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## A Place for Ahistoricism in the Mideast

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**Abstract.** This article advocates for an ahistoricism in conflict resolution between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA).

Political psychologists and other social scientists have long been attacked for ignoring historical factors in explaining, understanding, and predicting political cognition, emotion, motivation, and behavior. Many of these psychologists and scientists instead have focused almost solely on (1) individual traits and aspects of functioning and of group activity divorced from overarching social and historical contexts, (2) individuals and groups with characteristics—even including historical situatedness—far removed from those related to populations toward whom research is to be applied, (3) empirical and experimental settings far removed from those that are of worldly interest, and (4) methodologies bearing on handfuls of discrete independent and dependent variables torn asunder from a seamless welter of social and historical reality.

Qualitative action research bears out the validity of these attacks. Respondents often refer to historical factors—be they well-founded in fact or reflective of the most egregious biases and distortions—as having significant impact on their attitudes and behavior. As well, other collateral respondents offer the same type of information about those they are reporting on and about themselves.

One might conclude, then, that political conflict resolution would require extreme sensitivity to the salient histories of adversaries—grievances, revanchist and irredentist tendencies, mythologies, stories of cosmic and national origins, epochal turning points, and so on. Often this is the case. However, there are times when a pure ahistoricism is a catalyst for the resolution of conflict and the obtaining of some sort of consensual justice. This is especially the case when competing histories ineluctably demand precedence in and for identical times and spaces.

It is with this perspective that Israeli Justice Minister, Yossi Beilin, has supported the abandonment of some settlements of Jewish settlers in the West Bank. Even though many settlers were explicitly encouraged by the Israeli government to reclaim the land of a Greater Israel, he has stated that "The settlements are towns of Israelis and not Israeli towns" and, more to the point, "We aren't dealing with historical justice at present." The same may ultimately be the case with Jerusalem. An agreement between Israel and the PNA may transcend history as opposed to compulsively splitting hairs and parsing discourses.

Ahistoricism may doom the ignorant to repeat folly—as farce or otherwise. At times, however, it might free negotiators and the peoples they represent from shackles and blinders into the clean air of peace. But where is the wisdom to know when ahistoricism must be avoided or sought? (See Burman, E. (1991). What discourse is not. *Philosophical Psychology*, 4, 325-342; Burns, J.F. (July 31, 2000). Camp David terms roil West Bank settlers. *The New York Times*, p. A1, A8; Cushman, P. (1990). Why the self is empty: Toward a historically situated psychology. *American Psychologist*, 45, 599-611; Gergen, K.J. (1973). Social psychology as history. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 26, 309-320; Mazen, A.M. (1998). When settlement and resolution are in conflict: Searching for a Mideast peace dividend.

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Negotiation Journal, 14, 357-367; Munsterberg, H. (1899). Psychology and history. Psychological Review, 6, 1-31.) (Keywords: Ahistoricism, Israel, Palestinian National Authority.)