

Disarming Palestinian Militant Groups: A civil society approach¹

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FAILED AGREEMENTS and peace initiatives abound in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. There are numerous features that make this conflict intractable, ranging from continuous international meddling to unbridgeable gaps in respective domestic opinions. Most of the diplomatic peace initiatives address “stumbling blocks” and adopt a gradualist approach to peace building. While these components are certainly important, they do little to satisfy the need for constructing an agreement and final status situation that has long-term viability.

Palestinian resistance is asymmetric and employs terrorism. Separate and competing military factions, as well as single individuals, use small and mid-sized operations aimed at Israeli strategic and civilian targets. These operations, such as shooting assaults and suicide bombings, are achievable with relatively minimal financial and political resources. As viewed by the Israeli public and body politic, they represent a continuation of a campaign of terror—small attacks are seen in aggregate and as justification for an Israeli military response.

As a condition for any sort of final-status negotiations, each side insists on security for its citizens. Precisely because Palestinian resistance is seen in aggregate, a single incident has the potential to scuttle the entire conflict resolution process, inflame nationalist sentiments on both sides and reignite the cycle of revenge attacks. It is important then to consider aspects of implementation for any sort of final-status agreement. Israel has long demanded that any Palestinian state initially be a demilitarized one; nonetheless, insufficient thought has been directed toward how to achieve such demilitarization in an environment in which weapons and resources are dispersed between different militant factions throughout the territories.

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One critical aspect of implementation is the collection and disposal of Palestinian arms used in the resistance. Disarming militant groups in a viable Palestinian state is advantageous for both Israelis and Palestinians; it would increase the odds of any agreement succeeding. It would inspire Israeli confidence, contribute to a more governable Palestinian population, and strengthen Palestinian democracy and civil society by promoting alternatives to violence.

The persistent failure of the international community (not to mention the Israelis and Palestinians themselves) to successfully contribute to a viable peace settlement, coupled with the recent success and publicity of various civil society initiatives, suggests that this problem could be better addressed by an independent consortium of non-governmental organizations, rather than by respective governments or the United Nations acting alone. The complexity and multifaceted nature of the conflict requires the inclusion of nimble and less partisan actors in a solution. This paper will examine the potential for employing civil society to disarm Palestinian militant groups.

The problems and consequences associated with the arms trade in the Palestinian Territories cannot be ignored, nor can they be expected to cease with the implementation of a peace accord. In fact, demand for arms is so high that unless provisions are put in place to combat smuggling, the relaxation of controls and reduction of external scrutiny associated with a peace process could enhance the weapons traffickers' ability to function, thereby strengthening militant opposition forces.¹

MILITARIZATION OF PALESTINIAN SOCIETY

FRACTURED POLITICAL AND MILITARY ORGANIZATION

The internationally-recognized government of the Palestinian Territories, the Palestinian Authority (PA), is currently lacking in efficacy. The PA suffers from power struggles and insider dealing, in addition to competition from rival political factions and pseudo-governments, such as the Hamas network. Despite initial improvements, this situation is likely to continue even following the death of Yasser Arafat. There are at least seven militant organizations operating in the West Bank and Gaza, with tacit and official support from the Palestinian Authority. The militant Hamas group was extremely successful in recent municipal elections (the group boycotted the presidential elections in protest of the Oslo Accords and the presence of Israeli troops), winning seven of ten councils in Gaza and eight of twenty councils in the West Bank.² The following section provides a brief overview of the largest Palestinian militant factions.

HARAKAT AL-MUQAWAMA AL-ISLAMIYYA (*Hamas – An acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement, the word itself literally means “zeal”*)

IZZ AL-DIN AL-QASSAM BRIGADES (IDQ)

Hamas is the largest and most extensive militant organization operating in the Palestinian Territories. Its role in Palestinian society is not confined solely to militant activities; it is also a principal social charity and educational organization. With an estimated operating budget of nearly \$80 million per year, it is an extremely visible and respected religious group with a stronghold in Gaza and popularity that rivals the secular PA. It acts as a shadow government, sponsoring over 1,000 kindergartens and numerous free health clinics.³ Hamas opposes the implementation of the Oslo Accords, or any process leading to eventual recognition of Israel’s right to exist as a Jewish state. The assassination of Hamas spiritual leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, in March 2004, emboldened the movement and increased its popularity.

