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Between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the East-West Pakistan struggle: a challenge to the conventional wisdom

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How to create a peacemaking change in the Israeli–Palestinian struggle? The consensus solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is a ‘two-state solution’, which means separation between two major identity groups. This paper points to the necessity to shift the emphasis in the peacemaking discussion. Instead of manufacturing solutions in a peacemaking laboratory, it would be better to focus on finding the social conditions that have the potential to create an effective peacemaking process. This paper suggests establishing a major Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating congress that has the potential to create a peacemaking revolution. The vision is based on the multi-party talks that had been conducted in Apartheid South Africa and Northern Ireland during the ‘troubles’ and the Minds of Peace Experiment – a small-scale Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating congress – that has been conducted in various locations around the world.

**Keywords:** conflict resolution; conflict management; ‘two-state solution’; public negotiating congress; peacemaking revolution

The bitter rivalry in the Arab world between secular nationalism and religious fanaticism has torn apart the Palestinian people. Since 2007, Palestinian society in the territories is not only geographically but also politically divided. Gaza is controlled by the radical Islamist movement Hamas, while the West Bank is administered by the secular movement Fatah. Despite the recent efforts to create a unity government, especially toward the United Nations discussion on a Palestinian state in September 2011, the current division among Palestinian leaders is deep. Each leadership has a different political agenda and is committed to promote a different ideology. Hamas, the militant outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood, is committed to establish an Islamic autocracy that could wage holy war against Israel, while the leadership in the West Bank shows serious efforts to build a civil society and to reach a peaceful resolution with Israel.

Despite the split in Palestinian society, the consensus solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict remains a ‘two-state solution’. Regardless of the tense situation on the ground, the conventional wisdom remains that a ‘two-state solution’ – an Israeli state side by side with an independent Palestinian state in...
Gaza and the West Bank – is the optimal solution to this ongoing struggle. The question that analysts are struggling with is how to reach the consensus solution. The idea of a ‘two-state solution’ – a divorce between two rival identity groups – was not invented in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In 1947, the ‘two-state solution’ was implemented in the Bengal area in order to reduce tensions between Muslims and Hindus. The Bengal region was divided into two zones, the western part went to India and the eastern part went to Pakistan. However, the people in East and West Pakistan, who basically share the same religion, were separated by almost every other possible dimension of human affairs, particularly culture, economics, and by 1000 miles of Indian territory.

The tensions between East and West Pakistan led to a civil war in 1971. The results of the bloody civil war were the creation of an independent East Pakistan, known as Bangladesh. Today, the former united Pakistan is divided between two independent states, the ‘People’s Republic of Bangladesh’ (former East Pakistan) and the ‘Islamic Republic of Pakistan’ (former West Pakistan). The painful civil war turned a failed attempt to implement the idea of a ‘two-state solution’ – Pakistan and India – into a reality of three states – Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India. Are there any lessons to be drawn from the conflict in Bengal with regard to the Israeli–Palestinian situation?

This paper is not entering the debate whether a ‘two-state solution’ is a viable option in the Israeli–Palestinian circumstances. Moreover, I recognize that there are major differences between the East–West Pakistan case and the Gaza–West Bank situation. For example, the Palestinian people see themselves as one nation that cannot be divided (despite the geographic barriers), while the people in East and West Pakistan had little in common except religion. Nevertheless, despite these expressions of national unity, the physical and political division in Palestinian society is a reality and it is too costly to wait until a reconciliation between the leadership of Gaza and the West Bank (Hamas and Fatah) is achieved.

The conflict in Bengal and the split in Palestinian society demonstrate that there should be a shift in the mainstream peacemaking discussion regarding the Israeli–Palestinian situation. Instead of searching for optimal solutions to the struggle, I argue that the emphasis should be put upon creating the foundations of an effective peacemaking process. The two societies need a peacemaking revolution: a process that helps, manoeuvres, and motivates the two people, Israelis and Palestinians, to discover, mostly by themselves, the road to peace and stability. The question is how to create such a revolutionary process.

The divide in Palestinian society suggests that promoting peace and stability in the region requires a dual strategy: conflict management in the Gaza–Israeli case and conflict resolution in the West Bank–Israeli circumstances. The first intends to reduce the intensity of an ongoing violent struggle and to begin incremental steps to construct a new social order. The second is designed to build the foundations of an effective peacemaking process through negotiations on multiple levels. This dual peacemaking strategy was labelled the ‘Bangladesh Approach to the Palestinian–Israeli Conflict’.
This paper begins with a brief historical overview of the power struggle in Palestinian society; it continues by developing the Bangladesh approach to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict with special attention to the West Bank–Israeli situation; it concludes with lessons from the various rounds of the ‘Minds of Peace Experiment’, a small-scale Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating congress that has been conducted in different locations around the United States, Canada, and in the Middle East.

Struggle in Palestinian society (2007): a brief overview

The Muslim Brotherhood started its operation in the Holy Land in 1947. Its activities focused mainly upon building the foundation of an Islamic state through charity organizations, religious institutions, social clubs, and Islamic education. In general, the Brotherhood refrained from active resistance to the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza and concentrated upon building the foundations for an Islamic revolution. In contrast, the establishment of Fatah, by members of Palestinian Diaspora in the late 1950s, was a result of growing Palestinian nationalism and a strong desire for independence. The Fatah is a secular nationalistic movement that centres on the ethnic dimension of Palestinian identity while the Muslim Brotherhood is a global movement that believes the religious dimension (Muslim) is the dominant motif in the identity of a people.

Major developments in the region shaped the relationships between the two competitive movements and their impact on the Palestinian people. For example, the inability of the Arab states to defeat Israel, the lack of Arab commitment to the Palestinian causes, and the ‘new’ Israeli occupation of Gaza and the West Bank following the 1967 war taught the Palestinians that they need to take their fate in their own hands. The Palestinians then became the major force responsible to fight for their own objectives and Fatah became the primary Palestinian faction to lead the struggle.

