

A PALESTINIAN NON-MILITARIZED STATE AS A WIN/WIN FOR ALL: SHARING WITH NETANYAHU THE TRUE LESSONS FROM THE COSTA RICAN EXPERIENCE

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Given PM Netanyahu's use of Costa Rica as a good example for a potential Palestinian state rather than Iran - both in his visit to the USA and Australia- it may be worth examining this possibility. As interested Israelis, we have been researching together with Palestinian and Costa Rican academics how best to learn from the positive experience of demilitarization of one of Latin America's most democratic republics. We argue that non-militarization is the optimal strategy for a Palestine self-enlightened interest, but not only as an enemy's a priori demand.

In 1948 a popular, armed civilian rebellion was waged in Costa Rica against the military serving fraudulent government leader. The revolt was successful, allowing the rebels to take control of the country, while suffering about 500 casualties out of a population of less than a million at the time. Instead of a strong police force that could become, like neighboring Panama, a powerful National Guard replacement of an Army, the wise Costa Ricans, established several separate functional police forces- judiciary, border control, urban police, etc. Since the abolishment of the army there were real and attempted invasions from across the Northern border, both from the Nicaraguan dictatorship of the Somoza's family as well as the Sandinista left. Their alertness and above all, the Inter American Reciprocal Defense Treaty, provided deterrence, including the support from the Air Force of the much larger countries, such as Mexico or Venezuela.

Since then Costa Rica has not participated in a war nor experience any significant acts of domestic political violence. Instead of investing in war and security, the "old" defense budget in Costa Rica goes into education. For this political and moral position of strength four decades later, Costa Rica's President Oscar Arias was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for "exporting" democracy to the rest of Central America. The proven principle of mutual defense that "established democracies do not fight wars with each other", has been also vigorously supported by Natan Sharansky's book "The case for Democracy".

For this and perhaps other variables Costa Rica ranks 14th in the World Index of Happiness, the first among Latin Americans. Israel ranks even higher, 11th, while the Palestinian Territories rank among the lowest ranking 108th, and this asymmetry is part of the problem. Can Israel's PM dictate to the Palestinians an obligation to follow the Costa Rica example, and just in case, keep the Israeli Defense Force controlling their entire country? Listening to his threatening, patronizing tone and demanding attitude is perceived by the Palestinian with no choice but to accept his high ruling. Needless to remind him and ourselves of the culture of honor and pride prevalent in the Middle Eastern culture, and perhaps elsewhere.

The Palestinian case has similarities and differences. There is no Palestinian army, hence easier to overcome the difficult task of dismantling an army. The current Preventive Security has no heavy weapons, such as tanks, planes, artillery; no match for winning a war against Israel. Think about the analogy of the "lion of Judea" being the King of the Jungle is not disputed. But large numbers of bees coming from under or top of the earth can cause terrible pain to a rather too potent but helpless lion. Hence, the future Palestinian could be seen as "non-militarized" but a reminder that while Israel can win wars, it cannot impose peace

In Costa Rica the abolishment of the army was not a demand of an enemy neighbor, a dictate, The "Patio de Agua" declaration was self-proclaimed and popular. From previously conducted interviews with political leaders in the West Bank, civil society and top activists, we find that there is overwhelming support for this idea. The main reason they support a Palestine without military is simple; they want to be a democracy. They do not want to be another Arab a kingdom or a military dictatorship. Many hope to be much more like Israel than other Arab countries; for most of them as refugees, like we Jews were , emphasis on education is very important as you can often carry nothing but your own people's bright head.

The Arab countries have killed more Palestinians than Israelis, in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria. An international force in the Jordan Rift Valley including Israelis defending the Palestinian border from neighboring Arab countries, shielding Palestinians from the massacres taking care around them will provide deterrence that a Palestinian force could not offer. Pragmatically they understand that they are no match for these countries, and that an attempt to catch up would require spending unprecedented sums. Realistically, they would have no air space to take off and land fighting plans or naval space from Gaza for reconnaissance and submarines. In this heavily armed Middle East, no money, space or experience can keep them as safe as regional alliances, accords endorsed by the "Quartet", [United States, Russia, UN and EU] peacekeeping forces and monitoring. If Israel could be part of an international force present in the Jordan Rift Valley preventing any threat of non-democratic regimes-this can be seen, and sold, as a blessing to all.

With some reserved optimism, we can argue that "Security" is not only a "zero-sum game", that only Israel can rightfully win. If we put ourselves in the Palestinian shoes, only providing security for both parties, could be and should be seen as a "win-win". From an Israeli perspective, it's always "security first, peace later". Hoping to make progress on one of the core issues of the conflict, trying to look from a wider perspective we are to focus on human security- defined as "freedom from pervasive threats to people's rights, safety and lives". The conflict is composed of people, by addressing the fears and needs of the individual, we are combating greater national and international security risks. Our wish is that it comes to the attention of our PM and he understand that it is better to discuss non-militarization in a comfort zone for both sides. Our neighbors are closer to the acceptance of the win/win scenario in security, if we handle it with care rather with threats. Even though our leadership is at loggerheads, we have been advancing in this study in cooperation with Palestinian and Costa Rican colleagues; one of them is Prof. Amb Rodrigo Carreras, who served twice as Ambassador in Israel, following the footsteps of his late father Prof. Rev Benjamin Nunez who also served twice in Israel.

So, a question to our PM: do you want to score points or really learn from experience and history? Change the tone from provocation to reconciliation and we and others will be all glad to put our modest energies to the service of both Israeli and Palestinians. In the meantime, we are going to continue with our research and conduct some simulations with our students at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya and Haifa University. Long term security correlates also with human security; can we at least agree on that?

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