

ARAB-ISRAEL CONFLICT: SEARCHING PEACEBUILDING MECHANISMS

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Abstract

The Arab-Israeli conflict is among the longest and most international-level-impacting conflicts of the modern world. Despite a series of interstate wars, bilateral peace treaties, diplomatic efforts and international mediation efforts that have minimized the chances of conventional war between Israel and some Arab states, an overall and long lasting resolution of the larger conflict especially the Israeli Palestinian one has eluded the eye. This paper will look at how peace building in the Arab-Israeli conflict has evolved and critically analyze the mechanisms that have been used to change the conflict relationships. It claims that the historical focus on elite diplomacy, interim agreements, security arrangements, and external mediation have generated significant yet partial types of negative peace. The experience of Egypt and Jordan shows that interstate agreements can institutionalize the cessation of hostilities, and the Oslo process shows the weakness of an interim, asymmetrical, and security-focused approach in the situation when the underlying political, territorial, historical, and identity-related grievances are not addressed. The paper builds a multidimensional peace building framework, drawing on the literature on conflict resolution, conflict transformation, reconciliation, and peace building, which is based on political settlement, conflict-sensitive security arrangements, recognition of rights and identity, transitional justice and historical reconciliation, economic cooperation, civil-society engagement, regional diplomacy, and sustained third-party guarantees. It is suggested in the paper that sustainable peace involves the shift of the dichotomy between war and peace to a vision of positive peace where institutions, political equality, security, justice, recognition and social interaction support each other. The paper does not consider diplomacy and grassroots peace building as substitutes, but as complementary levels of long-term peace architecture.

1. Introduction

The Arab-Israeli conflict is a multi-faceted blend of interstate competition, land issue, nationalism clash, displacement, political demands, security issues, historical resentment and identity conflict. The modern history of the country includes the 1948 Arab-Israeli War,

the Suez Crisis of 1956, the Six-Day War of 1967, the October War of 1973, the Israeli occupation of the territories that it conquered in 1967, the Palestinian uprisings, the Oslo peace process, the Israeli-Jordanian and Egyptian-Israeli peace treaties, and many international diplomatic efforts. As a result, the

conflict cannot be sufficiently perceived as a traditional territorial conflict per se. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 of 1967 put in place two principles that have been the main focus of further diplomacy: that territory can never be acquired by war and that a just and lasting peace must be achieved where states in the region can coexist within secure and recognized borders. The next Resolution 338 of 1973 solidified the need to negotiate towards the implementation of the principles related to Resolution 242. These resolutions formed significant platforms on which further negotiations were to be based such as the Egyptian-Israeli peace process and subsequent Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy. The history of the world shows that peace settlements can take place. In 1979, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty and in 1994, Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty. These treaties greatly changed the interstate relations. However the continuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows that the formation of formal agreements between governments does not necessarily lead to reconciliation between societies.

Of interest is the Oslo process. The Oslo Accords of 1993 was a significant change as it saw both Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) recognize each other and creating an institutional structure of Palestinian self-rule. However, the process failed to come up with a conclusive political settlement. Researchers have found issues such as asymmetrical power relations, unresolved final-status issues, and lack of confidence-building, institutional weaknesses, security dilemmas, settlement expansion, conflicting national narratives, and implementation failures (Barak, 2005; Kelman, 1982; Maoz, 2004; Morrison, 2020). This paper will argue that the architecture of sustainable peace building in the Arab Israeli conflict needs to be based on a combination of political settlement, security, justice, recognition, reconciliation, economic cooperation, civil-society involvement, and long-term international guarantees. Peace building cannot be thought of as a process that commences after a peace treaty. The process of peace building should go hand in hand with

negotiations in the case of protracted conflicts and even after formal agreements are made.

2. Methodology

The study has a qualitative, historical and analytical approach. It is based mostly on secondary academic literature, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, United Nations resolutions and reports, and the existing research on conflict resolution and peace building. The study uses comparative case-study method, which concentrates on the Egyptian-Israeli peace process, the Jordanian-Israeli peace process, and the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo process. The theoretical analysis relies on the literature about conflict management, conflict resolution, conflict transformation, peace building, mediation, reconciliation, and positive peace. The normative and institutional bases of international approaches to the conflict are established with the help of primary international documents, such as resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. The study does not seek to foretell the political success or failure of the conflict, but it points out mechanisms that the literature indicates are applicable in the transformation of conflict in a sustainable manner.

3. Conceptualizing Peace building

Peace building is more than just the cessation of armed conflict. The difference between negative and positive peace as proposed by Johan Galtung comes in handy. Negative peace is the lack of direct violence and positive peace is the elimination or the change of structural conditions that reproduce violence (Galtung, 1969). This is a critical difference in the Arab-Israeli scenario. Formal termination of military hostilities can lead to negative peace without addressing underlying conflicts related to territory, sovereignty, political rights, displacement, security, recognition, economic inequality, and historical accounts.

