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| |  |  | | --- | --- | | **The Negotiations in South Africa; Lessons for Palestine** | | | *Date:* November 18, 2003 PASSIA, *Ramallah*   *Speaker:* Dr Greg Mills, National Director, The South African Institute of International Affairs | |  | | --- | | [http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/images/meetings/Nov-18-SA-Greg-Mills-ss.jpg](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/images/meetings/Nov18-SouthAfrica.htm) [More Photos](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/images/meetings/Nov18-SouthAfrica.htm) | | | :: [Summary](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/meetings/2003/Nov18-Text-South-Africa.htm#1)  :: [Notes for the lecture by Greg Mills and Tim Hughes](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/meetings/2003/Nov18-Text-South-Africa.htm#2) |  |  |  | | --- | --- | | **:: Summary** |  |      |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | **Participants:** |  | Marwan Barakat, PCBS; Rowan Al-Faqih, Birzeit University; Nizar Farsakh, NSU; Amal Husein, NSU; Nasser Qatami, PCYL; Wafa’ Abdel Rahman, MIFTAH; Niall Holohan, Irish Representatives Office; Holger Tillmann, German Representatives Office; Samer Salameh, PCYL; Dr Mahdi Abdul Hadi, PASSIA; Nick Kardahji, PASSIA; Areej Alyousef, PASSIA; Hanlie Booysen, South African representative; Hijazi Natsheh, PASSIA. | |  |  |  |  | |  | **Summary:** |  | The subject of the meeting today was comparisons between the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa and the situation in Israel/Palestine. The speaker was Dr Greg Mills, National Director at the South African Institute of International Affairs (SAIIA). The following points constitute a summary of Dr Mills’ talk and the discussion that followed. |   **South Africa and Israel/Palestine; Zionism vs. Apartheid**   * During the 1980's the three archetypal conflicts that regularly appeared in academic literature were South Africa , Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine. Only the first conflict has reached a peaceful resolution. This suggests significant disparities between this case and the other two. * Comparisons are often made between Afrikaaners and Israelis, Z ionism and Apartheid and Black South Africans and Palestinians. However the extent to which these comparisons are valid is questionable. * Both South Africa and Israel developed similar foreign policies. Both states sought to destabilize their neighbors in order to minimize their support for opposition factions and to enhance internal security (e.g. Israel sought to eliminate PLO bases in adjacent Arab states whilst the Afrikaaner state reduced the capacity of Southern African countries to assist the ANC). * Security is more pertinent in the Israel/Palestine case than in South Africa . The Israel/Palestine situation has witnessed all out territorial war involving neighboring states as well. The South African conflict was relatively muted by comparison and featured considerably fewer major acts of terrorism. Political violence did not play a key role in determining the outcome of that conflict. * There is an existential factor at work in the Israel/Palestine conflict which was largely absent in the case of South Africa . This is illustrated most effectively by the fact that whereas the vast majority of South Africans, black and white, accepted some form of one state settlement, only the notion of a two-state solution enjoys widespread acceptance in both communities in the Israel/Palestine case. The Israel/Palestine conflict is in a sense a conflict over the right to exist. * The Israel/Palestine conflict deals in absolutes, whether it is the right to return or questions of sovereignty (e.g. both sides demand exclusive sovereignty over Jerusalem/Al Quds). Black South Africans on the other hand were demanding *quantitative*change – i.e. they wanted an extension of the kind of democracy enjoyed by white Afrikaaners. Territory was not a factor in South Africa with both communities agreeing on the borders of the state and the need for a unified polity.     **Some Remarks on the Progress Towards Peace in South Africa**    South Africa was ‘ripe' for resolution by the late 1980's. From 1977 onwards the South African state had responding to a worsening national, regional and international situation with a major security clampdown. This succeeded in buying the Afrikaaner's 12 more years by which time international isolation and economic collapse demanded a change of tactics. The ANC had also reached a stalemate. Unable to make inroads military against the Afrikaaners, they had succeeded in making the country ungovernable. However the state still maintained military superiority.    A crucial factor in the South Africa case was *leadership*. Both F.W. de Klerk and Nelson Mandela were capable of leading their respective communities to a position they had not previously believed possible. Crucially, both leaders recognized the need to support the other and not to place pressure upon weak points. A successful political resolution was only made possible by the extensive co-operation between the two sides. Arguably this degree of mutual trust is absent in Israel/Palestine, aptly demonstrated by Israel 's continued attempts to undermine PA President Yasser Arafat.    Both leaders were also ‘hard-nosed' politicians who sought the best deal for their respective communities. At the same time they recognized the need to make compromises on crucial issues in order to keep the opposition on board during the peace process. Mandela and De Klerk were also highly pragmatic acknowledging the fact that a worsening national and international situation was affecting all South Africans and it was in no ones interests to maintain the status quo.    