Shared Society in Israel: Towards a New Model

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Policy Paper

Prepared by the Center for Advancement of Peace Initiatives

As part of

"Learning from Europe to Improve Intercultural Relations in Israel"

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Introduction

Israel has long struggled with tension and hostility between Jews and Arab-Palestinians, both within Israel proper (Arabs comprise 17% of the citizen population) and in the West Bank and Gaza strip. We believe it is crucial to improve relations as a matter of principle, and especially after the outburst of violence this past May, which was a frightening wake-up call for Israel and the international community alike. In addition to the exchange of rocket fire between Israel and Hamas, unprecedented inter-communal violence broke out in Israel's mixed cities, effectively bringing to the surface the issue of widening inequality between Jewish and Arab residents in these communities.

As an Israeli non-profit organization seeking to enhance peace, justice, and mutual respect between Israelis and Palestinians, the Center for Advancement of Peace Initiatives (CAPI) envisions a reality free of all forms of discrimination and oppression, where every individual enjoys equal rights and can fully live their national, religious, cultural, and political identities – in other words, a shared society in which every identity group flourishes together with other groups in society and not despite them or in conflict with them.

This policy paper is an outcome of our eight-month project entitled, "Learning from Europe to Improve Intercultural Relations in Israel." The project was generously supported by the Anna Lindh Foundation. We launched this project as part of our commitment

> *"to tackle perhaps the trickiest social and cultural challenge within Israel: the delicate intercultural relations between Israel and its Arab-Palestinian minority. A slow process of improvement might be reversed if dangerous local (Nation-State Basic Law) and international (transfer of communities as part of the "Deal of the Century") initiatives go unopposed. This can easily transcend Israel's border and generate a violent escalation in an already volatile region."[1]*

Many high-level, greatly experienced civil society activists and scholars joined us on this journey. We are thankful to each and every one of them for their commitment, wisdom, and constant engagement in this intensive endeavor. This was just the beginning of a longer process that we will continue.

In the following document, we present the main insights and recommendations gathered from the numerous valuable lessons reached in this project. We focus both on the reality of Israeli

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[1] Copied from the project proposal submitted to the Anna Lindh Foundation in April 2020

society in all its complexity, as well as a wide review of international case studies which provide valuable lessons for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Our project has identified three strategic directions, each with its own diverse practical steps, to address the challenges faced by Israeli society and help transform it into a vibrant, inclusive and prosperous shared society:

1. **Bottom-up processes:** encouraging and supporting the existence of arenas of egalitarian interaction that contribute to breaking down fear and stereotypes of the "other."

2. **Top-down processes:** creating policy and structural change to address the collective national needs of the Arab-Palestinian minority within Israel; decentralizing the government to open up opportunities at the local level for all identity groups and subgroups to express themselves.

3. **International processes:** actively supporting the peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict directly (and indirectly through other regional issues like the Abraham Accords or diplomatic relations with Egypt and Jordan), as the dynamics in the larger conflict have a clear and significant influence on the attitudes of both main national-groups within Israeli society.

We believe that this approach, implemented in parallel to those of many different organizations, will pave a path to a truly equal and shared Israeli society.

We welcome any comments and suggestions for improvement and support on this journey.

Shared Society – Challenges and Opportunities

We understand a shared society as one in which all individuals are granted equal social, political, and economic rights. Club de Madrid, an independent international non-profit organization comprising a forum of former Presidents and Prime Ministers who promote democracy around the world, identified 10 key policy areas that are essential to creating a shared society:

1. Locate the source of responsibility of social cohesion within the government
2. Allow for consultation with minority groups about their needs
3. Create government structures and policies that support social cohesion
4. Provide legal protection for minority groups
5. Address unequal distribution of income and opportunity between different groups
6. Build physical spaces that encourage social interaction between different groups
7. Ensure commitment to shared society values within the education system
8. Initiate a process to encourage shared society values at the local and national level
9. Promote mutual respect, tolerance, and appreciation of diversity
10. Reduce tensions and hostility between different groups as needed

Within the context of Israel-Palestine, a shared Israeli society would provide a sense of belongingness, stability, and security for Jewish and Arab citizens alike; the relationship between these two groups would be marked by mutual respect and tolerance. Perhaps most importantly, a shared Israeli society would advance a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is multifaceted. It has several substantive issues at its core, like Jerusalem and the Holy Places, refugees, national recognition, natural resources, and so on. Each of these is complex. In addition, each side has its own internal schisms that prevent them from adopting a more open-minded attitude towards the other side. Therefore, to reach a comprehensive and sustainable solution, it is crucial to address these (often-overlooked) internal components.

