

The consequences of conflict management in Israel/Palestine¹

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■ Executive summary

The recent return to violence across Israel, the West Bank and Gaza is harrowing, but sadly predictable. It comes on the heels of two events that underscore the desperate nature of the political landscape between Israel and the Palestinians, which is devoid of any prospects for a negotiated settlement. The devastation wrought by the attacks on Gaza over the summer of 2014, the first of these events, is still visible throughout the Strip. It evokes both the destructive consequences of Israel's military campaign and the crippling blockade that persists in its wake. The second event – the 2015 re-election of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – formalised a consensus in Israel against any diplomatic initiative to decide on the fate of the Palestinians.

Against the backdrop to the current unrest, this report assesses the implications of these earlier events through six weeks of fieldwork in Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Utilising interviews with a cross-section of Palestinian and Israeli politicians, cultural figures, leaders of civil society, journalists, and academics, this study offers a broad diagnostic of the unfolding situation. These discussions underscored how cyclical violence in Israel and the occupied territories is symptomatic of entrenched conflict management, a strategy that has led to a coarsening of Israeli politics and the fragmentation of the Palestinian populace. A rights-based approach to the Palestinian struggle may offer one way to overcome this stasis, as could other policies that impose a financial and moral cost on the occupation.

Introduction: the chimera of bilateral negotiations

Following the remarkable success of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's P5+1 Iran initiative, the long-sought but elusive goal of achieving a negotiated settlement between Israel and the Palestinians may very well reappear in the final brief window of the Obama administration. Yet there is now widespread conviction that a return to bilateral negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians would not be effective. Talks between the parties will not reverse the rapid drift towards permanent Israeli hegemony over the "Greater Land of Israel" or the fragmentation of the Palestinian national movement. Rather, bilateral negotiations would likely reinforce the asymmetrical nature of Israeli-Palestinian relations at the expense of substantive measures that could, with time, halt or even reverse this dangerous drift.

The current Israeli government evinces no desire to relinquish control over any part of the occupied Palestinian territories (OPT) that could be the basis for the formation of a viable Palestinian state. The Palestinian leadership is too divided and disempowered to successfully force a shift in Israel's approach towards the territories or to secure effective international backing for their self-determination. International efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement are in fact disincentivising the parties from taking the requisite action for political change, e.g. undermining the prospects of a Palestinian unity government by backing Mahmoud Abbas unconditionally and marginalising Hamas, on the one hand, or publicly condemning settlement expansion without taking corresponding action that might impose real consequences, on the other.

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Together with the possibility of restarting bilateral negotiations, there has also been a renewed focus on a potential UN Security Council resolution to enshrine the parameters of a permanent settlement to the conflict, most recently spearheaded by the French government (Reed, 2015b). In discussing this prospect with Israeli and Palestinian diplomats and analysts we were faced with a range of reactions. Several Israelis suggested that the potential for terms of reference could serve to force the hand of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the wider Israeli political establishment. Despite an Israeli track record of ignoring external pressure, these interviewees argued that in the case of a resolution with wide backing, Israeli officials would have to respond to UN action with substantive movement towards a negotiated settlement or face greater international opprobrium.

For many Palestinians, a UN gesture was seen as an unlikely but possibly welcome initiative that could recalibrate the uneven nature of their struggle. Others, however, felt that continuing to push forward an initiative rooted in a two-state model failed to contend with the collapse of such an option in the wake of the second *intifada*. In his address to the UN, Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas alluded to his decision to revisit the commitment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to the Oslo Accords, given Israel's failure to fulfil its own obligations (Beaumont, 2015b). There was also a great deal of cynicism about whether such an initiative could work, given the dismal track record of grand gestures at the international level. The need to reaffirm well-known policies, like a statement regarding the illegality of settlements, was deemed by some to be redundant. Many voiced more acute fears that a UN resolution would simply "kick the can down the road" for the next U.S. or European leader. It is unclear whether or not such initiatives to enshrine diplomatic parameters in international forums could be effective. But with the ever-widening gap between events on the ground and visions of a comprehensive settlement, focusing on local developments remains imperative.

Palestinians in the wake of the attacks on Gaza: fragmentation and resilience

The division of Palestinian society can perhaps be best understood as one moves from the beaches of Jaffa in Israel to the back alleys of Wadi al-Joz in East Jerusalem, and through the Qalandia and Erez checkpoints to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In each of these distinct realities (not to mention far-flung diaspora communities), diverging contexts have produced stark differences in Palestinian life. With each community confronting a particular set of challenges, there is great concern that the overarching narrative of the struggle for Palestinian self-determination has given way to disparate, localised and easily managed initiatives.