The administrative organization of Hamas, coupled with its domestic popularity and political strength, makes it particularly resistant to a top-down disarmament scheme. Its primary military force, the covert Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades (IDQ), is estimated to contain some 1,000⁴-2,000⁵ armed troops, mostly operating in the Gaza Strip. These troops are well trained and highly disciplined. In addition to the IDQ, there are an unknown number of armed Hamas supporters and sympathizers that act as a “civilian guard”. Hamas is organized regionally; each cell has a certain degree of autonomy in planning operations. Coordination on an organization-wide level takes place via e-mail and mobile phone communication, with cells using similar processes for planning and executing attacks, as well as performing interrogations, recruiting new members, and generating propaganda. The group serves a variety of different functions in Palestinian society, and is thus not easily categorized. Rather than being examined from a traditional state-actor perspective, Hamas, in its military capacity, should be seen in a regional context similar to the structure of al-Qaeda, perhaps more analogous to an organized crime or gang ring in the United States.⁶

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A combination of secrecy, rhetoric, and diffuse organization makes it difficult to estimate the true military strength of Hamas. The group possesses a plethora of light weapons but is most renowned for its suicide bomber attacks. Such attacks are carried out with homemade explosive belts, constructed in covert metal working shops and factories. A more recent and strategically significant development is the manufacture and use of the Qassam rocket, a homemade and constantly improving mortar round.⁷ The improving range of the Qassam is significant in that it has allowed Hamas to target civilian population centers inside Israel.

FATAH TANZIM
AL-AQSA MARTYRS BRIGADES
FORCE-17

Various armed groups associated with the late Yasser Arafat's Fatah party comprise a significant coalition of militias that offers a competing secular alternative to Hamas. Fatah, a reverse acronym for "*Harakat al-Tahrir al-Falastiniya*" (the Palestinian Liberation Movement), was founded in 1957 as a nationalist alternative to the larger pan-Arab nationalism of the time.⁸ Its military components were originally established as a counter to the Islamic opposition groups, although at times during the *al-Aqsa Intifada* they have cooperated and coordinated with Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad.⁹

The al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades is the most extreme militant group associated with Fatah. Initially conceived in 2000 during the outbreak of the *intifada*, the group has been responsible for a number of bombings and shooting attacks. They are augmented by the Fatah Tanzim, a recognized militia established in the wake of the 1993 Oslo Accords, with an estimated membership of 1,000 men.¹⁰ Arafat's own protection force, Force-17 is an elite group of soldiers formerly charged with guarding him at the *Muqata*, whose members have also been implicated in attacks against Israel.¹¹ Again, identifying members and constructing cohesive estimates of force strength is difficult. Cross-membership abounds, and until recently, even legal groups like Force-17 were unable to wear uniforms in areas under Israeli occupation. The 1993 Oslo Accords originally allocated some 15,000 light arms for Palestinian protection and policing.¹¹ Illegal smuggling and import of weapons has left the Fatah militias with tens-of thousands more. On

¹¹ Force-17 members have been implicated in the execution and organization of a number of attacks in the West Bank, most prominently the killing of Binyamin Kahane and his family in December 2000.

a fact-finding mission to Israel and the West Bank from December 2003 to January 2004, members of the New Initiative for Middle East Peace (NIMEP) came in contact with members of Arafat's elite guard during a visit to the *Muqata*. The members of Force-17 who NIMEP encountered wore dark-colored street clothes, toted AK-47s, and took up positions among the demolished buildings of the *Muqata*.

