

Overview:

In this simulation, students will take on specific roles and engage in a facilitated discussion concerning rising violence between Israelis and Palestinians. In their roles, students will either live in Israel or in the Palestinian Authority, and all of them have been asked by an outside party to discuss their needs and concerns in this environment of violence and hostility.

This is a great exercise for students to learn about facilitated discussions, a common and often crucial component of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. The goal of this facilitated discussion is not to debate or negotiate, but for both sides to express their own concerns and hear those of their adversaries. It is a chance for both sides to humanize each other and identify shared concerns and opportunities to cooperate.

Learning Outcomes:

- Introduction to the practice of facilitated dialogue and discussion.
- Acknowledge that perceptions are influenced by various socio-cultural aspects. Develop understanding of difference, cultivating empathy, and building cross-cultural competencies.
- Are prepared to discuss complex issues and ideas with people of different views, learning to speak with clarity and respectfulness.

Information for the Instructor:

Student handouts are included with this activity to include:

- “Israeli-Palestinian Facilitated Dialogue Simulation” packet
- “Israeli-Palestinian Roles” packet

Instructions:

Give students packets, “Israeli-Palestinian Facilitated Dialogue Simulation” and assign them their roles. Each student should get one “Israeli-Palestinian Facilitated Dialogue Simulation” packet and the sheet for their assigned role – they should avoid seeing the sheets for other roles.

Either in class or for homework, students will read through their materials. They should have a firm understanding of the background of the conflict and of their assigned roles before the simulation starts.

When the class is ready for the simulation, set the room up for a dialogue. The most common set-up is a circle that includes the facilitator. If there are multiple facilitators, perhaps people can be put into

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clusters, with one facilitator per cluster, to discuss and share their different viewpoints – if the teacher chooses to do clusters, then the groups should be organized so that there are varied viewpoints included in each group.

Applications: This activity can be used to engage students outside of the standard curriculum - between units, near the end of the school year, after standardized testing, or at an after-school club. It is a great way to introduce the practice of dialogue and the power of talking to and humanizing those who we perceive as our enemies. The activity can also be used to exemplify that cooperation is possible (and sometimes necessary) between those who would not otherwise want to work together, which can also be tied into units in history, social studies, government, and leadership.

Israeli-Palestinian Facilitated Dialogue Simulation

“Israelis need trust; Palestinians need hope.”

-- King Hussein of Jordan, 1999

Each student will be assigned a role. In your role, all of you either live in Israel or in the Palestinian Authority. You have been asked by an outside party to discuss your needs and concerns in this environment of violence and hostility. The outside facilitator will be playing a key role in official discussions between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority that are being planned in response to the escalating Hamas-Fatah violence. Many involved in the failed Oslo process believe that it is critical to understand what issues are of most concern to average citizens. The outside party needs to provide guidance to the negotiators about what is necessary in building a sustainable peace and also in considering what should also be included in any possible peace agreement. Thus, you will engage in a facilitated discussion, often an important tool or process in conflict resolution to explore the needs of different groups in conflict.

Background

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has pitted two peoples – Jews and Palestinian Arabs – against each other within the larger conflicts between Israel and its neighboring Arab states. The conflict is a struggle for land, existence, security, justice and acceptance – by both peoples. How can Israeli sovereignty and security be reconciled with the national aspirations and needs of the Palestinian people?

Most, including most Israelis now, believe that a Palestinian state is inevitable. But how can a stable, democratic and responsible Palestinian state be created that will ensure Israel’s security? What would such a state look like and how will it come into existence? Although creating a Palestinian homeland will not guarantee Middle East stability, an unresolved Palestinian problem continues to exacerbate regional instability and has been a constant source of anti-Israeli sentiment in the region and increasingly has become a source of anti-Americanism in much of the Middle East.

Thus, this workshop comes at a time in which violence is extremely high and there is little trust by most Palestinians and Israelis that the other community truly wants peace. Those on both sides who are less interested in compromise and who take a hard line toward the other and want little compromise have gained in power and stature. The moderates, those who have promoted compromise and peace, have lost support and have little credibility. The workshop is meant to be a facilitated discussion of the needs and interests of Palestinians and Israelis. It is not meant to be a negotiation. The goal of the dialogue is to assess and bring to the surface what some of those needs are. Ultimately, it will be up to the representatives of each community to reach a settlement if possible.

Key Issues

Territory: Gaza is a small enclave that abuts the Mediterranean Ocean and Egypt to the southwest. It is one of the most densely populated areas in the world, with close to 1 million people. Poverty and unemployment are rampant. The Islamic Palestinian party, Hamas, now effectively controls Gaza.

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The West Bank is situated west of the Jordan River and Dead Sea and east of most of Israel. Israel has occupied the land since its victory in 1967. It is now home to 2.1 million people, over 200,000 of whom are Jewish settlers. Of the 1.9 million Palestinians, over 500,000 are refugees, many still living in refugee camps. The economy is largely agricultural.

