

THE QUESTION OF PALESTINE: DIVISIONS AT THE TOP AND HUMAN INSECURITY AT THE BOTTOM

PART 1: DIVISIONS – THE FOCAL ISSUE:

The Security Council (SC) debated on 25 July 2012 whether or not Palestine could become a Member State of the United Nations – “The Question of Palestine.” Yet, the standard rhetoric clouded the issue and buried it within the ongoing Israel-Palestine and Israel-Arab world divides. Several other divides also surfaced stemming from historic occurrences, present actions and current ongoing conflicts that continue to produce gaps and stall peace negotiations. These divisions reveal the underlying fundamental issue: the divide between State security and human security and the disconnect that exists between high-level officials and the human perspective.

When discussing Israel and Palestine the underlying systemic issues dividing the Middle East and the international community surface. The continual divide between Israel and the Arab world; Iran’s alleged enrichment of nuclear weapons; and the Syrian Conflict – a subject within which there are multiple high-level divides – collectively clouded the focal issue on Wednesday and continue to form the broader backdrop against which the Palestine-Israel issue is framed.

The topic of peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel has been ongoing since 1967. A stalemate in negotiations between Palestine and Israel has endured since 2010. The “Question” of Palestine has been reviewed several times at Security Council meetings. Israel refused to attend the last Council meeting fearing it would only result in countries ganging-up on them from multiple sides. This was the reality at the 25 July 2012 meeting.

The meeting began with Robert Serry, the UN special coordinator for the Middle East peace process. Serry expressed that a continued stall in peace negotiations is perilous and an effort to restart direct talks between Israel and Palestine is critical. The “worrying issues on the ground” make this timing of the utmost importance. A Two-State agreement is vital to reaching peace and security in the region and on a global scale.

The stalemate in the peace process between Palestine and Israel is based on four main issues: Israel’s continued construction and encroachment of settlements, destruction of agricultural and orchard lands, violations of multiple international laws and the six year blockade in Gaza; the internal divides that exist within Palestine stemming from the ousting of Fatah from Gaza by Hamas in 2001, resulting in tensions between the Hamas-lead government under Ismail Haniya and the Palestinian Authority President, Mahmoud Abbas; the pre-1967 boundaries; and a diminished or nonexistent level of trust due to enduring violence and conflicts as well as terrorist attacks in the region.

The Palestinians, as well as Egypt, Qatar, Iran, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, Tunisia and Syria agreed that Palestinians were specifically targeted for war crimes and ethnic cleansing through the use of “demographic change via geographical expansions” and that it represents a “collective punishment” by the “colonizers.”

The majority of the SC, including four of the P-5 (excluding the United States), agreed that Israel’s illegal settlements as well as the blockade erected in 2004 were the main cause of the stalled peace negotiations, with Iran specifically stressing that Israel should immediately return all of its occupied territories – meaning their past military occupations of lands within Lebanon, Syria and Egypt.

The U.S. delegate stressed that “unilateral decisions were contrary to reaching a two-State agreement,” which is essential to the end goal of creating an “independent Palestinian State living in peace and security alongside a

Jewish democratic State.” The U.S. also did not support expansions of outposts. In response, Russia specifically suggested that the U.S. has been supporting Israel’s expansions— an accusation based on the U.S. veto of the 2011 UN Resolution which was to declare Israeli settlements illegal.

Israel was further accused of detaining multiple Palestinians illegally – many of which are children and not allowing visits from Palestinian families. Only recently was one visit allowed. Reports of continued hunger strikes by Palestinian prisoners continue and allegations of torture ensued at the meeting. This is a grave and sensitive issue which fuels anger on the Palestinian side and further increases human and State insecurity in the region.

Palestine was blamed – mostly by Israel for engaging in, supporting and continuing acts of violence. Israel blamed Hamas for carrying out continued terrorist attacks on Israeli soil and accused them of engaging in rocket launches. The majority of speakers at the meeting condemned such actions. All states at the meeting stated they condemned any and all acts of terrorism.

Israel also blamed Iran for supporting terrorism throughout the Middle East and specifically accused them of the attacks in Bulgaria. Accusations significantly escalated between Iran and Israel, with Iran later accusing Israel of targeting and killing its own citizens in order to blame and frame Iran. Further, Iran’s alleged uranium enrichment was raised and continues to trump the Palestine “Question” yet it is directly linked to the high-level divisions which exist on both topics – creating national, international and intra-national divides.

A majority of States blamed the SC, the Quartet and the international community for continually failing to find a solution to resolve the issues in Palestine and Israel.