SELECTED OTHER GROUPS:

PALESTINIAN ISLAMIC JIHAD (PIJ)

POPULAR FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE (PLFP)

DEMOCRATIC FRONT FOR THE LIBERATION OF PALESTINE (DFLP)

While Hamas and Fatah represent the largest political forces in the Territories, an assortment of other smaller groups still constitutes a significant military force. Palestinian Islamic Jihad is an extremist organization with an ideology that is similar to Hamas, but purely focused on military operations, not on social projects. Operating from Afghanistan and Syria, they envisage an Islamic state in place of Israel. Originally an offshoot of the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, PIJ is estimated to have about 500 active members. PIJ's primary weapon is suicide bombings.¹²

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) and its splinter group the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) pursue a secular, Marxist-Leninist struggle against Israel. Combined, these groups have approximately 1,100 members but are tactically inferior to PIJ, Hamas, and Fatah. They lack the central organization, recruitment methodology, and popularity of the major militant groups.¹³ The PLFP and DFLP favor suicide attacks and are most known for the 2001 assassination of Israeli Minister of Tourism Rechavam Zeevi.¹⁴

AGGREGATE FACTS AND FIGURES

There are more than 70,000 light weapons (in addition to an unknown number of heavy machine guns) available in the Palestinian Territories, most of them acquired illicitly after the 15,000 allocated during the Oslo process. The street price of an M-16 has skyrocketed since the eruption of the current *intifada*, with the price tripling from \$2,000 to \$6,000 between 1999 and 2000. The price of ammunition has also risen dramatically, forcing groups to be more conservative in their use of ammunition. The once rampant firing of weapons at funeral processions has all but ceased.¹⁵

Clearly, the military cost of the conflict is unsustainable and exploitative for a population reporting a per capita GDP of \$1,505.¹⁶

SMUGGLING AND MODES OF ACQUISITION: A STRATEGIC SHIFT?

Once again, only limited information is available on specific modalities of smuggling and arms acquisition. The matter is spurned by PA officials (some of whom might be implicated) and is an issue of secrecy and occasional embarrassment for the IDF. Despite these difficulties, I have managed to identify the four principle routes by which weapons are smuggled.

Tunnels from Egypt to Gaza supply most of the guns in the area, while dual-use factories produce mortars and suicide belts. Tunnels run from the Egyptian side of the border into safe houses where the weapons are stored and distributed. Since the outbreak of the *intifada* in October 2000, the tunnel industry has blossomed. An increased IDF presence in Gaza has succeeded in reducing over-land and sea smuggling, forcing smugglers to work underground. The IDF has successfully discovered some tunnels, but cannot prevent the emergence of new ones without additional cooperation from Egyptian and Palestinian security services. From 2002 to 2003,

some 73 tunnels were uncovered and destroyed, but it is estimated that 10-15 tunnels continue to operate.¹⁷

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Tunneling is a lucrative business which tends to be contracted out to criminal elements at the behest of militant groups and possibly the PA. There is some evidence that local populations resent the presence of smugglers and of the tunnels, as their presence offers a pretext for IDF incursions and house demolitions. In late 2003, residents of Rafah who lived near the border launched a series of protests against the

PA for perceived negligence and inaction against smugglers.¹⁸ This offers some support for the notion that a disarmament process will have popular grassroots support. The United Nations is currently incapable of addressing the problem, confined by a lack of authority and necessary attention to an increasingly dire humanitarian situation.

Arms for the West Bank come primarily from Jordan. They are either smuggled by Bedouin traffickers or floated on small dingy boats across the

Dead Sea. Trafficking also occurs via Lebanon and Syria, although on a smaller scale. The IDF is also forced to confront a threat from within, as the weapons market provides an incentive for internal corruption. IDF officers have access to weapons and ammunition caches in addition to knowledge of the security apparatuses that make smuggling feasible. In particular, the IDF is a useful source for ammunition with vast stores often left relatively unguarded or in the hands of corrupt army officers.^{III 19}

While the vast majority of weapons are light guns, there is a disturbing trend that underscores the need to formulate a comprehensive arms control regime. With the rise of al-Qaeda and globalized Islamic fundamentalism, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has taken on additional prominence. Resistance strategies have evolved, and most importantly, the weapons and knowledge trade has globalized too, vigorously incorporating Hezbollah and Iranian strategy and munitions.

The IDF's greatest anti-smuggling accomplishment to date is the January 2001 seizure of the *Karine A*, an Iranian vessel containing some \$10-15 million worth of illegal weaponry.^{IV 20} Although this shipment was halted, it represents the possibility that similar weapons and equipment have been successfully smuggled into PA-controlled territories. This suggests an attempted tactical change, with Palestinian militants moving away from small arms and towards heavier weapons with drastically improved range, capable of attacking military and civilian aircraft, and military vehicles. These weapons were mostly Iranian in origin or modified Soviet arms.