John Paul Lederach (1997) theorizes conflict transformation as a process that targets relationships, structures, interests and narratives and not just a negotiation of an agreement between elites. His method is

particularly applicable to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since it is not only a political institution that is in conflict but also social identities and collective memories. On the same note, Miall, Ramsbotham and Woodhouse (1999) differentiate between conflict management, conflict resolution and

conflict transformation. Conflict management aims at restricting violence, conflict resolution aims at solving the underlying causes and conflict transformation aims at changing the relations and structures that perpetuate the conflict.

This difference implies that there are three degrees of peace building:

Level	Principal objective	Relevant mechanism
Conflict management	Reduce violence	Ceasefires, monitoring, security arrangements
Conflict resolution	Address underlying disputes	Negotiations, mediation, political settlement
Conflict transformation	Change relationships and structures	Reconciliation, institutional reform, social integration

The Arab-Israeli conflict requires all three levels simultaneously.

4. Historical Evolution of Arab-Israeli Peace building

Since the formation of Israel and the first Arab-Israeli war, the international involvement has been the key element of the Arab-Israeli diplomacy. The resolution 242 provided guidelines on the withdrawal of territory, sovereignty and safe boundaries. Resolution 338 then requested negotiations to be made to implement Resolution 242. The 1978 Camp David Framework was also an attempt to settle the whole issue peacefully and specifically tied peace between Israel and Egypt to the larger Palestinian issue. The plan was that negotiations would take place between Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Palestinian representatives over the West Bank and Gaza. These efforts laid a significant principle: the peace in the region cannot be perceived solely in terms of bilateral relations.

5. The Egyptian-Israeli Peace Process

The Egyptian-Israeli peace process is one of the most important examples of successful interstate peacemaking in the Middle East. In 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat made a dramatic diplomatic breakthrough with a visit to Jerusalem. The following Camp David talks yielded agreements which led to the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty of 1979.

The case illustrates relevance of a number of mechanisms:

- high-level political leadership;
- direct negotiations;
- third-party mediation;
- territorial arrangements;
- security guarantees;
- economic and military incentives;
- phased implementation;
- International monitoring.

The treaty has stood the test of time and has shown that institutionalized peace can be preserved even in the places where the reconciliation of the society is still weak. Recent scholarship also makes a difference between strategic or cold peace and more normalization in society. The Egyptian example shows that interstate peace is not an automatic process that automatically leads to warm relations within the society. This is a theoretically significant difference. Peace treaty is able to stop the war but social attitudes, historical grievances and popular perceptions remain mostly unchanged. Thus, peacebuilding should be able to differentiate between:

Peace agreement → cessation of conflict → institutionalization → normalization → reconciliation.

These stages are related but not identical.

6. The Israeli-Jordanian Peace Treaty

In 1994 Israel and Jordan signed their peace treaty. Another example of the highest level of

diplomacy with the help of strategic calculations is the Jordanian case. Ripsman (2016) contends that the two countries, Israel and Jordan, had wider strategic pressures which led to their institutionalization of peace. Nevertheless, he also mentions shortcomings in the economic and institutional integration after the agreement. This case shows that peace accords may be sustainable due to the strategic interests despite the lack of overall reconciliation in the society. In turn, the changes in the attitudes of the population should not be the only factors of the sustainable peace building strategy. Peace can be based on strategic interests but institutional, economic and societal mechanisms are required to enrich it.

7. The Oslo Peace Process

The Oslo process is the greatest effort to change the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by direct negotiations. The 1993 Declaration of Principles brought about mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. Oslo was however designed in a way that it was more of an interim process. Final-status questions were deferred including:

- Jerusalem;
- settlements;
- refugees;
- borders;
- security;
- Sovereignty.

This sequencing generated significant problems. Barak (2005) claims that the Oslo process was poorly informed using theories of intergroup conflict and did not adequately cover the nature of the conflict. Morrison (2020) highlights the imbalance between Israel and the Palestinian territories and believes that institutional structures that were formed in Oslo could not address structural inequalities. Falah (2021) also notes that there are serious limitations related to the Oslo framework and further diplomatic suggestions, such as questions about the political rights and involvement of the Palestinians. It does not imply that negotiations were not suitable.

Instead, it is the institutional structure of negotiations that is important.

8. Why Previous Peace Processes Have Struggled

8.1 Asymmetry of Power

Asymmetry is one of the major challenges. Israel has state structures, military forces, economic means and international diplomatic contacts that are quite different as compared to those of Palestinian political actors. The existing inequalities can be replicated during peace negotiations that are done between parties that have vastly different capacities unless mechanisms are developed to counter them. According to Morrison (2020), the feature of asymmetrical relations is one of the key features of the Oslo process. A process in the future thus needs to have mechanisms that bring procedural equality despite material capabilities being unequal.