Communities like the unrecognised villages of the Negev or the liminal space of East Jerusalem are feeling the weight of this political fragmentation in the absence of

leaders or institutions that can better integrate them into the Palestinian fold. This lack of guidance has no doubt exacerbated the sense of desperation that underpins lone acts of violence, particularly in the case of East Jerusalem, referred to in one interview as the "weakest Palestinian entity". The erosion of an effective political instrument to guide and unify these various communities into a cohesive and representative whole should be the highest priority for Palestinian leaders today.

West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem

Observers of the tensions that erupted in Jerusalem over al-Haram al-Sharif/the Temple Mount are often quick to read the violence as religiously motivated. To be sure, religion animates Jewish, Muslim, and Christian feelings about Jerusalem and the Holy Land more broadly. Religious symbols have historically served as a prime motivator of national sentiment, underpinning both violent attacks and political decision-making. Understanding the legitimising force of religion is crucial in addressing this conflict. However, reducing the violence in Jerusalem to religious sentiment alone overlooks the broader national and political crises that inhere throughout the OPT. It is therefore imperative to understand the structural issues confronting the Palestinians.

In Ramallah there is hope among the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) leadership that initiatives to internationalise their political struggle by pursuing legal avenues in the International Criminal Court (ICC) and targeted boycotts might "challenge Israeli impunity and remind the international community of their responsibility". The overdue adoption by the PLO of such initiatives builds on widespread popular support for the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign, legal accountability, and international recognition of statehood. But as one PLO adviser wondered out loud, "is it perhaps too little too late?" The value of symbolic politics, like the UN or Sweden's recognition of a Palestinian state, is only effective when accompanied by strategies to create real change on the ground. While the ICC initiative and BDS tactics can have an impact on their own, they hardly constitute a strategy for national liberation.

One of the main reasons is the dormancy of the PLO, the sole recognised representative of the Palestinian people. Over the years the PLO has been subsumed by the office of the president of the PA, the interim government established by the Oslo Accords. The PA was intended as a temporary arrangement to administer the OPT on the road to statehood. Despite the seeming permanence of the PA, the institution of the PLO continues to be regarded as the backbone of the struggle for liberation. "Given all the problems of the PLO", one Palestinian adviser asserted, "the institution and its mandate are still supported, even if its leadership is not."

Mahmoud Abbas's consistent attempts to revive the PLO – including his latest resignation from its Executive Commit-

tee – fail to address the absence of representative leadership (Buttu, 2015). Efforts are reportedly under way to carry out reform initiatives under Egyptian auspices, which is an indication that Abbas is intent on PLO reform as part of his legacy. Despite this nod to reform, interviews with PA leaders in the West Bank revealed a centralisation of decision-making around President Abbas that has excluded the rest of the leadership, leaving major decisions about the Palestinians' future contingent on the whims of a single individual. Institutionally, there is a lack of investment in a younger generation of Palestinians and a dangerous opacity with regard to succession plans.

Perhaps as a consequence of Oslo, and particularly under Abbas's tenure, pressing everyday concerns related to governance and autonomous self-rule have eclipsed the wider national struggle. This has bred a condition of what Israeli scholar Eyal Weizman has called "prosthetic sovereignty", whereby the Palestinian leadership clings to vestiges of control that have little substance in the face of the ongoing occupation (Weizman, 2007: 155-57).

A major obstacle undermining the prospect for real reform is the entrenched division between Hamas in Gaza and the Fatah-dominated PA in the West Bank. Repeated calls for reconciliation belie any intent by either party to pursue lasting unity, and in fact obscure the international policies that initiated and continue to sustain this division. Discussions with members of Fatah and Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza Strip underscored a tactical short-term approach to unity talks. Many in the Ramallah-based leadership questioned Hamas's commitment to the national struggle, e.g. by citing its loyalty to the international movement of the Muslim Brotherhood. Among Hamas's leaders there was uniform scepticism that any reconciliation was possible and a cynical acceptance of the need to maintain the charade of unity talks for the purposes of local legitimacy. Neither party exhibits a readiness to make the concessions necessary for lasting reconciliation.