CONTENTS OF *KARINE A*²¹

- 70,000 rounds small arms ammunition
- 735 hand grenades
- 345 Katyusha rockets & 10 launchers
- 212 Kalashnikov rifles
- 211 anti-tank mines
- 51 RPG-7 anti-tank missiles & 328 rockets
- 30 Dragonov telescopic rifles
- 29 mortar tubes & 1,545 shells
- 6 Sagger wire-guided anti-tank missile launchers & 10 missiles
- 2 Speedboats with Yamaha engines & range of diving equipment

^{III} Goldberg identifies two principle methods for the acquisition of IDF arms by Palestinian militants. Weapons depots, where soldiers deposit their weapons for maintenance and repair are frequently left unguarded and a typical raid can net 30 weapons. According to Goldberg, the Israeli army also admits instances of corruption where corrupt officers have collaborated with Palestinian gunmen in smuggling.

^{IV} Some PA officials were implicated in the *Karine A* anti-smuggling operation, but the PA denied any formal involvement in the affair.

FAILURE OF STATE AND MULTINATIONAL INITIATIVES

In this incendiary conflict, external intervention has culminated in continual failure. The United States, branded by much of the Arab world as biased toward Israel, has failed to facilitate a peace settlement for decades. Clinton's all-or-nothing approach at Camp David in 2000 extracted compromises from each side, but its ultimate failure resulted in mutual entrenchment and shifts to the right. President Bush's performance-based roadmap initiative is a bulky mechanism, lacking in detail and commitment. It has also been weakened by the administration's multilateral approach, with different "Quartet" members pursuing different policies and rhetoric. From the Arab side, the 2002 Saudi backed peace initiative spurred internal Arab discussion, but little else. Conflicting versions of the document left both parties uncomfortable and unable to overcome decades of mistrust and conflict.

The United Nations plays a critical role in the region, but it is not in a position to undertake comprehensive conflict resolution initiatives. In the Palestinian Territories, it is mired in a dire humanitarian situation with no resources to spare. The UN also suffers from a severe lack of credibility in Israel inspired by events from the 1947 Partition Plan as well as poor oversight of the May 2000 Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

REGIONAL APPROACHES TO DISARMAMENT

The disarmament processes outlined in this section share common elements that lead to their ultimate demise. First, the plans' backers lack the regional credibility and neutrality to pursue disarmament fairly. Second, they fail to take into account the structure of Palestinian society, and more importantly the structure of militant groups. It is illogical to propose a bureaucratic, nation-state based initiative to disarm a localized, familial and somewhat anarchical reality. Perhaps most critically, the failed initiatives do not address root causes of armament beyond the incredibly wide realm of "conflict". Disarmament must be seen by Palestinians as an advantageous and productive initiative that contributes to long-term stability and also realizes immediate and tangible benefits. Disarmament needs to be a catalyst for conflict transformation and resolution, an element that contributes to mutual security and confidence building.

IDF efforts to halt the smuggling of weapons and dispose of illicit arms have been largely unsuccessful. The multitude of avenues for smuggling, combined with internal corruption, makes it difficult to institute a complete

halt to the practice. Actions against militant organizations are purely consequence based, typically a harsh reprisal following a terrorist attack or preemptive action against “ticking bombs”. Although the IDF claims to be restrained in its military operations, it still produces unacceptable amounts of collateral damage, giving rise to further incitement. As Palestinians yearn for independent statehood, it is preposterous to assume that the IDF could oversee confiscation of illegal weapons in a post-settlement environment.

