

The Middle East: Building Blocks for Peace

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The unspeakable tragedy that unfolded in this sixth Israel-Arab war should force us to focus on what peace might look like. The building blocks are clear, but they are threatened particularly by those who stop thinking when it is needed most. The building blocks are:

1. The UN Security Council Resolutions 194 and 242, demanding the return of Palestinians, and the withdrawal of Israel to the 1967 (meaning before the June war) borders.
2. The resolution by the Palestine National Council of 15 November 1988, accepting a two state solution.
3. The proposal by Saudi Arabia in 2002 that Israel withdraws to the 1967 borders in exchange for recognition by all Arab states.

Putting the building blocks in place we get two states side by side with East Jerusalem and most of the West Bank reverting to Palestine (Israel has already withdrawn from Gaza), the Golan Heights to Syria, and some minor border problems solved, sometimes through creative adjustments. No big revolution. Only common sense.

But there are also minimum and maximum demands on both sides.

Palestine has three minimum, nonnegotiable demands:

- a Palestinian state in line with 1. and 2. above, with
- East Jerusalem as the capital, and
- the right of return as a right, numbers to be negotiated.

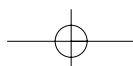
Israel has two minimum, non-negotiable demands

- recognition of the Jewish state, Israel,
- within secure borders

All five goals are legitimate, and compatible.

The Palestinian legitimacy rests on continued residence, and the Jewish legitimacy on territorial attachment in their cultural narratives, and their residence there in the past. It does not rest on their suffering at German and European hands. Any territorial bill on that basis would have to be placed at the feet of Germany.

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The demands are compatible because they can be bridged by a two states solution with the 1967 borders, to be spelt out below.

But there are also maximum goals: an Eretz Israel defined by Genesis between the two rivers Nile and Euphrates (or something in that direction), and on the Palestinian/ Arab/Muslim side no Israel at all, erased from the map. Their incompatibility is obvious. But they are also illegitimate. There is more than a de facto basis for a Jewish state, even if never anything with that extension.

How strong are the maximum demands? A major tragedy of this war that it strengthens the maximalists, not only "hatred". On the Israeli side some will feel the borders cannot be far enough out, at least where disarmament of anyone hostile to Israel is concerned. And their numbers are steadily increasing. On the Arab/Muslim side, some will feel the solution to Israel is no Israel at all; their numbers no doubt also increasing.

The two maximalist positions are emotionally and intellectually satisfying, being simple, easy to understand. And spell nothing but endless war. The Arabs have to accept SOME Israel state, but not the overextended, belligerent monster of today. And the Jews have to understand that settler colonialism AND occupation AND continued expansion will never bring them secure borders. The road to security passes through peace. There is no road to peace that passes through security in the sense of eliminating people-supported Hezbollah and democratically elected Hamas. What perhaps might work against smaller and less firmly rooted groups will never work today.

There will be new groups coming up all the time. Governments may be bribed or threatened into acquiescence, people never. Behind Israel there are some increasingly unwilling governments, also behind settler colonialism: USA, UK, Australia. Behind Palestine there is the Arab and Muslim world - considerably larger. Maybe 1.3 billion and increasing, as against 0.3 billion and decreasing.

The in-between peace position must be made equally compelling. There is the 1967 possible meeting point with minor revisions and the idea of two states with capitals in Jerusalem (thus, Jerusalem could become a confederation of two cities, East and West).

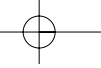
But two demands still have to be met: the Israeli demand for security and the Palestinian for the right of some, limited, return.

Saudi Arabia's recognition is a necessary but not sufficient condition for positive peace. Sovereign states may recognize each other and still go to war. They must be woven together in a web of positive interdependence making sustainable peace desirable to both.

Since Israel wants secure borders, why not focus on the border countries Lebanon, Syria, Palestine recognized, Jordan and Egypt? Imagine the five border countries add to recognition a readiness to consider a Middle East Community, along the lines of the European Community, as a major carrier of sustainable peace in the region?

The formula that accommodated Germany may also accommodate Israel.

