ATLANTIC MEMO #15

Middle East Peace: Back to Oslo – with Egypt

The conflict between Israel and Palestine is a long and bitter one. Atlantic Community members intensely debated both traditional and non-traditional solutions, such as one-state, two-state, three-state and even four-state options. Several policy recommendations have been recurrently emphasized as critical for making progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: the two-state solution is still the most likely to succeed and Egypt has a crucial role to play in initiating regional peace and security.

1. The one-state solution is no solution.
Sociological considerations suggest that long-term ethnic hatred renders the one-state solution unsustainable (Campe). From the Israeli perspective, it is seen as the "Arab-state solution," which denies Israel's right to self-determination and exasperates anxieties that Palestinian citizenship would result in a vulnerable Jewish minority (Petek).

2. The two-state solution is the most promising despite past failures.
The near success of the Oslo Accords suggests that the two-state solution still has potential for success if the "failed points" are reviewed and reformed (Lucke). This option promises both Palestinian recognition of Israel and self-determination for Palestine. Successful implementation will depend on dismantling Israeli settlements and withdrawing all Israeli presence from the West Bank and Gaza (Awwad). Ideally, a reformed peace plan should also demilitarize the Jerusalem area (Cannon). Admittedly, there are problems with the two-state solution: In a world of failed states and terrorism, pessimists argue that divisions among Palestinians will turn any Palestinian state into the new Afghanistan (Petek). Furthermore, a Palestinian state would be dependent on Israel for economic development. However, despite these obstacles, the two-state solution has the benefit of addressing both the Israeli desire to preserve the Jewish state and the Palestinian desire to create a sovereign Palestine.

3. Egypt holds the keys to regional peace.
Israel's anxieties would be better allayed if a joint security architecture were achieved among regional players such as Jordan, Egypt, Turkey, and even Syria (Lucke). Other members point out that cooperation among regional actors is uncertain. Jordan is concerned that adding the West Bank to its territory might lead to changing demographics (Lucke). Indeed, the outcome of the latest Arab League Summit confirmed the disunity which characterizes Arab states and revealed an unwillingness to take the initiative on Palestine. However, Egypt, as a 'neutral' Arab state, must play an influential role in the region (Matthews). President Mubarak is seen as a key figure in setting up an international strategy through which to address the Palestine question.

4. Israel: Isolate Hamas through negotiating with Syria.
Member opinions are deeply divided on negotiations with Hamas. Some conclude that Hamas must be invited to the negotiating table if peace negotiations are to ever "get off the ground" (Matthews). However, despite the fact that Hamas was democratically elected in 2006, it is questionable whether negotiating with an actor who is committed to the destruction of Israel will produce fruitful results (Kilper). Successful political dialogue between Israel and Syria, whether public or behind the scenes, could simultaneously move Syria out of the "Iran camp" and break ties between Syria and Hamas, thereby marginalizing Hamas and furthering peace efforts in the region.

5. Real peace begins at the grassroots.
It is crucial to change the rhetoric and vision of Israeli politics. Israeli politicians should stop perpetuating security-driven policy rhetoric and throw more weight behind the peace movement. While the security agenda delivers unity and maintains the status quo, it makes little contribution to ending the conflict (Galaski). Furthermore, increased interaction at the grassroots level, although not a comprehensive peace solution, is a crucial first step towards setting aside religious fundamentalism and ethnic divisions, such as creating exchange programs between Israeli and Palestinian schools (Campe).

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