8.2 Unresolved Final-Status Questions

Delaying basic questions can help to get an initial agreement, but an indefinite delay can breed frustration.

The key questions that are yet to be answered are:

Borders

The spatial aspects of a settlement are kept to the fore.

Jerusalem

The city has religious, historical, political, and national connotations to both the Israelis and Palestinians.

Refugees

The refugee problem entails the aspects of displacement, repatriation, compensation, resettlement and historical acknowledgment.

Settlements

The issue of settlement has been a significant stumbling block to negotiations. According to UN Security Council Resolution 2334, settlements in occupied territory since 1967 are not legally valid under the framework of the

resolution and it refers to them as a significant impediment to a two-state solution.

Security

The Israeli security issues and the Palestinian occupation, military occupation, movement and political rights issues need to be dealt with at the same time.

9. Identity and Historical Narratives

The battle is also a battle of interpretation of history. The national accounts of Israelis and Palestinians often differ regarding some of the most important historical events. Khoury (2016) shows that the Oslo paradigm of peace building did not merely overlook historical narratives but, in most cases, its practice was based on narrative partition and avoidance, with the result of unequal identity costs. This is important as it is not always possible to establish peace by political agreements. Kelman (1999) posits that the identity of Israelis and Palestinians are interdependent on each other since the identity of each group is influenced by its relationship with the other. Sustainable peace therefore demands that the other be recognized as having existed historically and a political identity without the need to have one community lose its collective identity.

10. Reconciliation as a Peace building Mechanism

Settlement is different to reconciliation. A settlement may form an agreement with regard to territory or political jurisdiction. Reconciliation entails changing the relations among the communities that were hostile to each other. Rouhana (2004) points out that there is a need to differentiate between reconciliation and conflict settlement and conflict resolution especially where power asymmetry and identity is at play. More recently, Rouhana (2018) proposes to rethink the notion of reconciliation in a wider context of decolonization and reorganization of relations.

A reconciliation plan may consist of:

1. Acknowledgment of suffering;
2. Awareness of historical accounts;

3. Memorialization;
4. Educational reform;
5. Dialogue initiatives;
6. Victim-centred approaches;
7. Institutions of dealing with historical grievances;
8. Joint commemorative activities.

These measures cannot be considered as an alternative to political negotiations. They ought to come with them.

11. People-to-People Peace building

People-to-people programs have tried to establish face-to-face contact between the Israelis and Palestinians. Maoz (2004) discussed people-to-people initiatives after Oslo and discovered that many initiatives were put in place, yet failed to stop the breakdown of the political process and the re-emergence of violence in 2000.

This discovery is a valuable lesson:

Peace building at the grassroots level cannot substitute structural conflict that is not resolved.

Interpersonal dialogue might not be able to transform as much as it needs to, in case political violence, occupation, insecurity, inequality, or territorial disputes are not resolved. This does not however imply that people-to-people programs are not important.

They are able to contribute towards:

- Trust
- Empathy
- Reduction of stereotypes
- Communication
- Cross-community networks
- Preparation for future reconciliation.

Thus, the activities of civil-society must be related to the overall political peace building.

12. Confidence-Building Measures

CBMs are especially significant in the context of a situation where parties do not trust each other.

Examples include:

- Mutual cuts in aggressive military actions;
- Communication hotlines;

- Prisoner-related agreements;
- Limitations of some military operations;
- Humanitarian cooperation;
- Joint security mechanisms;
- Independent monitoring;
- Transparency arrangements.

The Oslo process has been studied to have weakened the mechanisms of confidence building due to noncompliance and mutual distrust.

This means that CBMs have to have three properties:

Reciprocity + Verification + Enforcement

Parties can be at variance with compliance without verification. Agreements can be symbolic without any repercussions to breaches.

13. Economic Peace building

Economic cooperation has often been put forward as a tool of peace building. The economic interaction can form constituencies which have interest in stability. But the economic development cannot replace political settlement. A peace building approach must thus be able to draw the line between:

**Economic cooperation as an instrument of peace
&**

Economic development without political resolution.

Economic mechanisms ought to entail:

- Cross-border infrastructure;
- Water cooperation;
- Energy cooperation;
- Technology partnerships;
- Trade facilitation;
- Employment programs;
- Regional transportation;
- Reconstruction;
- Development funds.

The aim of such mechanisms should be to decrease structural inequalities and not merely to boost aggregate economic activity.

14. Regional Peace building

The Arab-Israeli dispute cannot be taken out of the context of the Middle Eastern security situation. Arab League and the states in the

region have been significant in the field of diplomacy. The Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 was a regional initiative which tied normalization among Arab states and Israel to a wider resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Bilateral negotiations could thus be complemented by a regional mechanism.