Palestinian Authority initiatives aimed at disarmament and suppression of militant groups are met with failure or outright rejection. In Gaza in particular, PA authority is at an all-time low, with militant groups becoming increasingly popular and claiming credit for forcing Ariel Sharon’s proposed withdrawal from Gaza, in a manner similar to Hezbollah’s perceived success in driving the Israelis from Lebanon. In order to retain any sort of credibility, the PA must balance diplomatic initiatives and tacit approval for military operations. A rumored plan proposed by Mohammed Dahlan, the PA minister for security affairs in the Gaza Strip, failed due to a lack of public support and the necessary infrastructure. Dahlan suggested offering al-Aqsa militants \$6,000 to turn in their weapons and join the PA security forces. Political differences between militant groups and the PA and long-standing allegations of corruption prevented this plan from gaining any credibility.²² In addition to the domestic credibility gap, it is nearly certain that Israel would not approve such measures, especially as the PA budget has been routinely used to finance terrorist attacks against the Jewish State.²³

THE RISE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

As state-sponsored diplomatic initiatives are mired in failure, an emerging civil society and non-governmental organization (NGO) approach to dealing with the conflict has met increasing success and popularity. On the broad diplomatic front, at least three separate initiatives have emerged that have generated substantial potential and publicity.

Most renowned of these new initiatives is the December 2003 Geneva Initiative^v, which marked a historical agreement between a group comprised of some current and former government officials from both sides. At the grassroots level, the nascent Ayalon-Nusseibeh plan, “The People’s Voice”, seeks to demonstrate popular support for an agreement along the lines of the Clinton-led Camp David negotiations, circulating petitions for acceptance of this agreement in an effort to pressure respective governments. Furthermore,

^v The Geneva Initiative is not an official set of accords—it is an attempt by its architects to convey the plausibility of a final status agreement.

the civil society approach is taking on an international dynamic with the ascent of the One Voice initiative, capitalizing on the appeal of American celebrities.

The most important and practical advantage of NGO action in the region is its efficacy in dealing with the local realm. NGOs are flexible and adaptive. Out of necessity, they are able to act under corrupt leadership, military occupation, and a dangerous security situation.²⁴ NGOs also have a more nuanced understanding of local culture and social structure. This

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is a critical element for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular, as substantial cultural differences exist both between and amongst the two sides.

A successful weapons buyback program would have to incorporate a number of elements and safeguards. First, in combination with other initiatives, a buyback program would have to transform the militant culture that permeates so much of Palestinian society. Many factors contribute to this phenomenon, which is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is apparent that violent symbolism pervades many aspects of Palestinian

culture. In addition to the blatant displays of violence from the IDF and Palestinian militant groups, art, graffiti, and even education contribute to the militarization of society.

Second, disarmament must combat the arms market. As discussed previously, the lucrative nature of the weapons smuggling trade provides tremendous incentive for its continuation. The failure of anti-smuggling initiatives, and the presence of corruption in the IDF, suggests that it is more feasible to attack the weapons market on the demand side. As it pertains to micro-disarmament, steps must be taken to reduce the currency of weapons by decreasing their perceived utility and by offering more viable alternatives through skills training and education and reintegration purposes.

One effective method for achieving this outcome is through a buyback scheme. Pursued with varying degrees of success in West Africa and Afghanistan, buybacks offer gun owners money or transfers in-kind in exchange for turning over illegal weapons. In the Palestinian Territories,

such a mechanism might already exist. Despite the ongoing occupation and IDF operations, microfinance programs have flourished. Micro-loans are provided to individuals in order to pursue entrepreneurial activities. They take into account local power structures and norms, and have a tremendous success rate, as indicated by nearly 90% repayment.²⁵

The danger in promoting buyback as a means to disarmament is that, if improperly implemented, it could reinforce the market. Safeguards must be instituted to prevent abuse of the system. In Sierra Leone this was accomplished via in-kind transfers, where goods such as tools or sewing machines were traded for weapons. Such an approach is advantageous for many reasons. It reduces the number of weapons in circulation, provides restitution to those who give up arms, and contains a built in rehabilitation program that combats cultural violence and offers opportunity for economic and political development.

A DDR PROPOSAL FOR PALESTINE

Disarming militant groups in a future Palestine is a critical and challenging task. Any Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process must absorb as much as possible from other disarmament initiatives and will require substantial new innovation.^{VI} First, a DDR process should be meticulously planned and organized before it commences. Coordination between all parties must be firmly established and the necessary levels of funding must be achieved. A failure to do so may result in the partial failure of a DDR initiative, which undermines regional and international support for the project.