The turning point in the competition between the two movements, the Muslim Brotherhood and Fatah, was the first Intifada in 1987. The growing nationalist sentiments of the Palestinians during the Intifada – the spontaneous uprising of the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupation – made the leadership of the Brotherhood consider changing its policy. They began to understand that in order to maintain popularity and gain supporters, they needed to begin taking an active role in the violent struggle. The result was the establishment of Hamas, a militant outgrowth of the Brotherhood.

The two major competitive movements in the Palestinian society (Fatah and Hamas) developed different political agenda. The primary goal of the mainstream of the Fatah was to establish an independent state in Gaza and the West Bank. In contrast, the ideologists of Hamas saw any compromise with Israel as a religious sin. They have been committed to establishing an Islamic autocracy in all of Mandatory Palestine, which they view as Islamic property. Ironically, it was the action of a third party that enabled the beginning of the next chapter in the
struggle between national secularism and religious fanaticism in the Palestinian society.

The unilateral withdrawal of Israel from Gaza in 2005 left the Palestinian authority vulnerable and incapable of maintaining law and order in the region. The following events were a coup d'état of Hamas in Gaza in 2007 and civil war between the two dominant factions in Palestinian society. Today, Gaza is monitored by Hamas as an Islamic autocracy while the West Bank is administrated by the secular Fatah, which strives to build the foundations of a civil society.

The two entities of the Palestinian people began to develop different histories, relationships, and patterns of communication with the state of Israel. The relationships between Israelis and Palestinians in the West Bank are fluctuating between frustrated elite negotiations and non-violent Palestinian resistance to the Israeli occupation. The dominant method of communication between Israelis and the leadership of Hamas in Gaza is violence. This violence reached its peak in the Gaza war at the beginning of 2009.

Despite the political division in Palestinian society, the consensus solution among analysts and peace activists is still a ‘two-state solution’. However, for many Israelis, the collapse of the Palestinian authority demonstrated that peace and stability in the region is an unrealistic utopia. Israeli analysts and scholars saw it as more proof for their view that the conflict cannot be resolved in the near future and, therefore, it has to be managed.

Between conflict resolution and conflict management

The Israeli–Palestinian peace process swings the pendulum between a glimmer of hope in the Israeli–West Bank situation and total despair in the Israeli–Gaza case. Despite 30 years of direct and indirect diplomatic interactions between Israeli and Palestinian elites, the dispute is still considered to be one of the most entrenched conflicts in the world. Therefore, should we not re-examine critically our conventional and non-conventional peacemaking methods?

The disappointing results of infinite negotiations and endless peacemaking interactions between political elites have led more and more scholars to believe that the conflict cannot be resolved in the near future. Unsuccessful efforts to bring peace and stability to the region resulted in a paradigm shift in the strategy to cope with a struggle that might be irresolvable, at least in the near future. Analysts have begun to focus upon developing methods to manage the conflict instead of investing futile efforts in suggesting creative strategies to resolve it.

In general, there are two emerging competitive trends in the extensive literature on peacemaking in the Israeli–Palestinian context: the conflict-management approach and the conflict-resolution strategy. The architects of the conflict-management approach believe that the conflict cannot be resolved in the near future. They provide policy recommendations for improving the domestic and foreign position of each society in order to reduce the intensity of the irresolvable struggle. Hopefully, conditions for negotiation of a peace agreement
will ripen in the future. In contrast, the supporters of the conflict-resolution strategy argue for returning to the negotiating table to achieve a final peace agreement as soon as possible and by any means.

It is quite acceptable to believe that the centre of attention, especially among Israeli analysts, shifted from conflict resolution to conflict management after the failure of the Camp David Summit in July 2000 and the beginning of the second Intifada. However, it was the recent transformation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict into a triangle of destructive relationships (Israel, Gaza, and the West Bank) that demonstrated, more than anything else, the intractability of the situation. The collapse of the Palestinian authority in 2007 and the political division between Gaza and the West Bank forced Israelis to understand that terms like ‘peace process’ and ‘conflict resolution’ belong to another scenario.

In general, the Israeli conflict-management camp emphasizes that the struggle is asymmetrical. Israel is a modern state with functioning institutions, while the Palestinians, who lack the tradition of liberty, independence, and responsibility, have hardly made their first steps toward establishing a well-functioning state. A negotiation process at this stage would only bring more violence, frustration, and despair. Moreover, the Israeli supporters of this strategy believe that any concessions to the Palestinians, who are not ready for a serious peace process, endanger the very existence of Israel. For example, Ariel Sharon’s unilateral withdrawal from Gaza in 2005, which had given hope to most of the Israeli population, eventually brought only frustration and despair. Sharon’s dramatic initiative was followed by a civil war among the Palestinians, a coup d’etat by the militant Islamic movement Hamas in Gaza, and a severe escalation in the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza.

The supporters of the conflict-resolution approach do not remain without reply. They argue that Sharon’s initiative can be viewed as an Israeli attempt to manage the conflict unilaterally by creating real-time facts. Negotiation, coordination, and cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians could have helped the Palestinians to cope with the challenge of the Israeli withdrawal and its side effects. In general, the advocates of the conflict-resolution approach argue that interactions between the two sides on multiple levels are necessary to understand the fears and needs of the opposing societies. These are critical elements that have to be addressed in order to prevent deterioration of any peace process, escalation of any violence, and progression to a resolution to the conflict.

