**Jason Greenblatt's Challenge**

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American envoy Jason Greenblatt has stepped into the shoes of all those who tried to find a solution to the conflicting national aspirations of the Jews and Arabs in the land of Israel. His visits and meetings with those familiar with the issue indicate he wants to learn from past experience. Even if an American initiative seems a bit distant today, because of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu‘s investigations and U.S. President Donald Trump‘s situation, one can hope that Greenblatt will learn the historical lessons of international involvement in the conflict.

Examining a hundred years of this conflict shows that the international community hasn‘t succeeded in imposing its decisions on the parties. All the proposals for dividing the land, from the Peel Comission (1937) through the Partition Plan of 1947 were rejected by either one or both sides, and all the international resolutions since then are gathering dust in the UN archives. This tells us that there isn‘t much of a chance to impose a permanent agreement on the parties and expect them to accept it and implement it as written.

But even within this series of failures we can point to two successes. The first was that the international community in 1922 was able to establish the object of the conflict as the area of Mandatory Palestine-Eretz Yisrael between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Despite the involvement of the Arab states in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is universally acknowledged that the territorial dispute applies solely to the borders of Eretz Yisrael.

When the War of Independence ended, the international community allowed Israel, Jordan and Egypt to retain the lands they‘d captured that were meant for the Palestinian Arab state, but it forced Israel to withdraw to the Mandatory lines from those areas it had seized in the Sinai and Lebanon. Even after the 1956 Sinai Campaign it forced Israel back to the Green Line. These successes can be attributed to Israel‘s relative weakness during that period, which is not the case today. But while Israel is indeed a regional power, the Palestinians have power of their own; their very weakness gives them the ability to withstand pressure that seeks to harm their vital interests.

The international community‘s second accomplishment was in creating diplomatic frameworks for resolving the conflict. Their success depends on the parties seeing them as compatible with the achievement of their interests. The Partition Plan of 1947 wasn‘t implemented but it established the key to resolving the conflict – partition. This is because the international community thought then, as it does today, that ―the claims to Palestine by both the Arabs and the Jews have validity and are irreconcilable. Of all the proposals made, partition is the most practical.‖ But only the Jews accepted this solution at the time.

The most significant success was the UN Security Council Resolution 242 in November 1967, which established land for peace as the basis for resolving the conflict. And indeed, after another war in 1973, which persuaded Israel that it couldn‘t preserve the status quo, the resolution was partially implemented; an agreement was signed under which Israel returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, and the latter exited the cycle of war.

Jordan‘s disengagement from the West Bank in 1988 and the Oslo Accords in 1993 allowed Israel and Jordan to sign a peace treaty in 1994 and restore the border between them to what was set in 1922. It‘s still important to recall that even there, the two sides needed the deep involvement of an American mediator and financial incentives to reach an agreement.

The Palestinians have been able to represent themselves since 1988 because they finally accepted UN Resolutions 181 and 242. Because of the geopolitical reality that had been created with the fall of the Soviet Union, along with the emergence of a local leadership during the first intifada, these UN resolutions constituted the only platform on which the PLO could seek to realize the Palestinian national aspiration to an independent state, even at the cost of giving up 78 percent of ―historic Palestine.‖

The international community can influence the definition of the parties‘ interests and take advantage of the diplomatic framework that has been created to resolve the conflict. The balance of power between the different camps among the public and in the political system sets and defines those interests. The Israeli public has for years been subject to the Netanyahu governments‘ efforts to maintain the ethos of the conflict and reject the two-state solution. In recent years this effort has even been accompanied by legislation designed to limit the power of those who support this solution.

On the Palestinian side there is the threat of Hamas, which sees all of Palestine as one and the return of all the Palestinian refugees as the only solution to the conflict. Palestinian organizations are also restricted in their ability to forge ties with their Israeli counterparts. The international community can strengthen the capacity of these organizations to influence public discourse.

To succeed where others have failed, it would behoove Greenblatt to establish a clear framework and parameters for a final-status agreement and to work out a package deal that will include deterring ―sticks‖ and encouraging ―carrots,‖ and to create an international atmosphere that will allow the civil society on both sides to influence the definition of their respective interests and national positions.