Second, while weapons collection and demobilization may be the most tangible elements of a DDR scheme, the role of population reintegration cannot be ignored. This aspect focuses on promoting alternatives to violence, such as education and reconciliation. The reintegration process can prevent a return to violence and contribute to the economic and political development of a future Palestine. Palestinians have suffered greatly under the Israeli occupation and throughout nearly four years of violence. With the economy in shambles and a rather ineffectual government, providing opportunities for economic advancement and political organization is a necessary component to combat the culture of violence; this would thereby

^{VI}Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (or Recovery) is the process adopted by the United Nations in Afghanistan, Liberia and Sierra Leone. It is viewed as superior to pure disarmament initiatives because it, when successfully implemented, also addresses the root causes of violence. In the full-length version of this paper available on the NIMEP website, the aforementioned DDR initiatives are examined.

increase the chances of establishing a viable Palestinian state and promote a reconciliation process with Israel.

The following is a proposal based on the discussions above: it combines a role for civil society, a role for international organizations, and grassroots outreach and support.

INTERNATIONAL LEGITIMACY: To attain international legitimacy, a DDR initiative must be conducted under the auspices of, or in collaboration with, the United Nations. The UN has the network of resources and international clout to tackle a tricky problem deemed intractable by many other actors. However, the United Nations has a strained relationship with Israel. To rectify this, strong UN declarations of support for Israel's security will be necessary to ensure Israeli confidence in the UN's ability to carry out a DDR process. The UN must also affirm its commitment to establishing a viable Palestinian state.

REINTEGRATION: As in Liberia, Afghanistan, and Sierra Leone, disarmament must be seen in an overall context that offers alternatives to violence and promotes a sense of security. Working with Palestinian NGO groups, parties to the disarmament process should implement a series of programs aimed at rehabilitation, education, and economic development. They might include:

- Microfinance loans for entrepreneurs
- Vouchers for university study, or technical education
- In-kind payments of tools or equipment to start businesses or participate in agriculture
- Alternatives to cash payouts, in order to reduce the chances of reinforcing the arms culture and market

ORGANIZATION: Disarmament should be highly organized and coordinated but conducted on a localized basis. This will ensure that payments and collection strategies can be tailored to local concerns and attitudes and it will also better suit the fragmented nature of Palestinian political affiliation. A localized approach will offer a number of benefits:

- Weaken overall military strength of organizations like Hamas and Islamic Jihad by dismembering individual cells. Even if participation in militant strongholds is lackluster, the organization as a whole can

- be weakened by successful collection efforts in other locales
- Strengthen Palestinian civil society and capitalize on local knowledge of a region. It also offers the opportunity to involve more Palestinians in outreach initiatives
 - By operating more collection and rehabilitation sites, a DDR program will ensure more access to its resources and potentially achieve a greater degree of disarmament

INTERNATIONAL NGOs: Disarmament initiatives should be tied to regional and international efforts at conflict resolution. Organizations active in the region can offer expertise and advice for rehabilitation procedures as well as help build popular support and mutual trust.

TRANSPARENCY AND VERIFICATION: Given the significant lack of trust on both sides, the disarmament process must be exceptionally transparent. Transparency can be facilitated by collaborating with local NGOs and by using a combination of Israeli, Palestinian, and international observers.

WEAPONS ACCOUNTING AND DESTRUCTION: In order to deter corruption and the recycling of arms, collected weapons should be documented and destroyed by an international consortium comprised of regional governments, the United Nations and the United States.

HOMEMADE WEAPONS: Recognizing that the manufacture of homemade explosives also contributes to a large part of Palestinian militant activity, incentives should be offered to factory workers and owners to cease the production of such materials. Local NGOs, working with community leaders, should offer microfinance grants to individuals who pledge to refrain from manufacturing mortars and explosives and are willing to submit to factory inspections and verification.

REGIONAL INVOLVEMENT: The disarmament coalition should enlist the help and support of neighboring governments, most notably Egypt and Jordan. These two countries have peace treaties with Israel and serve as the source for most of the smuggling and should be willing to help combat the trade.

CHALLENGES TO IMPLEMENTATION AND EXECUTION

The proposals outlined above present a number of challenges. Organizing and selecting a suitable range of candidates for the DDR project

will require time-consuming negotiations and planning. Creating a suitable ratio of Israelis, Palestinians, and Internationals is a necessary step in establishing the legitimacy of the initiative. Additionally, these individuals and organizations will have to define their roles in relation to each other and to the United Nations and area governments.