The conflict-resolution advocates point out that lack of extensive negotiations is deepening the frustration in each society and strengthening the conviction that it is impossible to resolve the conflict by peaceful means. Each side continues to believe that there are no partners for peace on the other side, a phenomenon known as the mirror image. It creates an ideal environment for extremists, radicals, and professional spoilers to dictate conditions for the rest of the people. For example, many Palestinians, who strive to live in their own independent state, continue to believe that the only language Israelis understand is force. As a result,
the radical Islamic movement, Hamas, gains more and more popularity in the streets of the West Bank and Gaza. In reaction, many Israelis, who fear the rise of Palestinian religious fanaticism, give their votes to right-wing radical politicians ‘who know how to handle the situation’. 21

The arguments of both camps, conflict resolution versus conflict management, are very persuasive. Part of the reason is that there is some truth in each of them, especially if we examine critically the political division in Palestinian society. Indeed, it is difficult to even imagine how to improve the Israeli–Gaza relationship where there is no common ground for negotiation at the present time. In contrast, extensive peacemaking efforts in the Israeli–West Bank conflict can create precious opportunities for change. Accordingly, I suggest viewing the conflicting approaches as complementary and to implement them simultaneously.

The logic of the circumstances infers that conflict resolution (extensive negotiations to resolve the conflict) is a better approach to improve the Israeli–West Bank situation. In contrast, conflict management (attempts to reduce the level of intense conflict) might be a better strategy to deal with the current Israeli–Gaza case. True, the Palestinian people see themselves as one nation that cannot be divided. Moreover, the socio-political situation in one entity has substantial influence on the other. However, these are exactly the reasons that it is important to create an environment of hope in the Israeli–West Bank situation that can influence the people in Gaza and not vice versa. Drastic peacemaking measures in the Israeli–West Bank situation are necessary to impede the expansion of frustration and despair in Gaza.

The main focus of this article is developing the conflict-resolution part of the Bangladesh approach to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. My main efforts are aimed at constructing a multifaceted approach that has the potential to build the foundations of an effective peacemaking process in the Israeli–West Bank situation. This decision is based on the assumption that a substantial change in a difficult crisis like the Israeli–Palestinian situation can begin only in a place where there might be an opportunity for peacemaking progress (Israel–West Bank) and not in an environment where there is no sign of light at the end of the tunnel (Israel–Gaza). Moreover, the conventional wisdom among Israeli scholars is that conflict management is the suitable strategy to cope with the ‘whole’ Israeli–Palestinian conflict. 22 Therefore, I think that my contribution to the growing literature on the conflict-management approach in the context of the Israeli–Palestinian dispute can only be marginal. In contrast, my proposal for extensive negotiations on multiple levels in the Israeli–West Bank case can help to elaborate the conflict-resolution approach and create a fresh perspective for those who are deeply engaged in the efforts to bring peace and stability to the Middle East.

The missing element
How do we create the foundations of a revolutionary peacemaking process in the Israeli–West Bank situation?
A revolutionary peacemaking process, in my view, is a social construction that manoeuvres the opposing people to discover the road to peace, prosperity, and happiness, mostly by themselves. This requires a broad acceptance that violence, as defined by the opposing people, is not a viable option to achieve political objectives. The main mechanisms to solve disputes between the opposing societies are diplomatic interactions such as negotiations between leaders. The main instruments to reduce tensions within each society are critical discussion and public debate.

A revolutionary peacemaking process provides political alternatives to the violent struggle. To expound, the violent debate in the battlefield is transformed into dialogue, discussion, and negotiation in the political arena. An effective peacemaking transformation needs to involve the various societal elements on both sides in the struggle for change, prepare the people for a new social order, and create commitment to continue the process in times of crises and setbacks.

Unfortunately, the people on both sides were not involved in almost any substantial attempt to solve the Israeli–Palestinian struggle. The result was that any peacemaking initiative that could have led to a reasonable compromise was vulnerable to destructive actions of radicals, extremists, and ‘professional’ spoilers. The rise and fall of the Oslo peace process of the 1990s, a signpost in the peacemaking efforts to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian struggle, is a case in point of this substantial weakness.

The accord was initiated through secret Track-II meetings in Oslo, Norway. It was an unofficial exploration of possibilities to reach a peace agreement. The participants were two Israeli academics and several low-ranking PLO officials. However, almost from the beginning, any substantial progress was reported back to the political leaders from both sides at the highest level. Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli prime minister, and Yasser Arafat, the leader of the PLO, were informed upon almost any substantial progress. The feedback that was received indicated to the participants the limits of possible compromises. As soon as it became clear that the Oslo talks might result in a formal agreement, the Israeli team was expanded to include official negotiators. Track-II diplomacy turned into official secret diplomacy.

The Oslo accord was formalized with the Declaration of Principles (DOP) in Oslo, Norway, in August 1993. It was officially signed in Washington DC on 13 September 1993, by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO leader Yasser Arafat. The agreement was a framework for the future relations between Israel and the anticipated Palestinian state (although there was not any specific commitment to establish an independent Palestinian state). After the agreement was signed, Track-I talks, official negotiations, became the main channel for negotiations between the two sides, while back-channel diplomacy continued to support the process. The intentions were to prepare the ground for the negotiation of a permanent agreement, which was planned to begin no later than May 1996.

The Oslo peace process looks like an impressive exercise taken from an academic textbook for the peacemaking diplomat. The communication channels of elite diplomacy were used effectively and efficiently.
unofficial interaction at the beginning of the process enabled the two leaders (Rabin and Arafat) to explore compromises in a way that they could not do in the official negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians that were conducted at the same time in Washington. The subsequent secret negotiations between officials who joined the talks enabled the formalizing of agreements and prepared the ground for making the process official. The signing ceremony in Washington and the beginning of implementing agreements made the peace process concrete to Israelis, Palestinians, and the international community. However, the public on both sides were not prepared to accept the process and its repercussions.

Desperate situations of intractable conflict have taught us that as the peace process progresses, violence tends to increase. 28 One of the main reasons is that extremists will do almost anything to stop the peace process and keep the violent struggle alive. Indeed, the ongoing suicide bombings of Palestinians inside Israel and the continuing expansion of Jewish settlements in Palestinian territories during the Oslo accord made it clear to the two peoples that days of peace and tranquillity were not going to come soon. The gap between the hope that an elusive peace pact created and the situation on the ground enabled extremists to dictate conditions for the general population. 29 The inescapable result was the collapse of the process.

