



Doing Almost Nothing is a Good Option

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Following the failure of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, 'doing nothing' and managing the conflict is Israel's most sensible approach to the situation. Israel should patiently adopt a 'wait and see' approach, and certainly not undertake any radical unilateral moves.

Now that the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations have ended in failure, many political actors advocate taking advantage of the political limbo to advance their preferred unilateral plans. The Israeli political right-wing is promoting annexation of Area C, while the left-wing is advocating a "coordinated" (whatever that means) unilateral withdrawal. Government officials have spoken about the need for Israel to "do something." Others suggest negotiating with the Quartet, instead of the Palestinians.

Activism is unquestionably a trait that is admired in Israel. Zionist-rooted rhetoric such as "we have to determine our borders and destiny on our own" indeed falls on receptive ears.

However, probably the wisest course of action for Israel is a patient and cautious "wait and see" approach. Resolving the conflict is impossible, but attempting to manage it in order to minimize suffering to both sides and to minimize the diplomatic costs to Israel – is within reach.

Kerry's initiative has indeed ended in failure. But the sky has not fallen. There is no sense of alarm or fear of a great impending crisis, not in Israel nor in the region nor elsewhere in the world.

Real pressure on Israel to change the status quo is unlikely. The assumption that time is running against Israel is simply wrong. As a matter of fact, the

Palestinian issue is likely to become less salient in the international arena over time.

After the Kerry debacle, Washington is left counting an additional foreign policy failure, trying to digest what happened and pondering on how to proceed. Its current instinct is to stay away from interventionist initiatives. The US, drained by two wars (Afghanistan and Iraq) and blessed with new energy finds, does not want to get dragged into further conflicts in a Middle East that seems less central to its interests. So the Obama administration may be less inclined to intervene in the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict than ever before. Even if the US obsession with Palestinian statehood persists for some reason, it is still better for Israel to wait and learn Washington's next moves before devising an adequate response.

Moreover, in light of America's great importance to Israel, uncoordinated unilateral steps by Israel regarding the West Bank are not advisable. Israeli statements expressing a commitment to future peace negotiations, coupled with restraint in building beyond the settlement blocs, might be enough to keep America at bay and reluctant to intervene.

The US is also unlikely to be confronted with Arab pressure to focus on the Palestinian issue if Israel does not engage in drastic steps. The Arab world is undergoing a tremendously difficult economic and socio-political crisis and is busy dealing with domestic problems. Moreover, the Iranian nuclear threat continues to be the most urgent foreign policy issue, putting most Sunni states in the same strategic boat as Israel. Even the Palestinians do not take Arab lip service on their behalf seriously.

In all probability, most countries of the world can also live with an unresolved Palestinian issue. There are many simmering territorial conflicts all over the world. Nowadays, Crimea and Eastern Ukraine dominate the news. In the coming months and years, many human and political tragedies will divert attention away from the Palestinian issue.

Significantly, the Palestinians have no impact on truly important strategic issues such as nuclear proliferation or energy that might galvanize powerful states into action. Once, the Palestinians were an important actor in international terrorism. This is no longer true. Nowadays, Palestinians are very dependent upon international aid. Rocking the boat by using too much violence threatens the livelihood of Palestinians receiving the Palestinian Authority's salaries and benefits, and risks Israel's strong retaliation. Simply put, the Palestinians have only limited international leverage and are vulnerable to Israel's potentially harmful countermeasures.

Moreover, the Palestinians have an excellent record of "shooting themselves in their own foot." The unity agreement between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas is the latest example of this.

Whatever some experts say, Israel is not isolated in the international community. Israel is a strong country, possessing a remarkable web of international interactions. Significantly, Israel's relations with the world are only marginally affected by its conflict with the Palestinians.

The political actors most obsessed with the Palestinian issue, the Israeli political Left and the Europeans, are in decline. The Oslo process, with which the Israeli Left was associated, has failed, delegitimizing its initiators. The Eurozone is facing acute problems, further reducing its limited ability to be a true strategic actor. The ability of these weakened political actors to push the Palestinian issue to the top of the international agenda has become increasingly curtailed. Contemporary international circumstances could lead to further marginalization of the Palestinian issue.

Israelis, like many misguided Westerners, often succumb to counterproductive hyper-activism. Yet doing almost nothing might bring about better results than activating unilateral plans of all kinds.

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