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Israel-Hamas-Fatah Joint Crisis Committee

1. What is your past Model UN experience?

Princeton's Model UN conference was the first conference I attended, by participating in the United Nations Development Program. I could not have asked for a better introduction to the club. The conference was exceptionally well run and the chairs made an active effort to ensure that the committee was an enjoyable yet educational experience for every participating delegate. Since then, I have participated in about 8 other conferences, two of which were crisis committees. This past year I participated in a Historical Security Council at HMUN on the topic of the Rwandan genocide. Although it was a beneficial experience to be sure, I have not yet gotten the opportunity to participate in a crisis committee at PMUNC, and I hope to finally get that opportunity this year.

2. What do you believe are the three most important issues related to developing a final framework agreement between Israel and Palestine?

I think one of the key issues is the disconnect between the people and the government of both sides respectively. Specifically, the Palestinian people are often tired of the violence yet the radicals of Hamas are able to retain a position of power because of their manipulation of information and the open hostility from the Israeli government. Another really important issue is the lack of international action - many Western countries have tended to shy away from engaging in the conflict but it is evident without third party action Israel and Palestine will be unable to come to any agreements. In 2009, President Obama requested that Israel stop illegal settlements in Palestinian areas, recognized as illegal by the Israeli government itself. This shows the fundamental lack of any desire to intervene on the part of the West in Israel's affairs other than in full support. Finally, I think the role of the regional actors also plays a part. Egypt, Jordan, and the other neighboring countries often support one side covertly, but they need to help facilitate peace instead of pursuing their own personal interests. As these nations threaten the destruction of Israel covertly, they only feed into the extremist power structures continuously gaining sway in the two nations.

3. How does the unification of Fatah and Hamas affect negotiations between Israel and Palestine?

The deal is not quite a victory for Mahmoud Abbas over Hamas, but it does offer the Palestinians some semblance of a government. Unfortunately, as armed conflict continues, Hamas's ideals only become more powerful, and Fatah loses credibility. Ultimately, the unification in theory would allow for a more organized and efficient negotiation process, but in reality it is the union of two completely different sides, one violent and extreme. It is also a break by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas from U.S. tutelage, and would likely end Secretary of State John Kerry's hopes of keeping alive his faltering efforts to renew negotiations between Israel and the PLO. Israel has cancelled the negotiations in protest recognizing Hamas's growing influence in the area, thus causing this plan of unification and efficiency to falter.

4. Please discuss some of the potential outcomes of negotiations between Israel and Palestine

(i.e. joint government in one state, two separate states, etc.), and the costs/benefits of each scenario.

The ideal solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is often, even offhandedly, cited to be the bi-state solution. It becomes the default answer, made to be synonymous with “peace”. Several decades ago, or even as recently as in 2009, a solution such as this one would have been possible, today as the issue currently exists it is not even fathomable. Because of the extended, non arbitrated conflict in the region, and the lack of any unified international recognition of the Palestinian cause, terrorism has taken root and become the face of the pro-Palestine movement. To speak of a bi-state solution, is not only idealistic, but unrealistic. Hamas, a largely rogue government is now the only government of Palestine with any sources of legitimacy among the people, with approval ratings are only rising, and has squandered several opportunities for a homeland including one in 1993. Today, Hamas is decidedly anti-semitic, making peace talks absurd.

The only viable solutions remaining to the Israeli and Palestinian people are currently considered moderate, if not outrightly treasonous by both nations’ governments, are either a bi-national or a one-state solution. Each poses a different set of issues, one dealing more with the moral the other dealing with the realities of ethnic conflict. However, the fact cannot be denied that any other solution deprives Palestinians indefinitely of basic necessities and the fundamental right to belong to a state. They cannot continue to exist in a political limbo, and there is no stability to suggest the sustainability of self-government. Israel must, in some way, adapt to accept Palestinians, which is the only true possible end to Hamas terrorism.

The options are still, somewhat bleak. A bi-national solution would tear at Israel’s foundational purpose as a “Jewish State” because it by nature requires Israel to become a safe haven for both Jews and Palestinians. Although a more accurate reflection of the people who would then live in the one state, it would undoubtedly face backlash from the global Jewish community. It would also require an overhaul of Israeli legislation and the address of a right of return which currently isn’t granted to any Palestinians.

The other option, a one-state, would preserve Israel as a Jewish state but allow the integration of Palestinians. Requiring less harsh alterations to Israeli laws, it would be a more realistic option for the current Israeli government. The problem is then it is sustainability. A diverse society with a religious government, and nationalistic principles is by nature unstable. Russia still has ethno-linguistic notions of culture despite having hundred of ethnic groups and it is their government’s largest source of illegitimacy. Palestinians would by default become second class citizens, and conflict would only be stayed momentarily, only to lead to future clash.

Given this, going down the road of two states does once again seem ideal, but with an international community, or perhaps a single world power, unwilling to recognize any Israeli culpability, the best options still remain to recognize at least the responsibility of a government to in some way be responsible for its people, whether they want them or not.

5. How can Israel balance its stated desire to be formally recognized by the international community as a “Jewish state” with its constitutional commitment to democracy? How does this impact the negotiations process?

Israel has defined itself as both a “Jewish state” and a “democratic state”, which has raised controversy regarding whether those two terms are compatible or contradictory. As a “Jewish state”, Israel has restrictions in line with Judaism - for example, other religious governments, especially muslim ones, are not recognized as legitimate democracies. Iran frequently receives criticism for this very reason.

Israel has, for example, limited the import of non-kosher meat. This is contradictory to the concept of a democratic state that Israel also claims, where the people, including non-Jewish ones, would have some option of choice in the laws that are passed. Naturally, this controversy creates difficulty for those non-Jewish inhabitants during the negotiation process, especially if a joint government solution is pursued. Depending on how Israel defines itself, those groups may very well be forced to side with the Palestinian authority, further complicating the situation. Israel can only exist as Jewish state in name if it wishes to function not only with the name, but the responsibilities of a democracy. It cannot condone the discrimination against Muslim citizens. It can be a Zion only by providing its citizens with religious freedom, allowing the free practice of Judaism in conjunction with other religions. This is not, however contradictory to Israel's core principles at all. There are elements of extreme tolerance in Israeli culture. The Bahá'í Faith makes its home there, as does an Armenian Quarter in Jerusalem. A Jewish State that is fully democratic is a somewhat contradictory term, however a democratic Zion is not.