Diplomatic innovative initiatives, like the Oslo accord, indicate that effective leadership is essential to promote peace and stability in difficult situations of intractable conflict. Political elites are necessary to begin a peace process, support it, and finalize agreements. However, as Niccolo Machiavelli taught us 500 years ago, political leaders should not be trusted. 30 Often enough, leaders are unreliable politicians that are motivated by their own personal political ambitions. Moreover, even altruistic leaders are subject to human limitations and cannot create miracles in times of social collapse. To promote peace and stability in difficult situations of intractable conflict, the conflicting societies need effective mechanisms that involve the people in the peacemaking process and build the foundations of a new social order.

**Revolutionary peacemaking process: leaders, people, and institutions**

The Oslo accord and other situations of intractable conflict indicate that three main elements are necessary to create a peacemaking revolution in the Israeli–Palestinian situation: visionary peacemaking leaders, the involvement of the people in the peacemaking process, and peacemaking institutions. 31 These elements are intertwined. Peacemaking leaders with vision need public support to implement their agenda. 32 People that are involved in the peacemaking process invite visionary leaders to the stage of politics and demand of them to create a substantial peacemaking policy. 33 Peacemaking institutions are the glue that connects visionary leaders to the people and maintain the whole configuration. The question is, how can peacemakers create this revolutionary structure in the Israeli–West Bank case?

A key element that is missing from the peacemaking efforts in the Middle East, and has the potential to begin a peace revolution in the Israeli–Palestinian
circumstances, is peacemaking institutions. Peacemaking institutions provide
an environment for visionary leaders to rise; they involve the people in the
peacemaking process and prepare them to consider a new social order; they keep
alive the struggle for peace in times of crises and setbacks. In short, effective
peacemaking institutions are able to give the peace process a life of its own
in situations of intractable conflict that appear to be most desperate.

Classical examples of peacemaking institutions are the all-party talks in
Northern Ireland during the ‘troubles’, the multi-party negotiations in South
Africa during the struggle to dismantle the Apartheid system, and the political
and civic engagement of the black church during the civil rights struggle in the
United States.

Our proposal is to build a major Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating
congress that can provide a substantial political alternative to the violent struggle.
The idea and vision is loosely based on the multi-party talks that helped to create
a revolutionary transformation in two other desperate situations of intractable
conflict: the ‘troubles’ in Northern Ireland and the struggle against the Apartheid
system in South Africa.

Public negotiating congress
A public negotiating congress is designed to transform the violent struggle into a
political dialogue. It is a democratic institution that intends to reflect the diversity
of opinions in the opposing societies. Delegations are invited to discuss, debate,
and negotiate solutions to the struggle by peaceful means. Any participant in the
negotiating process has to commit to principles of democratic dialogue. The
congress will condemn any efforts to achieve political gains by means of force,
power, and violence.

The congress is a democratic and pluralistic institution that intends to give a
voice to the different opinions in each of the opposing societies. Delegations can
be nominated in any substantial way that reflects the diversity of opinions in the
opposing societies. For example, holding elections specifically for the congress
or inviting delegates from various sectors (academia, business, clergy, and so on).
General principles for selecting representatives could be determined by
representatives of the opposing societies at the establishment of the congress in
a preliminary negotiating process. However, each side will not intervene in the
nominating process of the other – Israelis and Palestinians should select their
representatives independently (according to general guidelines). The ‘indepen-
dence selecting principle’ can give the congress credibility, which is so important
in situations of intractable conflict, where lack of trust is a dominant motif.

The idea of establishing a major Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating
congress is inspired by the multi-party negotiations that helped to create a dramatic
change in South Africa and in Northern Ireland The crucial point is that the
multi-party congresses in both cases could not solve the conflict by themselves. In
both cases, the negotiations were jumping from one crisis to another. Moreover,
violence, in many variations and by different segments of the population, continued during the whole process.\textsuperscript{35} However, these assemblies made important contributions to prepare the people for compromises and lay the foundation for leaders to conclude agreements.

In South Africa in 1991, 228 delegates representing 19 political parties came together to form the Convention of Democratic South Africa (CODESA) in order to negotiate binding principles for a future constitutional assembly.\textsuperscript{36} The CODESA talks, which were designed to establish the foundation of a new social order in South Africa, collapsed and re-established to collapse again (CODESA 2 in 1992). However, they paved the way to bilateral negotiations between the two main parties (African National Congress and National Party) which, eventually led to the establishment of the Multi-Party Negotiating Forum (MPNF) in 1993. The new congress included political parties that did not participate in CODESA.

Despite the intentions to discourage the usage of aggressive methods to achieve political gains, violence continued during the whole process. Major violent episodes – such as the massacres in the South African towns of Bophortang and Bisho in 1992 – managed to derail the negotiations and provided an excuse to end the CODESA talks. However, the bigger picture indicates that the violence could not stop the peace train from moving forward. At the end of the day, the violent events encouraged the two major parties and the top leaders to make extensive efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement for a new South Africa.\textsuperscript{37} The irony of fate is that the assassination of South African Communist Party leader, Chris Hani, is considered to be a turning point in the struggle for change. This tragic event, which threatened to crash the whole process, eventually motivated political elites to reach an agreement upon the interim constitution of the new South Africa. The constitution was approved by the MPNF on November 1993 and opened the road to democratic elections in April 1994.