For this dynamic to change the international community must revisit policies that enshrine the division by ostracising Hamas. Further, to move towards reconciliation, support must be extended to the PA to assume responsibility for administering the Gaza Strip. This includes the ability to address such intractable issues as the merging of government bureaucracies and attendant disagreements like the payment of civil sector wages. Ultimately, reconciliation efforts must contend with the reality that Hamas is unlikely to disarm or become subservient to the PA's security forces in Gaza in the absence of wider progress on the national front.

In the Gaza Strip it is clear that the Israeli blockade and intermittent assaults have failed to fundamentally weaken Hamas's hold on power. The movement appears to be quite

rooted in its role as a ruling authority. Its focus on local governance, intermittent use of violence and creeping authoritarianism have all come to mark Hamas's full control of the Strip. Despite severe financial constraints, tumultuous regional relations, and sporadic internal dissent from Gaza's population and from more extreme fringe groups, Hamas is unlikely to relinquish any authority to its rivals. The cyclical escalations with Israel, most recently the war in the summer of 2014, and the continuing blockade only serve to bolster Hamas's legitimacy. They allow the movement to continue to promote a vision of national liberation independently of the PLO, from which it has been effectively marginalised. This has resulted in the creation of two competing Palestinian leadership structures that indirectly serve the interests of Israel.

Palestinians in Israel

Perhaps the most hopeful aspect of the 2015 Israeli election was the success of the Joint List, a political alliance comprising Hadash, the United Arab List, Balad and Ta'al. Bringing together rival secularists and Islamists, as well as Jewish party members, the number of Knesset seats the Joint List secured exceeded expectations. As a result of tireless community organising, thousands of first-time student voters were transported back from the West Bank, where many were undertaking their university studies, to vote at their homes in Israel. While there is no illusion that the Joint List brings unity across the Arab-Jewish divide, or even a singular vision of Palestinian politics within the 1948 borders, it remains a promising vehicle for political change.²

Structurally detached for too long from the wider Palestinian political sphere, Palestinians in Israel are today contending with the erasure of their cultural identity and persistent institutionalised discrimination that weakens the nature of their citizenship (National Committee for the Heads of the Arab Local Authorities in Israel, 2006; Jabareen, 2007; Natour, 2012). With the tacit approval of the PLO and Hamas, Palestinians in Israel have reasserted political power. Speaking with civil society leaders in Haifa, Nazareth and Jaffa, a case was made that the Arab community in Israel is poised to forge alliances with other marginalised minorities, such as the Russian community, Mizrahim and Ethiopians.³ Such an emerging constellation may serve as a platform to negotiate a new civil agenda, fight discrimination and challenge the dominance of centre-right politics in Israel. However, this case may be overstated. Discussions with Israelis affirmed that many disenfranchised minority constituencies continue to view themselves as part of the right-wing consensus and would never consider a strategic alignment with Arab citizens.

This focus on the immediate struggles of Palestinians in Israel has not gone unnoticed by PLO leaders in the West Bank. With increased coordination and "cross-border"

² Note the recent tension among Arab politicians in Israel (Eldar, 2015; Lubell, 2015).

³ One activist close to the Joint List spoke of tactical alliances with far-right politicians such as Miri Regev, MK, on funding for cultural institutions that could divert funds from more privileged Ashkenazi elites.

projects that tackle issues such as economic cooperation and a shared cultural agenda, the success of Palestinians in Israel is, in the view of the authors, poised to invigorate politics across divides.⁴ As one Ramallah-based analyst commented, “the sheer fact that discussions are happening between 1948 [Palestinians in Israel] and 1967 [Palestinians in the OPT] is in itself incredible”. Given differences in their respective priorities, most of the PLO leaders interviewed adamantly distinguished between their initiatives and the struggle of Palestinians in Israel, while still praising the latter’s achievements. One leader of Palestinian civil society in Israel proclaimed, “while each side does not intervene in the internal politics of the other, both sides are now speaking as one people”. Another PLO official remarked that “our hearts are with the Joint List. They are our people. They are not strangers.”

Among the most intriguing avenues of political activism that are being spearheaded by Palestinians in Israel is the rights-based approach to achieving full equality with their Jewish counterparts. In his speeches and interviews since the election, member of Knesset (MK) and leader of the Joint List Ayman Odeh, as well as colleagues such as Aida Touma-Sliman, MK, have positioned Palestinian civil rights at the heart of the Joint List’s struggle (Miller, 2015). In distinct and relatable terms, often in Hebrew, these leaders have also appealed to the Jewish public, opening the possibility of a joint civic space that can move away from the stranglehold of ethnic identity towards more inclusive politics. While this may be particular to Palestinians in Israel, and may conveniently sideline the reality of the occupation, it still touches on a debate that is currently unfolding among Palestinian civil society globally. Can a rights-based struggle better advance the historical pursuit of collective self-determination?