There would still be the problem of Palestinian return, half a million in Lebanon alone. And there is the problem of some parts of the West bank being a part of the Israeli narrative of the past. So why not exchange one for the other? Some Jewish cantons in a West Bank under Palestinian sovereignty in exchange for some Arab cantons



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inside a sovereign Israel? Both states could become federations rather than unitary states that are relics of the past anyhow.

The non-governmental Geneva agreement is a non-starter because it fall short on three rather major points:

- East Jerusalem as capital and a right of return are non-negotiable
- borders can only become reasonably secure in a peace community, like the Nordic Union, the European Union, and ASEAN.

This peace solution is compelling by being so obvious.

But not obvious to Israeli and Western leaders now traveling down the Viêt Nam trail, with Israel against Lebanon corresponding to the USA against Viet Nam. The USA did not win, and withdrew. The same will happen to Israel. Further down, on the same trail of mad stupidity, 9/11 and Iraq are waiting.

There is the idea of Lebanon in two parts, with international forces pacifying a South isolated from two evil outsiders, Syria and Iran. As doomed to failure as in Viêt Nam. Hezbollah is a part of Lebanon like "Viêt Cong" of Viêt Nam. And arms are easily available.

There is the indiscriminate killing of civilians, in line with the two points made by the Israeli army chief of staff, General Dan Halutz: to bomb ten building in the shiite district of Beirut for each Katyusha missile launched against Israel, and to "bomb Lebanon 20 years into past" (EL PAIS 28/7, HAARETZ and JERUSALEM POST; the USA said back to the Stone Ages). Hezbollah also kills civilians, but the ratios are at least 10:1 The final ratio may be closer to Hitler's famous order in 1941 to execute 50 civilians for each German soldier killed by the "terrorists" (they used that term): Lidice in the Chech Republic, Oradour-sur-Glane in France, Kertelisy in Ukraine. Most of Lebanon was used for collective punishment. And to Israel Jewish lives are worth much more than Arab lives.

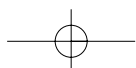
There is the naive idea that violence disappears if Hezbollah is disarmed, along UNSC 1559 lines. But 1559 makes no sense without 194 and 242. Israel cannot pick a resolution it wants, relying on USA forever controlling the UN. And Hezbollah will be reborn.

THERE IS A CONFLICT, THE CONFLICT CRIES FOR A SOLUTION, THE SOLUTION IS AT HAND AND WILL ONE DAY BE AS OBVIOUS AS THE EC/EU.

Everybody should work for real peace as political complement to immediate humanitarian cease-fire. To help Israel stumble down the Viêt Nam trail is blind solidarity, not an act of friendship.

Europeans could mobilize the talent and experience of the European Community/Union for a sustainable peace, not for infinite and escalating warfare. That would be an act of true friendship.

And in Israel itself? A coming generation might do well to question the wisdom of the major Zionist ideologue, Vladimir Yabotinsky, inspiring Begin, Netanyahu, Sharon and now Olmert. To Yabotinsky there seem to be only two options, either "impotent, humiliating self-sacrifice or militant, invincible rage" (Jacqueline Rose 2006: 34). To Yabotinsky, Hews had been humiliated, shamed by violence, and the answer is militancy and violence. This vision, apart from making violence a corner-



stone of human existence, is short on the third option: negotiation, settlement, peace.

And the Arabs, Muslims? Something similar. But Islam opens for a third possibility, not only dar-al-Islam and dar-al-Harb, the House of Peace, the House of War, there is the dar-al-Ahd, the coexistence with the infidels - possibly in a community, not too close, not too distant. Possibly also as an Organization for the Security and Cooperation in the Middle East. The present generation would also do well to elaborate this in more detail, today.

When will those generations come, how far have we been set back? Difficult to tell. The three building blocks for peace have been there for some time, but nothing seemed acceptable to Israel. They never were let into the collective mind, into public space. Outside pressure will only confirm the stark Yabotinsky dichotomy. If Israel wants security, mainstream Israel must want peace.

That leaves us with the maximalists. Their strongest argument against the moderates is "your linedoesn't work". And the strongest counter-argument, like for ETA, for IRA, is to prove them wrong.

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