In Northern Ireland, the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation was created in 1994; the Northern Ireland Forum followed in 1996; and the Belfast Assembly was established by the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.\textsuperscript{38} As Senator Mitchell, the independent chairman of the peace process described it, the road to the Good Friday Agreement was paved with frustration, despair, and multiple crises: ‘this is so difficult! Every time we’re on the verge of progress, a bomb goes off or someone is shot. Will we ever be able to work it out?’\textsuperscript{39} However, ultimately, the infinite crises and scandals could not stop the progression toward peace. The multi-party talks taught the people in Northern Ireland that there is a political alternative to the violent dialogue. These extensive negotiations gave the peace process a momentum that could not stopped by radicals. Ironically, as Senator Mitchell noted, the ‘troubles’ did not end with the conclusion of the Good Friday Agreement but with the Omagh bombing, which occurred a couple of months after the signing of the historical agreement. Twenty-nine men, women, and children died as a result of the attack and approximately 220 people were injured.\textsuperscript{40}

The Omagh bombing led to an immediate ceasefire for all paramilitary groups operating in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{41} The people in Northern Ireland, who were tired of
the conflict, stopped letting radicals, extremists, and ‘professional’ spoilers dictate conditions for them. Unfortunately, the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians is far from reaching this point. The current situation in the Israeli–Palestinian case indicates that any violent episode has the potential to stop any significant peacemaking initiative. The people in Israel and the Palestinian territories are not involved in any substantial peacemaking process. It is necessary to create an effective mechanism that can close this gap. The question is how to create a major public negotiating congress in the Israeli–Palestinian situation that can transform a violent collision into a political debate, negotiation, and dialogue.

In Northern Ireland and South Africa the multi-party congresses did not evolve spontaneously. Their establishment required major steps of political leaders at the highest level and the intervention of the international community. In Northern Ireland it was external players who have had a stake in the conflict, the English and the Irish governments, that pulled the strings in order to convene the various forms of the multi-party talks.42 In South Africa it was the close relationship between two strong and visionary leaders, Frederik Willem De-Klerk, the last president of the Apartheid era, and Nelson Mandela, the legendary leader of the black majority, that played a major role in the formalization of the multi-party negotiating congresses. The diplomatic interactions between the two leaders helped to bypass impediments. 43

In the Israeli–Palestinian case, the establishment of a major public negotiating congress, even in the Israeli–West Bank situation, seems to be very difficult. We do not identify visionary leaders in the opposing societies that understand the importance of involving the people in the peacemaking process and push toward the establishment of peacemaking institutions. The international community focuses on political elite negotiations and do not show any signs of intentions to create mechanisms that involve the people in the peacemaking process and prepare them for a new social order. As a desperate choice, it is worth considering the option that grassroots initiatives can be useful in attracting domestic and international attention to the necessity of creating a major public negotiating congress.

The idea is to conduct small-scale public negotiating congresses – labelled the Minds of Peace Experiment (MOPE) – in different locations around the world in general and in Israel–West Bank wherever the circumstances permit. 44 The Minds of Peace Experiment is designed to demonstrate the peacemaking power of a major public negotiating congress, to provide indication about its potential outcomes, and to develop domestic and international support for its establishment.

The Minds of Peace Experiment (MOPE)
The MOPE is a small-scale Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating congress. The exercise invites five Israelis and five Palestinians to discuss, debate, and negotiate solutions to their tragic conflict. The congress is co-chaired by Israeli and Palestinian moderators. The dialogue is conducted in front of an audience which
is invited to participate in the peacemaking process at the end of each session. The result is that the discussions and negotiations are conducted at three levels: between the Israeli and the Palestinian delegations, within each delegation (every participant in each delegation has his or her own view), and between the delegations and the audience.

The initiative has two stages. In the preliminary stage the two delegations are requested to conclude a general agreement on confidence-building measures and on the suspension of the violent struggle. In the second stage, the assignment of the two delegations is to reach a conclusive peace pact that can put an end to the conflict. The whole process consists of five formal two-hour sessions.

There are two ground rules for the discussion. The first is not to demean others. The second is not to enter into historical debate upon the origin of the conflict and past evils. The delegation are instructed to focus upon improving the present situation, to visualize a peaceful future, to come up with a language that works for both parties, to think about creative ideas that can progress the negotiations, and to make demands by peaceful means.

The ground rules are designed to create a commitment to the peacemaking process, to help control emotions by encouraging the use of cognitive skills, and to make the discussions efficient and constructive. It is clear that each side has its own version of the ‘historical truth’, which can lead to a frustrated debate. Therefore, the two sides are requested to take a step beyond their mutual historically determined narratives in order to engage in a critical discussion about improving the future. To facilitate this difficult process, the two delegations are encouraged to engage in informal settings (between the formal discussions) that include: secret negotiations, the sharing of personal stories, and the development of a better understanding of the other culture and mentality.

The success of the Minds of Peace Experiment is not necessarily linked to the ability of the assembly to conclude agreements. The main purpose of the mini-congress is to demonstrate that there is a political alternative to the violent struggle. It intends to show the power of the people’s voice.

**Between reality and wishful thinking**

The MOPE has been conducted 13 times thus far. Seven times in major universities around the US, one time in a Canadian university, and five times in Israel/Palestine. Each mini-congress managed to conclude at least one agreement. The Palestinians and the Israelis in the various rounds were heterogeneous in regard to substantial parameters such as: political view, gender, occupation, age, and education.

The delegations in the Diaspora rounds (US and Canada) were mainly composed of Palestinians and Israelis who are resident in the areas of the experiments. Some of them have been living outside of the ‘homeland’ for many years and some Palestinians were even American Palestinians (born in the US). In contrast, the participants in the local rounds (Beit Jala in the West Bank) were
living in the region of the conflict. For some Israelis and Palestinians it was the first meeting with a ‘real opponent’ for a peaceful discussion, while others had already participated in different Israeli–Palestinian peacemaking events. Palestinian participants, who have been living in the West Bank, have experienced the burden of the ongoing occupation (checkpoints, Israeli jail for resisting the occupation, and so on). Israeli participants remembered very well the days of ongoing suicide bombing inside Israel during the Oslo period.

The negotiating processes and their outcomes were different each time because people are different. They hold diverse world views and their interactions depend upon many variables and factors. Each round emphasized different aspects of the conflict. For example, a central issue in the Detroit round (Wayne State University, May 2009) was the dispute over the right of Palestinian refugees to go back to their previous homes in Israel (‘the right of return’), while central motives in the first round in Israel/Palestine (Beit Jala, August 2009) were security, checkpoints, and state building. Although each round was developed differently, we can identify a central motif that distinguishes the Diaspora rounds from those in Beit Jala (Israel/Palestine). This motif was particularly noticeable in the first stage of the process, when the panel negotiated agreement on trust-building measures and the suspension of violence.