Amidst all the finger pointing, disagreement and accusations, the actual purpose of the meeting was buried. Many States did not address the “Question,” whether or not they supported the Palestinian application for Statehood. The meeting merely demonstrated continued stalemates at the top levels. It illustrated the inability of high-level officials to properly address on-the-ground issues and reach any sort of standing resolution that will bring peace to a region that has been in the midst of conflict for decades. While the top remains divided, human suffering and insecurity on the ground endure. A connection between State and human security is missing.

The issues on the ground in Palestine are extremely fragile. Pakistan stated that 80% of Palestinians are dependent on aid with a majority of the population living in poverty and 45% food insecure. Economic development in Palestine is at a stand-still adding to the existing and significant humanitarian crisis. Many countries at the meeting commended Palestine for their efforts in continuing to build state institutions amongst economic and financial peril. Becoming an independent but unified State was repeatedly stressed as the goal.

How can such a goal be achieved amongst such disagreement, divides and inaction at the top while the bottom suffers? The Council meeting revealed the narrow perspectives being utilized to resolve endemic issues throughout the region – leaving us only to conclude that multiple players have a vested interest in allowing the Palestine-Israel divisions to continue as they affect the broader context.

Allowing differences in cultural, ethnic, religious, national and political values at the top levels to be manipulated in order to promote bias and keep from bridging gaps on the ground only demonstrates that high-level officials hold State security above human security – and to what end?

The answer is stalemate and continual divide in opinions. The answer is inaction and stalling at the top. A top down approach to peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel only perpetuates a volatile environment

within the broader context. A disconnect exists between high-level negotiations at the top and the human perspective at the bottom. A new framework within the existing system is necessary to make this connection.

PART 2: A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

As was demonstrated in Part 1 “Divisions” within the “Question of Palestine,” a framework for negotiations is required in order to fix the broken system. A top-down approach to peace negotiations is not working therefore it must be supplemented by a bottom-up approach – including the human perspective. A human perspective means looking at how the inaction at the top is affecting human security and how it is impacting the human on the ground and influencing violence and conflict. This then leads to State insecurity. Therefore, if an approach to easing tension on the ground is initiated this can lead to more successful negotiations at the top.

Global Action has a specific stake in this issue. The link between human security and State security is often ignored. Global Action, other NGOs and CSOs can work to fill in the gaps and bring forth recommendations that will establish a better framework within which negotiations can succeed. It is only through peace and security of human beings that state security can be achieved as is clearly evident in the Palestine-Israel situation. Three objectives are required to link State security with human security within the context of the existing system: 1) high-level negotiators must find compromises; 2) high-level negotiators must seek voices from the bottom so that civil society is heard in the debate and 3) the system at the top needs to change in order to include a human perspective.

NGOs and CSOs have a vital stake in accepting this role. Global Action in particular has a stake in affecting human security through building the negotiating framework, demonstrating connections between human and state and connecting on-the-ground voices with the State and international community. Within the three objectives listed above, NGOs are vital to the second two items: bringing voices in from the bottom and changing the system at the top. Therefore, a two-pronged approach could be utilized to achieve a Two-Party agreement between Palestine and Israel and to begin looking ahead to utilizing this approach in order to achieve human security globally, which in turn, will support State security.

How can this happen? Looking at the historical context of the Israeli-Palestine issue by both reviewing the broad-level and narrow-level perspectives, reveals that high-level talks create divisions between nations; the discussions are detached from the on-the-ground perspectives and they only bring a single viewpoint to the table. Can the top officials look beyond polarization and find the human being at the end that simply just wants peace? While the top polarizes, human suffering is exacerbated at the bottom.

A suggested framework to achieving peace negotiations within the current system at the top could include the following: 1) Supplement SC meetings with NGO and civil society voices. Allow structured public comments at the meeting by inviting NGO and CSO representatives. 2) The SC should meet with NGO representatives that have been working in the field to understand the disconnection occurring and to understand what the people want. This will help to find a solution and find a way to achieve peace and security. 3) Start using social media, building applications, using technology to get connected with teams, NGOs and civil society. Utilize the NGOs as part of the team to bridge the links and find solutions by using existing resources.

People on all sides are tired of conflict. A solution needs to be found. It is time for the top to start listening to the bottom otherwise state security will continue to be realized only through conflict, violence and the use of weapons and guarded borders along invisible lines. Why not resolve the problems from a bottom-up approach?

Erase boundaries and borders, bridge differences and allow the people to enter into negotiations. Only then will state security truly be accomplished as global and human security spread.