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Trends. Totem and Taboo: The Real Meaning of Camp David II

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Most policymakers and analysts from representative democracies are addressing the aftermath of the recent Camp David negotiations among leaders of Israel, the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), and the United States (US) in terms of tactics and strategies. What groupings of people during negotiations might have been more effective? Should there have been more preparatory meetings before the negotiations? Should there have been a different set of bridging options? Should people have been ensconced in different cabins? Should the purpose of the negotiations be publicly parsed in a different manner? Did the Israeli Prime Minister make too many concessions too soon? Did the PNA leader make too few concessions too late? Was the impending date on which the PNA leader is to unilaterally declare independence an intractable impediment?

In addition, most of these policymakers and analysts are asserting that (even with the talks ending in no formal agreement) progress has been made because topics never before discussed among the leaders--viz., the taboo of the final status of Jerusalem--were discussed. Or a deal was almost made and will be "next time" once the Jerusalem Issue is resolved.

It seems as if the totem of peace--venerated by many--continues to overshadow the one remaining taboo that has been left out of the commentary. This taboo is the open discussion of the following: (1) through ingenious and highly effective propaganda and active measures, the term Palestinian has been appropriated by and ascribed to only certain groupings of people and not to others. Arabs--Christians, Muslims, other religious faiths, agnostics, and atheists--and their ancestors who live or have ever lived in the British Mandate of Palestine are Palestinians; Jews who live or have ever lived in within the British Mandate are not. The appropriation of the term Palestinian affords the PNA and other Arab political entities a huge political advantage in the very discourse of Mideast peace Issues. (2) The PNA and other Palestinian political and politico-military entities willingly and unwillingly represent non-Palestinian entities as well--viz., other Arab entities, other Muslim entities, Persian entities, anti-Israel entities, anti-US entities, anti-West entities, and so on. Thus, the PNA's degrees of freedom are highly limited and its own intent--if one can be delineated for the entire PNA--is somewhat irrelevant. (3) There is still a vociferous intent by many Palestinians and others to destroy Israel as a nation-state. Negotiations and peace agreements are merely vehicles along with others--e.g., terrorism, war, economic sanctions, propaganda--towards this destruction. (4) All political entities that are parties to a conflict do not necessarily have to continue to exist. History affords many examples of victors, losers, victimizers, and victims. Political entities come and political entities go. Based on the red-fanged story of human history, one might argue that the destruction of Israel is not only a salient intention of many parties to the conflict but a possibly desired one by many others not party to the conflict based on specific criteria of strategic, moral/ethical, and domestic political calculation. Certainly there is a long anti-Jewish history to exemplify, if not justify, this premise. Of course, another desired intention might be advocacy for the destruction of political entities claiming exclusiveness over who or what is Palestinian or a Palestinian people. In both cases, destruction might denote a range from outright murder, through ethnic cleansing, through marginalization in camps, reservations, and territories.

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The above four taboos currently serve as a hidden subtext with an overwhelming impact on peace between Palestinians and Israelis. As long as these taboos remain, the conflict will continue. Good news for policymakers, analysts, dictators, authoritarians, militarists, propagandists, and terrorists needing work, bad news for most inhabitants of the Mideast desiring a decent life for themselves and their descendants. (See Astorino-Courtois, A., & Trusty, B. (2000). Degrees of difficulty: The effect of Israeli policy shifts on Syrian peace decisions. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 44, 359-377 Boyle, F.A. (July 11, 2000). Camp David revisited. Arab Media Internet Network, http://www.amin.org/En/eyejrs/0007/free7_120700.html; Dervin, D. (1998). Nothing to hide: Group-fantasy and the politics of unreality. *Journal of Psychohistory*, 26, 563-572; Gaerling, T., Kristensen, H., Backenroth-Ohsako, G., Ekehammar, B., & Wessells, M. G. (2000). Diplomacy and psychology: Psychological contributions to international negotiations, conflict prevention, and world peace. *International Journal of Psychology*, 35, 81-86; Kelman, H. C. (1999). Interactive problem solving as a metaphor for international conflict resolution: Lessons for the policy process. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 5, 201-218; Kifner, J. (July 27, 2000). Israeli and Palestinian leaders vow to keep working for peace. *The New York Times*, p.A1, A11; Montiel, C.J. (1997). Citizen-based peacemaking in a protracted war: Two Philippine cases. *Peace & Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 3, 115-134; The case against Israel and the destruction of Iraq: Facts ignored or manipulated by Western media. The Official Hezbollah Website, <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Senate/7891>; The so-called peace process. Hamas, http://www.hamas.org/peace_p.htm.) (Keywords: Camp David, Israel, Palestine, Taboo.)