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# Going Directly to Israelis and Palestinians

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With no prospect of meaningful negotiations between the Palestinians and the Netanyahu government, a new approach to peace is needed, one that focuses on the Israeli and Palestinian people themselves. Though not a perfect analogy, let's call it UNSCOP-2 because the work of UNSCOP, the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, in 1947, is the closest precedent for what is needed today.

UNSCOP was charged with coming up with a solution to the Palestine question, and after visiting the region to hold hearings, and then traveling to Europe to interview Holocaust survivors, the committee called for two states, one Arab and one Jewish. It produced a detailed plan that included an economic union, a map of the proposed border and a separate international regime for Jerusalem. This proposal was embodied in the historic Partition Resolution (UNGA 181) approved by the U.N. General Assembly in November 1947.

Here is how we might proceed today:

- The U.N. Security Council (or the General Assembly if the United States does not support this approach) will establish a special committee composed of distinguished international figures acting in their own capacity. Possibly it would be headed by a former American statesman or senator.
- UNSCOP-2's first task would be to determine if there is any possible peace agreement that would be acceptable to a majority of both the Israeli and Palestinian people.
- The committee would go to the region where, over a period of several months, it would conduct a transparent inquiry into the possibility of genuine peace.

First and foremost, it would listen to the Israelis and the Palestinians. Its hearings would be televised. It would conduct public opinion research and study the record of past Israeli-Palestinian negotiations — in particular, the Clinton Parameters and the progress made at Taba and in the Olmert-Abbas round. UNSCOP-2 would seek new ideas for resolving the most difficult issues, such as refugees.

- Assuming the committee concludes that there is sufficient popular support on both sides for a specific peace agreement, it would then develop a draft treaty which it would forward to the Security Council for further action.
- In a departure from 1947, no effort would be made to impose this treaty. Rather, the Security Council would call on Israel and the Palestinians to use the UNSCOP-2 proposal as the starting point for negotiations in which the two sides would seek to determine if they can agree on any mutually acceptable improvements. The United States could be invited into the process to play the role of honest broker.

Would the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government accept this people-based process? Governments always resist relinquishing control, and they may reject this proposal. Nevertheless, the process should go forward even if one government, or both, fails to embrace it. We should not make any assumptions in advance about how the two governments will respond once UNSCOP-2 has carried out its task.

Once UNSCOP-2 successfully identifies a set of compromises that both peoples can support, perspectives may shift. Possibly, in response to a directive from the Security Council, both sides will accept the UNSCOP plan as the basis for resumed negotiations. If that is not possible, the Security Council will have to consider its next step.

One option then would be for the Security Council to pass a resolution which embodies the UNSCOP plan and calls on Israel and the Palestinians to announce their acceptance. Were this to happen, provided that UNSCOP-2 has identified a solution that is accepted by majorities on both sides, both governments would be under enormous internal pressure to say yes. Should either Israel or the Palestinians be the first to agree to the proposed treaty, the pressure on the other side from its own people would grow even greater.

Agreement may not be immediate. However, an end-of-conflict plan that emerges from this process will have the staying power of historic resolutions such as 181 and 242. Supported by majorities on both sides, it will be an offer that political leaders cannot indefinitely refuse.

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