totally demonic image can also manifest itself in other ways in the course of a workshop. Typically, the two parties engage in a variety of exchanges designed to test each other's sincerity and genuine readiness for peace and coexistence. As a result of such exchanges, they may develop a degree of mutual trust, based on the conviction that at least these particular representatives of the opposing camp are genuinely committed to a peaceful solution. They are then startled to discover—perhaps through the active intervention of the third party—that these individuals, who have passed the tests they imposed on them and whose commitment to negotiation and coexistence they have come to trust, are committed Zionists or dedicated supporters of the PLO, respectively. Such discoveries help to break-down the assumption that peace is possible only if the other side undergoes conversion and abandons its own national ideology. They open up the possibility of negotiation based on acceptance of each other's right to nationhood and to commitment to the symbols and institutions expressive of that nationhood.

In sum, as long as the only meaning of the other's national quest is perceived to be the destruction of one's own national aspirations, there is no basis for negotiations. Once each side learns, however, to differentiate between the negative and the positive components of the other's ideology—to recognize that the other side has needs, purposes, and visions apart from its desire to destroy one's own camp—there is a basis for accepting the other as a negotiating partner. Negotiation with the other becomes a potential arena for finding solutions that satisfy the positive needs of both parties, rather than one in which, of necessity, one is asked to relinquish or jeopardize one's own national existence.

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