Israel's population is about 6.6 million. 5.3 million are Jews and 1.3 million are Arabs and others (such as Druze). If Israel were to absorb the territories it currently occupies, its population would be about 9.7 million, with 4.2 million non-Jews.

Security: Israel says that it cannot accept Palestinian authority over the occupied territories if the security of Israeli citizens is not guaranteed. Thus, the Israeli government continues to hold the Palestinian Authority responsible for the attacks on civilians in Israel. Even after the Israeli Defense Forces withdrew from Gaza and Jewish settlements were dismantled, bombs and rockets continue to threaten and kill Israelis in neighboring communities. In addition, even if the borders of Israel were more secure, Israel does not trust the Palestinians to ensure the security of Jewish settlements. On the other hand, Palestinians do not believe that Israel will ever allow true self-determination. Even as Israel withdrew troops from some major cities in the West Bank, soldiers continued to protect Jewish settlements. In fact, most Palestinians claim that there was never any Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, merely a redeployment. Even within the West Bank, Palestinians cannot travel freely from town to town. Israeli military checkpoints are omnipresent. Military curfews are often imposed and schools shut down frequently.

With the election of a Hamas-led government in 2006, Israel and the international community have effectively imposed sanctions on the Palestinian Authority because Hamas is classified as a terrorist organization and it has refused to recognize the state of Israel or agree to any negotiations with Israel. As a result, the Palestinian economy has become strangled and the Palestinian Authority cannot pay salaries for the large public sector work force nor can it provide much in the way of goods and services at all. The economic consequences for Palestinians have been devastating. The average income for a Palestinian in the occupied territories is now 10% of that of an Israeli.

In the meantime, Gaza has imploded and the Fatah party is struggling to retain control over most of the West Bank. Thugs from both Fatah and Hamas are killing each other in

the streets. But many Palestinians complain that Israel has no interest in a two-state solution and seeks more land for settlements and is de facto creating four isolated enclaves for Palestinians. Too often Israeli actions provide credibility for Hamas and discrediting the moderates who are willing to work with Israel. Israel claims that it has no one to work with and that Mahmoud Abbas and Palestinian moderates are too weak.

Because, for most Israelis, the Palestinian Authority is incapable of preventing attacks on Israelis or capturing and punishing those who commit such acts, or threaten to do so, Israel is in the process of walling itself off from the Palestinian territories. The goal is to provide a defensive barrier that will ensure security. Some Palestinians cite the route of the barrier and its incursion into Palestinian territory, as well as its division of one community or neighborhood from another as proof that Israel has designs on Palestinian land. The government and the military, along with many Israelis, feel that security needs dictate the course of the fence because Palestinians are incapable of policing themselves.

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Settlements: The first settlements in the occupied territories sprang up shortly after the 1967 war, and were essentially intended to be security outposts. A few religious groups set up Jewish settlements to stake a claim to ancient biblical lands. By 1980, there were 12,000 settlers, most of whom were religious Jews who saw the land of the West Bank as the sacred biblical land of Judea and Samaria. These settlers were encouraged to settle in the Palestinian territories by the Likud government in the late 1970s. In the 1980s, economic incentives were utilized by the government to entice new settlers to the land and the government itself was building many of the new Jewish communities in the West Bank. The number of settlers by 1990 was 76,000 and by 1995 was 146,000. Today, the figure is close to 225,000 settlers, almost all of whom are in the West Bank. Most of the settlements close to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv house Israelis who moved there because the housing was cheaper and the commutes to jobs easier. Many of those who live in more remote settlements strongly believe that Israel has a right to this land and have worked very hard to undermine any peace agreement that would cede territory to Palestinians.

Refugees and the right of return: Close to 3 million Palestinians are refugees. Half a million live in the West Bank; the rest are mostly in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan or are spread elsewhere in the Middle East and the west as part of a large Palestinian diaspora. Most of the refugees either lost their homes in 1948 or are the descendants of those who lived within the borders of the state of Israel. Some became refugees after the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967. One of the biggest stumbling blocks in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts has been an insistence by Palestinians on a “right of return.” Some argue that such a right can be acknowledged and compensation provided without the actual return of property to the refugees or refugees literally returning to what is now Israeli territory.

Jerusalem: In the original UN partition plan, Jerusalem was to remain under international authority because of its prime status for the religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In 1948 the state of Israel controlled the western part of Jerusalem while Jordan controlled the eastern part, including the old city, home to the most important holy sites

of the three religions. Israel wants to maintain sovereignty and control over all of Jerusalem while the Palestinians want sovereignty over East Jerusalem and to establish it as the capital of a Palestinian state. East Jerusalem is majority Arab but new Jewish settlements have been built to help solidify the Israeli claim to the entire city.

Incitement: Hateful language, hostile propaganda, and images emanating from each side that incites violence has rapidly increased in the past two years. Such inciteful language emanates from school books, the media, and from religious authorities. True peace and reconciliation are impossible in such an environment. A major part of the problem is that when the Oslo peace process was underway, many people in both communities saw little benefit from peace. From 1992-2000, the standard of living for the average Palestinian declined in half while Israelis saw a rise in violence during that same period.