Israel in the age of Netanyahu: choosing Jewishness over democracy

The results of the March 2015 Israeli elections underscored the solidification of Israeli expansionism across the Green Line with the continuing appeal of the “Greater Land of Israel” ideology among large swathes of the voting public. Negotiations over the formation of a coalition government highlighted the persistence of Likud’s grip on the political establishment and the subservience of the so-called Left to a Netanyahu-led government (Mendel, 2015).

Rather than focus on the eclipse of the Palestinian question from public and political discourse – a valuable contribution of any opposition to the Likud party – self-proclaimed centre and centre-left politicians instead pandered to the traditional right-wing view. One popular MK from the Zionist Union, on being asked about the absence of the Palestinian issue in the campaign, argued that it was actually at the heart of the election. “Had the election focused on the economy, Bibi [Benjamin Netan-

yahu] wouldn’t have won. This election was about security, like every other election in Israel.” The MK’s insistence on the centrality of the Palestinian issue – and the inadvertent reduction of the Palestinian’s future to a security paradigm – demonstrates quite clearly how the opposition has been subsumed by a right-wing worldview.

The perception of weakness and a reluctance to appear unpatriotic have driven the opposition to focus on domestic issues, leaving the Palestinian portfolio squarely under the remit of the ruling coalition. Opposition politicians like Isaac “Bougie” Herzog, MK, the leader of the Zionist Union, and Yair Lapid, MK, the chairman of the Yesh Atid party, have in fact outflanked Netanyahu in their criticism of European efforts at settlement differentiation and on the blockade policy in Gaza (Levy, 2015). Any possibility of domestic realignment appears to lie with the revitalised politics of Israel’s minorities, including Russians, Ethiopians, and Mizrahim, who have long felt patronised and condescended to by the dominant Likud and Labour establishments. As some are now arguing, their shared discontent could finally provide an opening that has long eluded minority politics in Israel. It remains unclear, however, whether or not these parties will ever sit alongside the Joint List in a unified opposition.

Netanyahu’s triumph and the collapse of any viable challenger have therefore codified a conflict management approach rather than the pursuit of a lasting diplomatic solution. Invoking possible annexation in Area C of the West Bank, as the leader of the Jewish Home Party, Naftali Bennett, has outlined, as well as continuing settlement expansion and conducting regular military operations in Gaza are the natural manifestations of this approach, and have done little to unsettle the Israeli public (*Jewish Daily Forward*, 2014; *Jerusalem Post*, 2015).

The outgrowth of this paradigm is seen most destructively in the repeated cycle of Israeli incursions into Gaza, chillingly referred to as “mowing the lawn” (Rabbani, 2014). As several interviews revealed, such an approach is justified by Israel’s selective invocation of its tumultuous regional surroundings as the latest in a series of historical excuses for inaction. With the war in Syria spilling over Israel’s northern border, unrest in the Sinai increasing tensions in the south, and acute concern over the Islamic State, realist members of the Israeli security establishment suggested that Netanyahu feeds on this climate to maintain steadfast opposition to the emergence of Palestinian sovereignty in the OPT.

The unwillingness to pay the price required to achieve Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem – accelerated by the second *intifada*, but rooted in Israeli prime minister Levi Eshkol’s “decision not to decide” on the fate of the territories in the aftermath of the 1967 war (Raz, 2012: 44) – has been accompanied by a

⁴ One Palestinian scholar suggested that with the gains of the Joint List, Palestinian nationalism is entering a new phase in its history.

coarsening of Israeli political culture. As one adviser to the security establishment cautioned, many Israelis will readily choose the Jewish character of their state over democracy. Faced with the threat of possible economic sanctions or boycotts, voters will persist in their commitment to a Jewish state, even an occupying one, over liberalism and full equality. While this calculus may eventually shift, there has been a marked increase in incidents of racism and religious intolerance towards non-Jewish citizens and price tag attacks on Palestinians living under occupation. The burning of Ali Dawabsheh and his parents in a firebomb attack on their Duma home by Israeli extremists was only the latest in a string of violent attacks that reflect a dangerous trend on the far right (Hirschhorn, 2015).