In the preliminary stage the two delegations were requested to reach an understanding upon practical moves that can be implemented immediately (‘tomorrow morning’). These moves intend to improve the situation on the ground, start building trust between the two sides, and create a peacemaking environment. A major demand of Palestinians in the Diaspora rounds was to improve the quality of life of the people in Gaza, while Gaza was hardly mentioned in the negotiations in the West Bank (Beit Jala). Agreements, which were reached in the preliminary stage in various rounds show clear differences. For example, the first agreement in the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) round (May 2010) includes practical moves to ease the burden of the Israeli blockade of Gaza: ‘Israel will immediately allow humanitarian aid into Gaza including food, medical, and house-building supplies. Israel will allow shipments through having fully inspected the shipments. Israel will gradually allow removal of the blockade as security concerns allow.’ In contrast, Gaza is not mentioned in the preliminary agreement that was reached in Beit Jala in November 2009. This agreement includes recommendations on substantial moves in many dimensions which are urgent for Palestinians in the West Bank, for example: education, checkpoints, security, economics, and media.

These results show that the people in the West Bank are fully aware of the severity of the split in Palestinian society, while Palestinians in the Diaspora are motivated by a strong desire to see a unified Palestinian state. It is true that conclusive agreements in various locations (the Diaspora and the West Bank) speak about a ‘two-state solution’ – Israel and a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. However, according to our analysis, it expresses a Palestinian longing for unification. We did not see any political programme to cope with the internal crisis in Palestinian society.
Peacemaking community

The Minds of Peace Experiment – a small-scale Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating congress – has proven to be an effective peacemaking instrument. For example, the mini congresses demonstrated the complexity of the situation: each round clearly showed that there are major objective problems that have to be solved (not everything is psychology); the negotiations in different rounds helped to create a commitment to learn the language of peace in difficult circumstances of social crisis; the various interactions showed that there are peace lovers on both sides who wish to end the conflict. Surprisingly, in many sessions, it was the hardliners who led their delegations toward a compromise that they usually tend to reject. We learned that not only professional politicians like Anwar Sadat and Ariel Sharon can drastically change their political strategy.

Beyond almost any expectation the mini-congresses did not collapse. Moreover, each mini-congress concluded at least one agreement. It was impressive to observe the determination of negotiators and the audience to use peaceful dialogue to find solutions to the various problems that the conflict encompasses. It was especially noticeable in the first round in Beit Jala (August 2009) that was conducted during Ramadan (the Islamic month of fasting). Most of the Palestinians, who were religious Muslims, fasted during the whole negotiating process. This physical challenge did not dull their enthusiasm to negotiate peace and the two delegations, despite major gaps in viewpoints, managed to conclude two agreements. As impressive as these results may sound, this was not the most important achievement of the mini-congresses.

The most important result of the Minds of Peace is not the agreements that the delegations in the various rounds achieved. The critical issue is hidden in a side effect that each mini-congress created or, at least, showed the potential to create: peacemaking communities. The peacemaking communities, built from the negotiators and the audience, were manifested in various ways. For example: activism – peacemaking initiatives grew out of the mini-congresses (including the Minds of Peace Organization which has been supported by members of the St. Louis community); commitment – Israelis and Palestinians committed to continue and develop the initiative (despite major difficulties, such as a boycott of Palestinian elites in the territories on discussions with Israelis); interest – people in the audience, who do not have any direct stake in the conflict, expressed sincere wishes to help in continuing and developing the initiative; cohesion – most of the experiments in the Diaspora helped to strengthen the connections between different local communities: Jews, Muslims, and Christians. The glue that connects the small peace communities that the experiments created is not necessarily love or altruistic motivations, but a deep understanding of the importance of negotiation, debate, and critical discussion in building long-lasting peace.

The Minds of Peace Experiment – negotiations in three dimensions (between the two delegations, within each delegation, and between the delegations and
the audience) – enables us to envision the peacemaking potential of a major Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating congress. The various rounds of the Minds of Peace Experiment (a small-scale public negotiating assembly) and the peace processes in Northern Ireland and South Africa give the impression that a successful public negotiating congress in Israel–Palestine can turn the opposing societies into a large peacemaking community. This revolutionary peacemaking entity is built on commitment to peaceful methods to resolve tensions and conflicts. The tools to advance political objectives in the peacemaking community are extensive negotiations between representatives of the opposing societies and public debate within each one of them. This is a necessary condition for an effective democratic peacemaking process where the option of violence is eliminated. 56

The philosopher Karl Popper claimed that democracy is built upon disagreement (people have different priorities, preferences, and viewpoints), critical discussion, and public debate. The consensus, according to Popper, is not an agreement but a compromise. This is the philosophy behind the idea of peacemaking community. However, a democratic peacemaking process needs basic social conditions and the readiness of key societal elements to accept democratic principles of peacemaking dialogue. 57 In the current situation, the opportunity might only exist in the Israeli–West Bank situation.

Conclusion

Strong desire for unity has played a major role in Arab politics since the Second World War. However, bitter rivalry between leaders and parties and the lack of appropriate institutions were major obstacles to implement the dream. 58 Indeed, the United Arab Republic, unification between Egypt and Syria, survived less than three years (1958–61). The lesson is that strong sentiments for unification are not enough to create a united entity that lasts.

The main architects of the unification between East and West Pakistan in 1947 were the British. The intentions were to reduce tensions between Hindus in India and Muslims in East and West Pakistan. However, the British, probably, did not take into consideration that the people in East and West Pakistan did not have any desire to be united, at least not on an equal basis. This artificial unification led to one of the bloodiest civil wars in the twentieth century. The grandiose attempt to impose a ‘two-state solution’ (India and Pakistan) in the Bengal area violently collapsed into three states (India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh). The lesson is that any attempt to impose a certain resolution to a difficult situation of conflict can lead to disastrous unintended consequences.