This type of framework may include:

- Israel;
- Palestinian representatives;
- Egypt;
- Jordan;
- Gulf states;
- other members of the Arab League;
- United Nations;
- European actors;
- United States;
- Other interested international players.

This would not necessarily be aimed at substituting bilateral negotiations but to establish a regional environment that would be able to support bilateral negotiations.

15. International Guarantees

Gap between signing and implementation has been one of the major weaknesses of the past agreements. An international guarantee mechanism can thus be included in future peace architecture.

This might include:

International Monitoring Mission

A neutral surveillance system would ensure that there is adherence to agreed obligations.

Dispute Resolution Mechanism

The disputes might be submitted to an arbitration or mediation institution agreed upon.

Implementation Benchmarks

Both sides might be obliged to achieve well-defined standards.

Automatic Review

The inability to put the provisions into action may lead to an institutional review.

International Economic Fund

A global fund may aid in establishment and execution of consensus plans.

These mechanisms would make peace building a political statement a process.

16. Transitional Justice and Historical Grievances

Despite the fact that transitional justice is traditionally related to the post-authoritarian or post-civil war societies, some of its components can be applied to the Arab-Israeli situation.

Potential mechanisms include:

- Truth-seeking initiatives;

- Historical commissions;
- Documentation of displacement;
- Memorialization;
- Compensation mechanisms;
- Recognition of victims;
- Archives and historical research;
- Educational initiatives.

It does not necessarily have to be the goal to enforce a single historical narrative. Rather, a process that is truth-oriented might enable rival narratives to be recorded and recognized. This is especially significant as the historical narratives are still closely related to the modern identity.

17. Proposed Peace building Model

The conceptual representation of the framework can be as follows:



Notably, these phases are not to be perceived as linear. A number of them will have to run concurrently.

18. Discussion

The main conclusion of this study is that the Arab-Israeli peace process of the past has been successful in attaining partial yet unequal peace. The cases of the Egyptian and the Jordanian and the Israelis show that formal agreements are effective in reducing interstate conflict. Nevertheless, strategic peace may be sustained but it does not imply total reconciliation of the society. The literature on Egypt and Jordan emphasizes the role of top-down strategic incentives but also the lack of development of greater social and economic integration. The Israeli-Palestinian case is another challenge since it is a mixture of issues of sovereignty,

territory, identity, security, displacement and political equality. The Oslo experience indicates that an interim agreement is not able to replace a permanent settlement of underlying problems. The analysis presented by Barak shows the shortcomings of a peacemaking model that is not well informed by the intergroup conflict theory. Studies on narratives and reconciliation show that peace building should be concerned with the psychological and historical aspects of conflict and not be considered as minor issues. The implication is that the new generation of peace building should shift towards a peace-process

model to a peace-system model. A peace process emphasizes negotiations.

A peace system focuses on the relationship of:

- Ppolitical institutions
- Ssecurity institutions
- Eeconomics institutions
- Rregional institutions
- Civil society
- International guarantees
- Reconciliation mechanisms

19. Conclusion

The Arab-Israeli war shows how flawed the concept of peace being merely the absence of war is. The Egyptian-Israeli and Jordanian-Israeli relations history has shown that formal interstate agreements can be used to build lasting strategic peace. Meanwhile, the Israeli-Palestinian experience shows that the agreements founded on interim arrangements, incompleteness in implementation, unresolved core issues, and lack of focus on structural asymmetry and identity may not lead to comprehensive peace. The readings on sustainable peace building reviewed in this paper suggest that both institutions and relationships must be transformed in order to achieve sustainable peace building. There is still a need to have conflict management since violence should be minimized. A conflict resolution is needed since there are underlying political differences that need to be resolved. There should be conflict transformation since the relationship and structures that perpetuate conflict need to be transformed. Reconciliation is required since communities are bound to come up with a way of acknowledging historical pain, political identity and humanity of the other. The conceptual approach of the proposed seven-pillar framework political settlement, security architecture, recognition and reconciliation, economic cooperation, civil-society peace building, regional integration, and international implementation mechanisms offers a holistic conceptual approach.

The main lesson of the historical peace processes is that peace agreements cannot be considered as final. They are institutional initial points of a far more extended process of

peace building. This would require sustainable Arab-Israeli peace architecture to be based on diplomacy at the top and change at the bottom. International actors are able to support negotiations, ensure agreements and offer resources, yet in the long run peace is only achieved through institutions and social relations that can ensure coexistence. Peace seeking must, then, go beyond the issue of how to prevent the next war to the more challenging issue of how to create political, social, economic, and institutional environments in which a new war is less probable and peaceful coexistence is more sustainable.

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