

Forty Years after the War of June 1967

“Peace comes with pain and strength.”
Yitzhak Rabin

On 5 June 2007, the fortieth anniversary of the Six Day War and the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the Kay Spiritual Life Center hosted “Forty Years after the War of June 1967: Is Israeli-Palestinian Peace Possible?” on the campus of American University in Washington, DC. This panel featured Yuval Rabin (son of former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin; governing board, the Rabin Center), Amjad Atallah (president, Strategic Assessments Initiative), Aaron David Miller (public policy scholar, the Woodrow Wilson Center), and Ziad Asali (president, American Task Force on Palestine; panel chair).

Rabin opened by describing the Six Day War as “a war of our existence.” He discussed the importance of the Camp David, Oslo, and other negotiations and then talked about Israel’s 1967 victory. After stating that both sides in this continued conflict have faced hardship, he also mentioned the lack of knowledge involving certain issues.

Atallah explained how Americans are bogged down with this conflict’s technicalities, such as the number of checkpoints, which causes them to neglect the bigger picture. He pointed out that on 29 November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution (33 to 13) recommending that Palestine be partitioned into two states, with over half of the land going to the Jews and the rest going to the Palestinians. By May 1948, according to the United Nations and the State Department, 350,000 Palestinians had been expelled from their homes. The Arab states declared war on Israel and, outnumbered and under-equipped, 400,000 more Palestinians were expelled. At the time, the Israelis accepted partition and the Arabs rejected the plan. He explained that the Israelis rushed to the Sinai Peninsula and the Jordan river and fully understood the rules of diplomacy. This resulted in Jordan taking over what is now the West Bank. In the course of the Six Day War, another 600,000 Palestinians were displaced, some for the second time.

He mentioned that Israeli roadmaps do not include Palestinian towns, many of which are no more than “impoverished Palestinian ghettos,” so that “you will never know when Israel ends and the West Bank begins.” Even as the Palestinians and the Arabs opposed Israel’s right to exist, by the end of

1974 the PLO's goal was partition. However, its leaders did not make this public until 1988. In 1993, the PLO agreed to transform itself into a national liberation struggle. He added that every Arab nation today recognizes Israel's right to exist and that a 2006 poll in Arab states, and another one conducted among Arab Americans and American Jews, showed that an overwhelming majority of Arabs would support agreements with Israel that allowed a two-state solution.

Emphasizing that partition and integration could resolve this conflict, he stated that: "The United States is the sole capital that can tip the balance in either direction," and thus every future American administration will have to deal with how this continuing situation affects our national security interests. He explained the necessity and crucial elements of resources and of a population willing to make sacrifices, as well as the importance of leadership: "No people nowhere, not Jews, not Arabs, not Palestinians, not black, not white, [there is] nowhere in history where people have been oppressed and they did not resist."

Atallah did not talk about the consequences of the occupation. He felt that what is needed on this anniversary is the core issue of whether we are going to partition or integrate Palestine and Israel. Either way, it has to be a "conscious choice."

Miller, the final speaker, discussed the after-effects of war: "Wars create pain in the prospects of gain, they create incentives and disincentives. . . . In a conflict like the Arab-Israeli conflict, which evolved in stages over time and is most likely to be resolved in stages over time, a certain measure of conflict and violence is virtually inevitable." He talked about how the war has created opportunities and incentives for mass settlements and a new Palestinian image and identity; accelerated Israeli's centrality in the United States' cold war plan; demolished the Arabs' secularist, Marxist, and socialist ideologies; and exposed pan-Arabism's weakness.

But most importantly, Miller added, the war failed to create a serious opportunity for peace-making. It took another and more devastating war in 1973 to create enough pain and prospects for gain for serious peace-making at Camp David in 1979. Miller stated: "People take risks only when there are prospects for gain or they are motivated by disincentives for pain." He closed by stressing the importance of American leadership and remarked that a sustainable peace plan would be impossible without it, for American leadership and its relationship with both sides are the keys to ending this conflict.

Panel chair Asali asked: "Is it possible to have a viable Palestinian state, and can it be done?" and then opened the floor for questions. The first ques-

tion concerned the right of return; the response was that it was unlikely. Another person asked Atallah about Iran and the region's political tensions. Atallah responded by stating that the United States is already bogged down in two wars and that the State Department cannot engage in a third conflict simultaneously. Adding that the United States is a superpower, the most powerful nation today, he stated: "It's unforgivable that we don't yet have an institutionalized diplomatic machine that can deal with multiple conflicts at the same time and recognize the connections between them."

Other questions focused on 1967 borders, settlements, and Hamas, which Miller described as "a permanent reality in Palestinian politics and governance." Another attendee made a lengthy comment about Israel being the region's only democracy and continued to express his grief in a very unexpected and passionate manner as he held up a photo of his relative, who is imprisoned in Jordan. It was a clear indication that the entire region, including Israel, is still undergoing major dilemmas in politics and peace, not to mention socioeconomic conditions, and that this is most likely to remain unresolved and unanswered for another forty years.

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