The ‘consensus solution’ to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict remains a ‘two-state solution’ in its traditional form: Israel and a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. Those who constantly search for creative ways to implement the ‘consensus solution’ seem to ignore the severity of the political division in the Palestinian society between the leadership of the West Bank and Gaza This paper proposes to shift the centre of attention from manufacturing solutions to creating
the foundations of a revolutionary peacemaking process. In other words, we look for the social conditions that can help the opposing societies to discover the road to peace and stability, mostly by themselves.

The political division in Palestinian society between Gaza (under the control of Hamas) and the West Bank (under the administration of Fatah) shows that a dual strategy could be a realistic approach to deal with the Israeli–Palestinian struggle. Conflict management (reducing the intensity of a conflict) is a desperate approach to deal with the current Israeli–Gaza situation. Conflict resolution (negotiations on multiple levels) is necessary to start building the foundations of a democratic peace process in the Israeli–West Bank situation. The Bangladesh approach, a dual strategy to cope with the Israeli–Palestinian struggle is not designed to promote a specific solution to the conflict (one, two, or three states). The intention is, however, to lead the different societal elements to build peaceful productive relationships mostly by themselves. The implementation of this democratic peacemaking vision should start in the Israeli–West Bank situation where there seems to be a window of opportunity for change.

As the peacemaking processes in Northern Ireland and South Africa show, a key element for building a democratic peacemaking process is the establishment of a major Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating congress. This peacemaking institution has the potential to begin a change in a difficult situation where the negotiations between leaders are stalled and the people are not involved in any substantial peacemaking process. The Minds of Peace Experiment – a small-scale Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating congress – has shown the potential of a major congress to create peacemaking communities, which are built on commitment to peaceful methods of dialogue. In peacemaking communities, internal public debate and negotiations between representatives of the opposing societies are major instruments to advance political objectives.

The intention is to develop, elaborate, and expand the Minds of Peace initiative. Hopefully the initiative will succeed to create substantial domestic and international pressure for the establishment of a major Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating congress that can help in opening a new chapter in the relationships between Israelis and Palestinians.

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Notes


5. For example, see http://www.americanthinker.com/blog/2011/06/fatah-hamas_unity_government_on_hold.html.


7. For a historical overview of the evolution of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Palestinian territories, see Abu-Amr, “Hamas: A Historical and Political Background.”

8. A modern liberal pluralistic approach to human affairs emphasizes that every person has multiple identities, for example: a national identity, a religious identity, and a professional identity. For a further discussion on this version of pluralism and its political implications, see Joseph Agassi, Liberal Nationalism for Israel: Towards an Israeli National Identity (Jerusalem and New York: Gefen Pub. House, 1999).


12. The dynamic between East and West Pakistan was also influenced by the actions of a third party. The intervention of Indian troops (third party) in the Bengal conflict played a dominant role in the collapse of the united Pakistan and the creation of an independent Bangladesh.


15. In general, Israeli public opinion is teetering between hope and despair, and right and left. For example, Yitzhak Rabin, the former leader of the Labor party, became the prime minister of Israel in 1992 on the belief that he was the only leader who could conclude an agreement with the Palestinians. See Hussein Agha et al., Track-II Diplomacy: Lessons from the Middle East (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 35. In contrast, the ongoing rocket attacks on Israeli towns from Gaza demonstrated for many Israelis, once again, that the language of force and power is inevitable in the Israeli–Palestinian struggle. The results were that the 2009 elections in Israel gave

16. Inbar (“Israel’s Palestinian Challenge”) labels the Palestinian authority as a failed state. However, the failure of the Palestinian authority to establish a decent modern state is not unique. The South African experience, as many other cases, demonstrates that the first attempts to make a democratic transition are likely to fail and the failures can bring catastrophic results. See, for example, Samuel Huntington, “How Countries Democratize,” *Political Science Quarterly* 106, no. 4 (1992): 597–8.

17. Ironically, Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, one of the advocates of the conflict-management approach, points out that Sharon’s unilateral initiative can be viewed as conflict-management strategy. See Bar-Siman Tov, “Dialectic between Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution.”


19. A similar complication occurred in Northern Ireland. On August 1994, the IRA had declared a ceasefire in expectation that inclusive negotiations would begin immediately. However, the British leadership refused to include in the negotiations the political parties associated with paramilitary groups. Eighteen months later, when no negotiations were in sight, the IRA renewed the violent struggle. See George Mitchell, *Making Peace* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999).


22. See, for example, Bar-Siman Tov, “Dialectic between Conflict Management and Conflict Resolution.”

23. Of course, violence is a broad concept that has different meanings to different people. For example, Palestinians see the Israeli occupation as a violent reality, while Israelis regard it as a necessity for self-defence. In our peacemaking vision, the two people have to commit to principles of non-violent discussion. These principles are derived from negotiating compromises that the two sides agree upon. In the various rounds of the Minds of Peace Experiment – a small-scale Israeli–Palestinian public negotiating congress – the compromises were achieved in the preliminary agreement that the two delegations reached. A good example is the first two agreements, “Declaration of Principles” and “Confidence Building Measures,” that were achieved in the first round of the experiment (St. Louis, December 2008): http://mindofpeaceexperiment.blogspot.com/2009/02/round-one-agreements_21.html.


25. Track II Diplomacy involves informal study, exploration, and negotiation between a wide circle of unofficial political elites. See, for example, Handelman, *Conflict and Peacemaking in Israel–Palestine*, 82–3 and Agha et al., *Track-II Diplomacy*, 3.


27. The political elite model, as presented by Sapir Handelman, includes: track II diplomacy, secret diplomacy, and track I diplomacy. The Oslo accord progressed gradually through the various diplomatic channels of the political elite model. See Handelman, *Conflict and Peacemaking in Israel–Palestine*, 81–90.

