

The Future of the Middle East Peace Process

Panel: Session 4 (Lilac/Tulip)

Date/Time: April 26, 2012 / 14:30-15:45

Organizing Institution: Moshe Dayan Center

Speakers: Uzi Rabi, Moshe Dayan Center (moderator)
Paul Rivlin, Moshe Dayan Center
Rami Ginat, Bar-Ilan University
Ephraim Lavie, The Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research

Panel Short Summary

Kim Jiseon, Ewha Womans University
Steven Denney, Yonsei University

Moderator Uzi Rabi leads off the discussion by remarking that the Middle East has seen the “most tumultuous change” over the last couple of years. Despite a connection made by some that this is part of the “Arab Spring,” Rabi suggests it has more to do with the geopolitical and economic landscape and political culture of the states involved. After directing the discussion away from popular clichés as a way to understand the Middle East, Uzi introduced the panel topics: the Israeli-Syrian conflict, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the relationship between economics and peace.

Rami Ginat focused on two points about Israeli-Syrian relations. The first topic he discussed was the causes for the deadlock in negotiations, which is related to issues of legitimacy. In 1966, the Alawi-oriented military officers took power through a coup and imposed their rule over a majority Sunni population, which to this day has been a source of popular discontent, even violence. According to Ginat, what we are experiencing after the Arab Spring is the awakening of Syrian Sunnis. The second topic was Israeli-Syrian relations after the Syrian uprising. Ginat argues that the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty is a good example of how to resolve a border dispute through international arbitration. To make a breakthrough, a democratically elected Syrian government, together with the Israelis, should submit their territorial dispute for international arbitration.

Pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Ephraim Lavie identifies three main problems: legitimacy, representation, and cooperation. Following the agreement between

the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel in 1993 to work towards implementing a two state solution, the process was repeatedly derailed by other issues. One issue that complicated negotiations was the establishment of Hamas as a political organization in the Gaza Strip, whose mandate was to liberate Palestine through “holy war” against Israel, whom it does not recognize. The election of Hamas as the representative political party of the Gaza Strip in 2006 undermined the legitimacy of the PLO and its non-belligerent sister party Fatah, causing a split between the two. Furthermore, Palestinian infighting has been exacerbated by uncompromising Israeli rightist who refuse to negotiate in a hostile environment. Recapping the post-Arab Spring environment, Lavie points out that despite the PLO’s best effort, including the Palestine 194 movement, political gridlock still exists. One suggestion given is that all interested parties abandon the two-state solution and recognize that a one-state solution is the new political reality.

Paul Rivlin maintains that we can summarize the structure of the peace process within three circles. The inner circle includes countries such as Israel, Palestine, and Syria, which have direct links. The middle circle consists of countries like Jordan and Egypt, which are not directly involved but can partly impact the process. The outer circle is the rest of the world. He also discusses the two roles of the relationship between peace and economics. Firstly, economics can be a political solution by increasing the incentives to move toward peace. Secondly, economic cooperation can be an alternative to political peace; the key example being the European Economic Community. Also, when people have economic difficulties, extremism can develop. Thus, it is important to establish a stable economy to prevent extremism and to establish peaceful economic relations.

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