

Arab-Israeli Conflict

Kaufman, Ed, Shukri B. Abed and Robert L. Rothstein, eds. *Democracy, Peace, and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. Boulder, CO and London: Lynne Rienner, 1993.

Rubin, Barry. *Revolution Until Victory?* Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1994.

The regime transformation of states in eastern Europe has contributed significantly to a redistribution of power at the system level. With a commensurate reduction in both threat perception and the aggressive display of national capabilities, a context for a renewed interest in democracy was displayed not only in eastern Europe but the Middle East as well. As much of the world gears up for regional trade expansion in the twenty-first century, many in the Middle East recognize that the choices with the emergent confluence of forces are clear: resolve the contentious Arab-Israeli conflict and develop the region's potential, or fall far behind much of the developed world.

It is widely agreed that sustained economic development requires an established environment, certainly devoid of the disruption of terrorism and other forms of violence up to the ultimate level – war. From the Western democratic perspective, peace is the best way to achieve order and then onward to development. Kaufman, Abed and Rothstein have collected a set of empirically-supported research essays by American, Israeli and Palestinian contributors designed in a scholarly and serious way to do several things. First, there is an attempt to test the commonly held belief that democracies do not go to war with one another. Beyond this there are two other important considerations: can Israel remain a democracy when faced with continual threats of violence from external sources in the form of terrorism, while maintaining a military presence in the Occupied Territories? The final consideration addresses the possibility of the Palestinians creating a democratic polity.

The book is divided logically into three parts. Initial attention is given to a theoretical approach to the relationship between democracy and peace. The question is raised: can democracy be established or maintained when national security issues are primary? With hindsight based on the extensiveness of the discussion, the authors express a belief that there is a need for a discussion of “the meaning of democracy in a Middle Eastern context.” (p. 29) This theme, I believe, is provided succinctly elsewhere in Ellis Goldberg *et al.*, *Rules and Rights in the Middle East: Democracy, Law and Society* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1993). For the authors here, “[d]emocracy will come slowly to the Middle East, the forms and procedures appearing well before the beliefs and values that support them.” (p. 302) The book concludes on an optimistic note, stating that “the presence of democracy in a Palestinian entity-state and perhaps

in other parts of the Arab world may increase shared interests in preserving domestic regimes by avoiding war and preserving the shared values and norms that make the absence of war possible." (p. 303) There is in this brief treatment, a tightly knit approach to a topic relevant to political theorists and comparativists worthy of scrutiny.

The banal expression about being careful what you ask for because you may get it applies to the PLO as the current peace process moves on from its auspicious beginning in Madrid. For those who have not grown up with this Palestinian organization, it may appear that it is merely the only organized group representing this expatriated group. A sober examination by Barry Rubin, an Israeli political scholar, of the Palestinian group's strategy is done in a sound manner.

Formed in 1964, the PLO served the Palestinians who sought to organize themselves as distinct from the Arab League in order to transform the Zionist entity to a purely Arab polity. Jerusalemite Arab elites were unable to develop a consensus about institutionalizing a political network during the British mandatory period, so that by 1948 the option of establishing some kind of a Palestinian political force had failed. Unable to mobilize political or diplomatic forces, the PLO resorted to using terrorism from bases in Lebanon and Jordan. The strategy of terrorism initiated by Yasir Arafat ultimately failed simply because Israel continued to exist. But also, as Rubin points out, Israel's continued existence failed to demonstrate to Palestinian supporters the organization's ability to succeed. A further shock was sustained when the PLO was expelled from Jordan after it threatened the monarchy and it migrated to Lebanon.

The opposition of the PLO to Western interests also meant a lack of appreciation of Western-style and initiated diplomatic initiatives. While the public image of the PLO as a representative body captured the imagination of the public, it did little in real terms. It was an uprising from below, the *intifada*, that secured a place for a loyal opposition at the level of the *volk*. In 1988, the Palestine National Congress issued a declaration of independence for a Palestine without a geographical setting. As Rubin so simply but cogently notes, the PLO's ability to survive contains within it the kernel of its own vulnerability; the overall organization is a coalition of quasi autonomous groups whose loyalty is frequently greater to some Arab state than it is to the personal leadership of Yasir Arafat. The unity of the group has been ideological in nature: to destroy Israel through armed struggle and establish an independent Palestinian state, taking in all of Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Adherence to the ultimate aims thus permitted any one member to sublimate any reservations over the use of terrorism as a tactic. But while the PLO's strategy might be considered faulty, unable to achieve its goal, the strengths of the PLO's leadership amalgam was sufficient to deny Israel its goal of splitting its ranks. By September 1993, when a peaceful resolution gained momentum through the employment of external diplomatic support, the conflictual issues began in earnest. Rubin takes the

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discussion of the PLO through the peace process of Madrid and Oslo and concludes as he might have at numerous junctures during the equally dangerous mandatory period: the PLO has the ability to resolve its difficulties with Israel at anytime it's willing to accept the Western rules of diplomacy and *compromise*.

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