With the exception of rocket fire from Gaza falling on major cities like Tel Aviv (as was seen in the summer of 2014) and the recent wave of stabbing attacks throughout Israel and the West Bank, the daily reality of life under occupation has been entirely out of sight and out of mind for most Israelis. Busloads of diaspora Jews on carefully curated “Birth-right” trips typically see little to pierce this false sense of normalcy, a pernicious phenomenon that small but influential groups such as the Israel-based Breaking the Silence and the U.S.-based Encounter have attempted to reverse. The dogged persistence of such groups and the work of Israeli NGOs like Gisha and B’tselem have painstakingly documented the reality that underpins this collective detachment or denial. Certainly, the crucial constituency of West Bank settlers who regularly drive by Palestinian towns and villages and traverse checkpoints on their way into Israel, or who live under military protection in occupied cities like Hebron, must bear witness to the consequences of their privilege. Yet this does little to challenge the sense of entitlement that strengthens their often-messianic hold on the OPT.

Rapidly spreading acts of violence perpetrated by individual Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank have temporarily burst the illusion of normalcy that underpins this status quo (Thrall, 2015). Apart from fleeting recognition that the situation is untenable, however, crippling violence has in the past generally failed to engender substantive change except for a redoubled effort on the security front. For many progressive liberals in Israel with whom we spoke, such a recurring state of affairs elicits anguish, exasperation and in numerous instances a genuine desire to leave.⁵ This has also bred a more critical diaspora politics, particularly among younger Jewish supporters of Israel (Beinart, 2015; Grover, 2015; Sherwood, 2015). But the lack of sustained costs of the persistent occupation for Israel’s public, as several private sector leaders affirmed, could only be broken by policies that would disturb the prevailing sense of normalcy. The impact of BDS on the domestic front has so far been marginal, as can be seen by Israel’s booming economy. The EU’s successful push to differenti-

ate between settlement products and goods manufactured in Israel proper, in contrast, offers a symbolically powerful jolt (Felderman & Casert, 2015; Lovatt & Toaldo, 2015).

Notwithstanding the difficulties involved in enacting this policy, concerned Israelis singled out such EU guidelines as a potentially effective tool to shake off collective apathy. As reactions to the FIFA initiative and the Orange telecom exchange in the summer of 2015 attested, the Israeli public seems most vulnerable when targeted initiatives bring pressure to bear on everyday life (Reed, 2015a). These pinpointed actions could potentially be more destabilising than blanket BDS policies. The latter mostly affect isolated sectors like the academy and the arts, while the former could affect the wider populace. Local business personalities who are sympathetic to the goal of achieving a negotiated two-state settlement spoke of the need for well-designed measures that could force private sector businesses to be at the forefront of pushing for a shift in policy. Such measures could also be amplified across Israeli society with the re-evaluation of selective privileges, like the need for visas to enter European countries.

With the exception of these isolated voices, the BDS campaign has been met with collective condemnation or indifference. The spectre of boycotts and sanctions intensifies a siege mentality among Israelis that politicians deftly play up. Netanyahu’s assertion that Israel must fight BDS in the same way that it fights Iran demonstrates the use of fear-mongering as a means to avoid substantive change (Beaumont, 2015a). U.S. debates and legislative actions against BDS only bolster this reactive stance among Israel’s politicians. As a result, there is little impetus for Israel to depart from a paradigm of simply managing the Palestinian issue.

If any pressure were to increase on Israel, it has been suggested that Netanyahu will simply invoke regional horrors and provide minimal cosmetic change packaged as beneficent concessions.⁶ They will hardly meet the lowest ceiling of required diplomatic action. As Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s bureau chief, Dov Weisglass, once quipped in the context of the Gaza disengagement, Israel’s goal is “actually Formaldehyde. It supplies the amount of formaldehyde that’s necessary so that there will not be a political process with the Palestinians” (Shavit, 2004). This remains the favoured stance of Israeli politicians today.

A Palestinian pivot?

How might Palestinians themselves break free of this stranglehold? One possible alternative that is expressed with growing conviction is the emergence of a Palestinian civil rights movement, both in the Palestinian community in Israel and the OPT, as well as in the Palestinian diaspora. Many interviewees extolled the virtues of this rights-based

5 Polls indicate growing dissatisfaction with Netanyahu’s foreign policy among the Israeli public, but the Palestinian issue remains low on the list of primary concerns; see MITIVIM (2015).