However it is also true that as time went on the level of negotiations intensified and more individuals became involved. It was not a ‘one man show'; many figures were involved in the search for a durable settlement. Single individuals by comparison dominate the Israel/Palestine conflict, especially on the Palestinian side. Questions remain about Arafat's ability to deliver a political settlement whilst the Israelis continue to support leaders incapable of making peace.    Civil society also played a crucial role in driving the peace process forward as did the business community. Given the dire economic situation it was in the interests of the latter to push for a settlement in order to end South Africa 's international isolation. A free and inquisitive media also helped make a resolution possible.    Another important factor in South Africa was the isolation of the extremist factions and the general acceptance of the need for a ‘moderate' solution. The bulk of both communities were agreed upon the strategy being embarked upon, whereas in Israel/Palestine hard-line factions on both sides play a significant part in influencing the course of the conflict.    External pressure was less marked than in the Israel/Palestine conflict. In the latter, Diaspora elements have been successful in elevating the importance of the conflict, and combined with the strategic importance of the region have made it an issue for the international community as a whole and particularly for the United States .    A potentially significant similarity between South Africa and Israel has been the pursuit of settlement policies. In both cases this has, ironically, undermined the drive towards a two-state settlement.    **Some Responses to the Talk**   Several participants were interested to know more about how the white community in South Africa had been persuaded to agree to a settlement. In response, Dr Mill's made a number of points;     * Firstly there has been, historically, a far greater degree of integration between the two communities in South Africa than is the case in Israel/Palestine. Many black South African's worked for white South Africans for example. Both communities shared similar experiences and differences in culture or religion were absent or less marked. This is significant because it meant that white South Africans could more readily accept black demands for equality and could envisage a power-sharing agreement. * White South Africans were desperate for international recognition and an end to the isolation that Apartheid had brought. As such they were willing to embrace political reform in order to open South Africa up to the rest of the world. * There was a strong liberal ethic which pervaded and influenced South African society. Portraying the conflict as white vs. black is misleading as many white South Africans supported the ANC, and indeed the organization had many prominent white members. * By the late 1980's there was a strong desire for peace among the Afrikaaner community. People were weary of ceaseless conflict and were highly receptive to change. There was a general feeling of relief when Apartheid ended. * Another crucial factor was economics. The South African economy was running at a 10-12% deficit by the late 1980's and international sanctions were exacting a heavy toll. Hence white South Africans could see their interests were not being served by a continuation of the policies of Apartheid. * In addition there was increasing pressure from the military who argued that political reforms were needed alongside security measures if long-term stability was to be achieved (cf. similar arguments from senior IDF and intelligence officers in Israel ).     Dr Mills questioned whether Israeli society had reached the same position that white Afrikaaners had by the early 1990's. Several participants agreed that many of the factors which influenced the white community in South Africa are absent in Israel/Palestine. For instance the economic situation although bad has not reached the dire levels experienced in South Africa . Indeed there are some small signs of economic recovery in Israel (it is worth noting that Israel still receives substantial amounts of foreign aid, unlike South Africa under Apartheid).    Similarly there seems to be much less of a desire for peace in Israel , relative to South Africa . Support for Likud and other hard-line parties has risen and PM Sharon still enjoys popular backing for his aggressive stance.       |  |  | | --- | --- | | **:: Notes for the lecture by Greg Mills and Tim Hughes** |  |   **Introduction**  Of the three archetypal divided society conflict-ridden societies case studies of the 1980's ( South Africa , Northern Ireland and Israel/Palestine) only South Africa has reached a peaceful settlement, despite repeated attempts (Good Friday Agreement, Camp David and the Road Map). Does this suggest that the differences between the three case studies have precluded settlement in the other two, Israel in particular?    SA's situation with Israel has been compared in a number of respects:     * Afrikaners and Israelis – search for a modern homeland. Lost tribes/lost white tribe. * Conflict resolution – inspired SA involvement in Spier talks for example. * The plight of the Palestinians being akin to that of black South Africans – in terms of not having equal rights to Israelis. * The equation of Z ionism with apartheid and, in some sectors in SA, Israel 's depiction as an apartheid state. * The related depiction of areas set aside for Palestinians as “Palestans, dreadfully reminiscent of the Bantustans established in the most repressive days of white rule in South Africa ”. **[**[1](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/meetings/2003/Nov18-Text-South-Africa.htm#_ftn1)**]** * Questions about human rights abuses by Israel on Palestinians. * The use of military attacks by Israel on neighbouring areas seen as similar to the destabilisation strategy pursued by apartheid South Africa in Southern Africa during the late 1970s and 1980s.     