

BOOK PROPOSAL

BUILDING COMMON GROUND: AN ISRAELI AND A PALESTINIAN JOURNEY IN SEARCH FOR A JUST PEACE

AUTHORS: Manuel S. Hassassian and Edward (Edy) Kaufman
Written with Julie Barlow

The Washington Post called them the “odd couple”. While violence was sweeping through South Lebanon, Haifa and Gaza last summer, this Israeli professor and his Palestinian colleague were sharing a friend’s house in Washington DC, and doing the same thing they have done for the past twelve summers: cooking dinner in the evening, then getting up and going to work at the University of Maryland, where they teach a course together on conflict resolution in the Middle East. It’s a special situation: back in the Middle East, they are separated not only by a border and physical wall, but by a psychological one as well.

Edy Kaufman and Manual Hassassian are ready to produce a book that will explain the origins of their 20-year friendship, the unique professional partnership they have developed, and the lessons it has produced. “Scholar-practitioners” who work on conflict resolution, they have been working for over a decade side-by-side, gathering and generating creative ideas to resolve the dispute that divides their respective societies. Both believe that the conflict can be resolved and this book will explain how.

Even the pessimism generated by the present situation has not dampened that shared conviction. As complex and as divisive the issues are, Kaufman and Hassassian have pursued a pragmatic experiment that has yielded concrete answers. Their book will tell of Second Track Diplomacy workshops, academic collaborations and hunger strikes. But it will also tackle thorny subjects such as Jerusalem, Jewish settlements, Palestinian refugees, borders disputes, security problems, sharing scarce water resources, and more.

Through hundreds of second track meetings, studies, brainstorming and experiential training sessions, they have devised solutions that are creative and meet the most basic needs of their nations.

These ideas –including “two floor sovereignty” for the Holiest places for Muslim and Jews in the Old City of Jerusalem, joint management of the shared Palestinian and Israeli aquifers– support Kaufman’s and Hassassian’s conviction that there is a peaceful way out of the Middle East crisis. Their book will show how non-violent struggle, democratization, mobilization of civil society, academic cooperation across the divide, and confidence-building measures such as prisoners’ release, make these solutions applicable.

Kaufman has been director of the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem as well as the Center for International Development and Conflict Management at the University of Maryland. While teaching and training in these fields, he has been actively involved with human rights across the planet for many years, was one of the leaders of Amnesty International and a founder and then Chair of B’tselem, the Israeli information center on human rights in the Occupied Territories. For more than a decade, Hassassian was the Executive Vice president of Bethlehem University and also President of the Palestinian Rectors Conference at the Ministry for Higher Education. As adviser to Yassar Arafat, minister for negotiations and head of the Jerusalem Task Force of the PLO, he was an important participant in back channel negotiations. He is currently the Palestinian ambassador to the United Kingdom. From these vantage points, Kaufman and Hassassian have observed and participated in the unfolding events of their tragic conflict.

Part I of this book will explore the authors’ backgrounds. It will show how early experiences shaped each of them and how their separate life stories led to a common destiny. Kaufman’s life started in cosmopolitan Buenos Aires. He arrived in Israel as a teenager and later on, while studying at the Sorbonne, witnessed the 1968 student uprising in Paris. Hassassian, a student at the American University in Beirut, left during the Civil War in Lebanon to finish his PhD in the US. Both became student leaders where?????.

While their early experience should have placed them on opposite sides, a bloody incident surrealistically brought them together. In 1988, seven Arab workers were machined gunned by a deranged Jewish youngster during the first Palestinian Intifada. After the event, Kaufman invited Hassassian to come and speak for the first time at Hebrew University, and he accepted,

despite pressure from his peers to boycott the event. Kaufman barely made it to Mount Scopus to attend the event because a rock was thrown on his car-roof while driving through an Arab neighborhood.

In Part II they explain how their visions began to converge through an in-depth analysis of the conflict. They learned firsthand how the recognition of the Other's concerns and needs could make it possible for peace builders to find common denominators for finding the "means" to stop war, and engage again in peace-making as an "end". In this book they show how in their own relationship they have learned to live in peace and mutual respect.

While sharing stories from a rich repertoire of personal anecdotes, Kaufman and Hassassian will tell what the efforts of Arab and Jewish colleagues taught them in dealing jointly with the thorniest issues in the Middle East dispute. As insiders, they both sensed the long-term potential of peace-building as a bottom up process. They will explain how "Citizens diplomacy" was a trigger for official negotiations, as in the Oslo peace process, and how it led to creative proposals during negotiations to solve impasses in talks carried out by military officers, by diplomats and politicians.

Though Kaufman and Hassassian's story has not yet reached a "happy ending" in the form of post-conflict work, they do understand and see what needs to be done, both before after agreements are reached. And they know that after so many years of violent conflict, it is necessary to move from the leadership's handshake to people-to-people reconciliation.