29. The ongoing suicide attacks inside Israel contributed to the astonishing defeat of Shimon Peres, who is considered to be a peacemaking visionary leader, to Benjamin Netanyahu, who is associated with right-wing hardline policy, in the 1996 Israeli election. For a further discussion, see Sapir Handelman, *Thought Manipulation: The Use and Abuse of Psychological Trickery* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 93–9.

30. Kelman claims that the disaster of the Oslo accord was that the two leaders, Rabin and Arafat, did not trust each other. Each of them prepared a reserve option in case the process collapsed. See Kelman, “The Israeli–Palestinian Peace Process and its Vicissitudes,” 292.


32. Compare to Mitchell, *Making Peace*, 186–8, who describes the reasons that led the people in Northern Ireland to endorse the Good Friday Agreement.

33. Shimon Peres, who is considered to be an Israeli visionary leader, failed in getting support for his vision of a “New Middle East.” The result was that he lost the 1996 Israeli elections to Benjamin Netanyahu, who is considered to be an advocate of a pragmatic hardline policy. See Handelman, *Thought Manipulation*, 83–99.

34. The establishment of the multi-party talks in Apartheid South Africa was very difficult. The people in the Apartheid government were convinced that democratic elections after the talks would lead to a substantial black majority. They preferred a constitutional convention composed of representatives from all existing political institutions. However, this kind of convention would never be able to reflect the diversity of the South African population (20 million blacks versus 5 million whites). The non-white parties saw in this proposal a cheap trick, a way to maintain a softer version of Apartheid. Only diplomatic contacts between leaders from both sides at the highest level could formulate a sophisticated compromise to the satisfaction of both sides. See Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa’s Negotiated Revolution* (Sandton, South Africa: Struik Book Distributors, 1994), 128–9.

35. See, for example, the frustration of Senator Mitchell, who led the peace process in Northern Ireland, in Mitchell, *Making Peace*, 126.

36. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 130.


40. Ibid., 184.

41. Ibid.


43. Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country*, 156.
There is no free movement between Israel and the West Bank. Israelis cannot travel freely to the West Bank and vice versa. One of the few places that Israelis and Palestinians can meet without special permission from the authorities is Beit Jala (near Jerusalem). Indeed, this is where we conducted the MOPE in the Middle East.

Compare to Kelman (“Negotiation as Interactive Problem Solving,” 106), who claims that solutions which address the fears and needs of the opposing parties do justice to each one of them.

The informal engagements are very important, even critical. They create opportunities to get to know each other, to develop personal relationships, to explain the different positions better, to explore possibilities to advance the formal discussion, and to try to soften hardliners. For example, in the first round of the experiment (St. Louis, December 2008) the informal sessions, which were conducted in a Palestinian restaurant and a private house, helped to conclude three valuable agreements: “Declaration of Principles,” “Confidence Building Measures,” and “Agreement on Borders and Jerusalem.” For the agreements see http://mindofpeaceexperiment.blogspot.com/2009/02/round-one-agreements_21.html.

The rounds in the United States were conducted in different universities: University of Missouri-St. Louis (twice), Wayne State University, University of California-Irvine, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, University of California-Los Angeles, and Fontbonne University (St. Louis). The Canadian round was conducted in the University of Windsor. The Middle East rounds were conducted in the Everest hotel in Beit Jala (near Jerusalem). Beit Jala, which is located in the West Bank, is one of the few places that Palestinians from the West Bank and Israelis can meet without receiving special permission from the authorities.

Palestinians in the UCLA round claimed that it is relatively easy to reach a reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah. We did not hear such a claim in the West Bank rounds, to say the very least.

The Minds of Peace Experiment on April 8–9 in Beit Jala left a strong impression that the Palestinians are fully aware of the political split in their society. It was astonishing to learn that Fatah and Hamas signed a reconciliation deal two weeks later on April 27. It seems that a strong motivation for unity is the upcoming United Nations discussion on Palestinian statehood. The questions are: Is there going to be a “real” unity? Can it hold?

It is clear that conflict is a unified force. Adversaries may join forces to fight a joint enemy. However, as soon as there is substantial progress towards a resolution of the struggle, tensions within each society appear and start playing a dominant role. For example, Apartheid in South Africa had united the non-white populations and made the struggle look like “a black-versus-white” one. However, the progression toward a new social order exposed the diversity within the non-white population and led to violent clashes between different factions in the “black” camp. The assumption in this article is that there is a deep division between Palestinian leadership. For a further discussion, see Handelman, Conflict and Peacemaking in Israel–Palestine, 68–70.


Anwar Sadat, the former president of Egypt who almost exterminated Israel in 1973, came to Jerusalem to speak peace in 1977. Ariel Sharon, the former Israeli prime
minister who is considered to be a main architect of the settlement project, decided upon an unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Gaza strip in 2005. For a further discussion upon these dramatic initiatives and their theoretical and practical implications, see Handelman, *Conflict and Peacemaking in Israel–Palestine*, 49–60.

54. The two delegations in the University of California, Irvine (UCI) round (October 2009) managed to reach a preliminary agreement on the suspension of the violent struggle. However, the agreement was not signed. In the first round in St. Louis (December 2008), not everyone signed the third agreement (“Agreement on Borders and Jerusalem”). For a description and analysis of the outcomes in the St. Louis round see Handelman, “The Minds of Peace Experiment,” 520–1.

55. To view the agreements, see http://mindofpeaceexperiment.blogspot.com/2009/02/round-one-agreements.html.

56. Compare to the concept of “security community,” which was proposed in Karl W. Deutsch et al., *Political Community and the North Atlantic Area* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957). According to Deutsch et al., the communication process in security community leads to a high level of social integration where war is not even imaginable.


59. It is not in doubt that there are major problems which have to be addressed and solved by experts. However, we should bear in mind the limitations of social experts and use their expertise wisely. For a critical discussion on the appropriate use of social experts in our struggle to build a well-functioning society see Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).