What was the nature of the South African conflict, why was it soluble and how might this contrast with the Israeli Palestinian conflict?      **Nature of the conflict**   * Israel-Palestinian conflict more existential in nature than South African * Based on fundamental questions both of existence and identity for both sides * Security threat more intensive, more immediate and more pervasive than South African conflict * Israel-Palestinian-Arab conflict marked by all out territorial war and occupation interspersed by periods of intense terrorism and destabilisation * South Africa engaged in ‘border wars', low intensity civil war and less intensive or brutal terrorism * Israeli-Palestinian conflict and disputes characterised by a phalanx of perceived absolutes (right to exist), rights (right of return) and non-negotiable (sovereignty over Jerusalem ) * South African conflict the only absolutes were political in nature (constitutional protection, full franchise, non-discrimination etc) * Israeli-Palestinian conflict complicated by religious, cultural, race, ethnicity and Diaspora/refugee concerns * South African conflict racial and political and to a lesser degree ethnic * Territory crucial to Israeli-Palestinian conflict * Territory never a serious impediment to a South African resolution     Key factors to be compared and contrasted include:  **Timing**   * South Africa was arguably ‘ripe' for resolution in the early 1990s (end of cold war, sanctions biting, intensifying civil unrest, change of political leadership, conflict stalemate) * Despite tectonic progress at through Oslo , momentum lost in Israel-Palestinian settlement * Although timing artificially set by Clinton at Camp David , a clear oportunity lost from which neither side has yet recovered. * Post 9-11; post Saddam Iraq , Bush doctrine, Road Map perhaps Israeli-Conflict now riper for resolution?   **Leadership**   * Was there something unique about De Klerk and Mandela as political leaders? Yes and no * Yes in terms of breaking with the past, taking respective constituencies to conclusions unforeseen, Mandela's charisma, force of personality and conciliatory nation-building qualities * Neither leader had a clear mandate to negotiate a final settlement, but had sufficient authority and support to deliver * Important to note in South Africa the depth of negotiating teams on both sides, not a one man show * However, Mandela and De Klerk were driven by pragmatism and by the rapid foreclosing of choice and opportunity. * Both are hard-nosed politicians that sought to cut the best compromise deal for their respective constituencies     By contrast:   * Can Arafat deliver peace for the Palestinians? * Does Arafat seek a settlement? * Is there and end-game for Arafat? * Will Arafat allow the Palestinian Authority to negotiate a peace? * What sort of leader does he wish to be remembered as? * Why has Israel been unable to replace Rabin as leader? * Why has it elected leaders the calibre of Netanyahu and Sharon? * Why have leaders such as Peres failed? * Why did Barak fail? * Sharon may be able to secure an element of security, but can he secure peace?   **Process**   * No pre-conceived plan or roadmap for the South African settlement * No external brokering, interference or guidance * No pre-conditions, these followed negotiations * No exclusions in peace process (save for those who excluded themselves) * Release of all political prisoners * Everything on the table for discussion * Emphasis on absolute inclusivity and the cardinal principle of negotiations over violence * Despite assassinations, spoilers and dirty tricks, negotiations were put back on track each time they struck stalemate by protagonists themselves * The lessons from conflict resolution can thus be seen, notably, in terms of strengthening the opponent so that they can deliver; making concessions – critical in building trust and a sense of mutual reward and loss; establishing methodology and partners with whom one ‘can do business'. * Another lesson is the value of ‘protracted negotiations' such as in SA; as well as the need for ‘transitional steps' in the building of a new government. Regarding the SA experience, when Mandela was released, the ANC and its allies demanded that the government be immediately disbanded and elections held within six months, at least elections for a constituent assembly which would write the constitution. The government, however, “intent on finding a formula to enhance the power of the white minority, insisted on prolonged negotiations and on staying in power until the elections”. **[**[2](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/meetings/2003/Nov18-Text-South-Africa.htm#_ftn2)**]** Despite the ANC's dismay and concerns, the slow transition was critical to success and showed the both parties that their involvement and consensus was required. They had, to put it simply, to find out what they had in common and not only what divided them.        |  | | --- | |  |   [**[1]**](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/meetings/2003/Nov18-Text-South-Africa.htm#_ftnref1) Naomi Chazan, ‘Disengagement not Separation', *The Jerusalem Post*, 14 June 2002 . See also Edward Said, ‘Palestinian victory will be won in US', *Sunday Times*, 14 April 2002 .      [**[2]**](http://146.185.164.77/passia.org/meetings/2003/Nov18-Text-South-Africa.htm#_ftnref2) See Marina Ottaway and Thomas Carothers, ‘The Right Road to Sovereignty in Iraq ', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Policy Brief*, 27, October 2003. |