The DDR process will also require substantial funding for initial weapons collection and subsequent rehabilitation and reintegration procedures. Cash-strapped Palestinian NGOs will need new funding sources and flexibility under United States' anti-terrorism laws that currently undermine many of their activities.²⁶

Providing security to UN and other DDR officials will be an exceptional challenge requiring collaboration between governments, NGOs, and perhaps even private military companies. As the DDR process progresses and more weapons are collected, the security situation should improve and provide a more positive environment for initiating reintegration programs.

CONCLUSION: POLITICS, BIAS, AND RESEARCH DIFFICULTIES

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most polarizing and polemic disputes in the world today. Although this paper deals mostly with aspects of Palestinian militarization, it should not be seen as an indictment of the Palestinian side or as necessarily supporting Israeli policy. Rather, this discussion is an attempt to address one important aspect of the viability of a future permanent status agreement. Disarming Palestinian militant groups should not be viewed as a victory by one side over another, but as a process that can strengthen civil society, enhance local development, and most importantly reduce violence. It must also be remembered however that such a process cannot be implemented without some political progress and assurance of Palestinian and Israeli security.

Researching and composing this paper was a very difficult process. The political sensitivity of the subjects addressed hindered interview processes in the region. Discussion of weapons smuggling and even militant activity directly was at best presumptuous and at worst could have jeopardized the safety of the NIMEP delegation. This required a rather subtle and circuitous mode of questioning that yielded interesting results but failed to provide many of the hard facts that were originally sought.

Similarly, published information on the weapons trade and militant groups' strengths and activities is also difficult to obtain. Various estimates and compilations of facts and figures are presented in this paper. A direct result of the polemic nature of this conflict, much of the information publicly

available is substantially biased. To combat this, diverse sources have been used, and when possible, whittled down to only the bare facts. Although lacking in some specificity, the research hopefully succeeds in conveying the militarization of Palestinian society, significance of the weapons trade, and the necessity for a comprehensive strategy to address these problems. Additionally, this report relies substantially on personal conversations and interviews which were conducted with a variety of figures of many political orientations and perspectives.

In short, this paper should provide the reader with two things. First, presented as background research, there is an analysis and assessment of the capabilities of Palestinian militant groups. The information offered demonstrates the significant degree of armament present in the Palestinian Territories and its negative consequences. The culture of weapons and violence reinforces the cycle of revenge and retaliation and inhibits economic and political development. Fortunately, the nature of militant organization and ideology suggests that disarmament and rehabilitation are possible.

This paper offers a series of broad proposals for a DDR process within the Palestinian Territories. The proposed steps draw on the analysis of the security situation and militant capability, political dynamics, and lessons inferred from other recent DDR initiatives. While absolute specifics cannot be discussed until the makings of a final-status agreement are in place, overall planning for DDR may proceed. Indeed, the experiences in Liberia and Sierra Leone suggest that DDR arrangements should be made before a finalized peace agreement so that they may proceed in an expedient and organized manner. The focus on building peace is important, but it is also critical to plan for the day after. Preparations to demilitarize Palestinian society can begin now, and can even be implemented before a final status agreement, to the benefit of all trapped in this conflict.

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²² Associated Press. “Palestinian Sources: Dahlan Offering Weapons Buyback from Al-Aksa Brigades”. FreeRepublic.com (6 June 2003). <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/924511/posts>

²³ “The Palestinian Authority Preventive Security Apparatus Finances and Infrastructure of Arms Production and Procurement in the Gaza Strip”. Intelligence and Terrorism Center at the Center for Special Studies (C.S.S.) (April 2003). http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/bu/capt/capt_b.doc

²⁴ PNGO Meeting.

²⁵ PNGO Meeting.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

- Interview with Trevor Findlay, Executive Director of VERTIC
- Interview with Major General Ashley Truluck, Director of Blue Sky Group Foundation
- Class notes and discussions from IR903 (Disarmament and Arms Verification Seminar) with Nicholas Sims at the London School of Economics
- NIMEP Fact-Finding Mission to Israel and the West Bank