Kaufman and Hassassian have developed an innovative approach in the cross-fertilization of their life experience, using human rights as a universally legitimate yardstick to evaluate the asymmetric situations in their conflict. They propose a formula for reconciling the Jewish "Law of Return" with the Palestinian vision of a "Right to Return" to their respective homelands. They will elaborate on the right of Arab and Jewish Jerusalemites to have a say in determining the future of their shared city.

Although some "realists" consider adhering to such principles an impediment to the advancement of peace, the Israeli experience has shown that military power can at best ensure short-term results, not solutions. Winning a war against popular resistance is becoming increasingly difficult and there is no unilateral way to ensure the formula endorsed by both sides

of a “just and lasting peace” (as mentioned in UN Security Council Resolution 242). Nor will Arab suicide bombings generate a readiness towards concessions on the part of Israeli Jews.

In Kaufman and Hassassian’s view, it is Palestinian and Israeli extremists who are avoiding reality by remaining intransigent over the question of sharing power over each nation and recognizing each other’s existence.

Written in the first person plural, this book will be a dialogue in which each reveals previously unknown facts, together recounting their life experiences. This unusual style will indirectly involve the reader as a tacit interlocutor at the receiving end of an interactive conversation. Julie Barlow, the best-selling author of *Sixty Million Frenchmen Can’t Be Wrong* (Sourcebooks) and *The Story of French* (St. Martin’s Press), will contribute her skills in transforming their story into a vivid account that will appeal to a broad audience. This is a pioneer attempt to merge the autobiographies of two academics blending into a shared vision across the divide – the first such endeavor not only between an Israeli and a Palestinian activist but, perhaps ever.

BUILDING PEACE ON COMMON GROUND will be a 200 to 250-page volume written in a popular and accessible style. If desired by the publisher, 8-10 photos of Kaufman and Hassassian, together and separate, can also be provided. They will tell their story in chronological sequence, but beginning the book in several dramatic present-day conflict situations, and then returning to the past to describe the events that led their to our present-day work. The book will show how their formative early lives sets the parameters for their activists’ careers: from the dictatorship of General Peron and the awareness of the suffering of the urban poor in Kaufman’s case, to Hassassian smuggling himself back home across the Jordan river from a family visit to Aleppo (Syria) and being shot at by Israeli border police in the aftermath of the June 1967 war. The book will show how experience and intellectual growth led both from different backgrounds, first to a joint deep-involvement in the defense of human rights, then to the struggle for peace. And above all, it will show how they put themselves in the shoes of each other.

To enrich the book, occasional quotes of personalities and colleagues who have inspired Kaufman and Hassassian’s work and life-mottos will also be

incorporated, including the Czech writer and former President Vaclav Havel who inspired them with his saying: "Each and every one of us can come to realize that he or she, no matter how significant or helpless he may feel, is in a position to change the world. We all have to start with ourselves. If we wait for someone else, none of us will ever see change, whoever applies it, may achieve something. If he does not even try, it is quite certain he will achieve nothing". In the "Muddled East" Kaufman and Hassassian attempt to translate this statement into more realistic language, since, as Hassassian puts it, Palestinians and Israelis are "doomed to live together."

The audience for BUILDING PEACE ON COMMON GROUND will include not only people interested in world affairs and the Middle East, but teachers interested in the pedagogy of team teaching in a conflict situation. It will also appeal to readers interested in how academics and civil society activists are shaping what is being called an international citizens lobby.

One such community, called by Keck and Sikkink "Activist Beyond Borders" involved in "Global Citizen Action" (Edwards and Gaventa) is now a network of several million people. Amnesty International – in which Kaufman was involved for many years at the top leadership level – counts over one million members. BUILDING PEACE ON COMMON GROUND will provide hope that the recent waves of violent conflict can be mitigated. Such spirit is highlighted not only in Kaufman and Hassassian's enterprise, but truly represents the many other Israeli and Palestinian moderates and pragmatists who have been committed to advance peace and understanding over the years.

Over the last decade, Kaufman and Hassassian's work has earned the praise of many high prominent figures around the world. Their work has been the object of articles in the Washington Post and the Boston Globe, and they expect to be able to get pre-publication quotes from important figures in the fields of human rights and conflict resolution, as well as the Israeli and Palestinian peace camps, diplomats, and high-standing members of the Jewish and Arab community. They have been engaged in speaking tours together and separately in more than forty countries (and within it more than one hundred universities), often in Europe and Latin America, the United States and occasionally in Africa and South and East Asia.

Upon request, they can provide appendixes to include:

- 1) the tentative structure of the book.

- 2) a short bio with selected data and listing academic publications relevant to this book.
- 3) current press coverage of their team-teaching in leading US newspapers, radio and TV programs.
- 4) a list of personalities potentially willing to promote the book.

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