6 Conversely, PA officials were quick to use the threat of the Islamic State – which is no doubt a source of real anxiety – to call for a rapid resolution of the conflict.

approach, which broadly entails the pursuit of equal citizenship under a single sovereign and fully representative entity. This would mean a retreat from an ethnocentric form of Israeli governance and a move towards a “one person, one vote” model of statehood (e.g. see Munayyer, 2015). While critics of such a pivot loudly denounce the implications of this move for maintaining the Jewish character of Israel, proponents of a rights-based approach must also consider the pitfalls. Palestinian thinkers warned that such a pivot entails a risk of inadvertently steering the struggle towards individual rights at the expense of the broader collective. This would mark the end of the Palestinian national struggle and a departure from decades of seeking sovereign statehood.

PLO leaders therefore questioned the value of turning away from the symbols of national self-determination that had traditionally been at the heart of Palestinian politics towards the more undefined notion of rights. How the two can go hand in hand in securing a better Palestinian future – rather than being seen in competing terms – remains a matter of contestation. As one interviewee suggested, “One can maintain the demands for rights without eliding the political strategy in terms of UN resolutions or the bids for statehood Mobilising around Palestinian rights is easy, but how do we link that with a political agenda?” This debate is ongoing, and is happening both within and outside traditional PLO institutions (Bashir & Dakwar, 2014).

An intentional pivot towards a rights-based approach would undoubtedly serve as a form of non-violent intervention in the current political landscape. Ironically, many speak of the pivot towards rights as the prerequisite to mobilising the international community in support of a two-state outcome. In this line of thinking, the prospect of a reinvigorated Palestinian community demanding equality across historic Palestine and in the diaspora would compel the Israeli government to end the occupation for fear that the emerging demographic reality would undermine the Jewish character of the Israeli state. Notwithstanding the ethnocentric hue of this logic, it nonetheless speaks to those who remain loyal to the two-state model in both the Israeli and Palestinian communities. For these proponents, the end goal of any diplomatic solution ultimately must lead to territorial divorce.

In contrast, for advocates of the rights-based approach, this (re-)emerging discourse forces a reckoning with the prospect of national cohabitation in the territory between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. Given the unequal one-state reality that currently exists in this territorial unit, such a prospect is producing thoughtful and innovative suggestions for the creation of new models for inclusive and representative governance. These models would have to address issues pertaining to collective self-determination, as well as the right of return for Palestinian refugees. Against the current backdrop, such a pivot would be a bracing development. For it to be effective, however, it

would require thoughtful preparation and a sustained effort on the part of civil society leaders to coordinate across their respective communities and combine the Palestinian national struggle with what would effectively become a civil rights movement.

How would the international community react to such a rights-based struggle? World leaders in the EU and U.S., as well as emerging powers, would certainly be hard-pressed to dismiss genuine calls for equality. At a time when both the U.S. and EU in particular are focused on the question of rights in their own domestic contexts, it will be difficult to justify inherently discriminatory policies if the Palestinian struggle is framed in this way.

Conclusion

Events in Israel and the OPT may swiftly overtake this more deliberate reconfiguration of the Palestinian struggle. The current unravelling is an unsurprising outgrowth of a dynamic that has failed to address the systematic elision of Palestinian rights, both individual and collective. This could very well indicate a tipping point that both grows out of an unsustainable reality and irrevocably transforms that reality itself (Lustick, 2013). In such a despair-inducing environment religion becomes a powerful tool for fuelling further confrontation, as can be seen in Jerusalem, around Joseph’s Tomb in Nablus and in the city of Hebron.

For Palestinians, whose leadership is now indicating a shift in strategy whereby the Oslo model may be annulled, the descent into violence presents a formidable challenge. In the absence of a unified, representative and authoritative body, how do Palestinians effectively manage this recalibration? For Israelis, who have only ever seriously considered the fate of the Palestinians when faced with the costs of Israel’s perpetual inaction, what is the threshold at which they will ultimately consider relinquishing control of an entire population and turning away from an exclusionary model of governance? For the international community, which has consistently decried the collective failure to resolve this conflict, when will individual government policies impose a degree of accountability that is a prerequisite for any substantive change on the ground (Dajani & Hussein, 2014)?

It is often easy to forget the context that underpins rapid disintegration, but we ignore these wider trends at our peril. This report has attempted to move beyond short-term reactions to unfolding events in favour of a longer-term view. History has been an infallible guide in this regard: without addressing the core grievances that animate this conflict, any settlement will surely prove elusive.

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