On the Israeli side, perhaps the most sensitive and challenging of these internal issues is the conflict between the state and the Jewish majority and the national minority of Arab-Palestinian citizens, who comprise about a fifth of the country's population. By reaching a better model for managing the relationship, we expect to see a decrease in the negative influences of intra-Israeli discord. In turn, we believe that improving these relations will contribute to building better conditions for addressing the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Relations between the state and its Arab citizens has had many ups and downs in the seven decades since the 1948 war, which resulted in the establishment of the state of Israel and the

Naqba (tragedy) of the Palestinian people. Although granted citizenship in the new state of Israel, the Arabs who remained in the state were under military rule until 1966. The relationship between Arab citizens and the state has since gone through different phases.

One of the more recent low points in this relationship was the massacre of 13 Arab citizens by the police, in what is known as the "October 2000 Events." These events marked a major turning point and resulted in worsened tensions between Arab society and state institutions, particularly the police. Two decades later, we can see how this contributes to both over-policing, where excessive force is used towards Arab citizens, and under-policing, where not enough is done to stop crime in Arab communities. This lack of police intervention is one of the reasons for a constantly escalating wave of criminal violence affecting first and foremost Arab citizens. Data gathered by the Abraham Initiatives' "Safe Communities" project show how this reality has spiraled out of control. From the lowest point of 56 murder cases in 2013, a constant increase began (61 cases in 2014, 64 in 2016, 67 in 2017, 71 in 2018, 89 in 2019) and the numbers keep escalating. Last year, a total of 96 Arab citizens were killed (an average of 8 per month), while in the first 10 months of 2021, more than 100 Arab citizens have been murdered (an average of 10 per month, or one murder every three days), making it the deadliest year to date for the Arab society in Israel.

On the other hand, since the October 2000 Events, a clear though moderate process of improvement can be recognized in relations between Israel and its Arab minority. This progress can be seen mainly in the gradual reduction of gaps in different socio-economic parameters. To quote just a few findings from the 2019 "Fact Sheet: Arab Citizens of Israel" published by Inter-Agency Task Force on Israeli Arab Issues:

- In 2017, 50.3% of Arab citizens were poor (down from 52% in 2016) compared to 13.9% of Jewish citizens (down from 14.3% in 2016); 47.1% of Arab families lived below the poverty line (down from 49.2% in 2016), compared to 13.4% of Jewish families.

- The percentage of poor Arab children dropped from 61.7% in 2016 to 60.7% in 2017, compared to 19.6% of Jewish children in 2017 (down from 21.1% in 2016).

- Of all students pursuing their undergraduate degree in Israel today, approximately 17% are Arabs, up from 12% in 2012 (an 80% increase in number of Arab students).

- The work participation rate (those employed and actively seeking employment) for Arab citizens is 73.8% for men and 40% for women (up from 69% and 27% in 2012, respectively), compared to 81% for Jewish men and 79.1% for Jewish women.

These improvements are the result of many long-term changes in both Arab citizens' attitudes towards the state, and at the same time, the realization by the government that maintaining such enormous gaps has a clear economic cost for the country. A reality in which about 95% of Arab towns and villages fall into the Ministry of Economy's four lowest socioeconomic deciles of Israeli municipalities means that this segment of the population is not living to its potential and not contributing its share to the national GDP. To mend this reality, the Israeli government took two important steps. First, in 2007, it created the special Authority for the Economic Development of the Arab, Druze, and Circassian Sectors in the Prime Minister's Office (it was later moved to the Ministry of Social Equality). Second, in 2015, Government Resolution 922 (GR922) launched a major program to enhance economic development and integration of Arab society, with an estimated investment of NIS 12-15 billion ($3.7-4.2 billion) over five years.

However, both internal and external developments pose a real threat to this process of improving relations with the Arab minority. On the internal level, attacks by Jewish right-wing politicians on Arab voters and their parties are a common electoral strategy. The lowest point so far is the legislation, passed in 2018, of the Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People, which deliberately downgraded many of the collective achievements of Arab citizens, including the symbolic ones, and sent a clear and dangerous message. On the external level, recent ideas to transfer some Arab communities to Palestinian rule as part of President Trump's "Deal of the Century" plan posed fundamental human rights issues according to international law and could destabilize the delicate inter-communal relations on a regional stage.

Another factor adding to the complexity of the Israeli reality is the multitude of identities that exists within both Jewish and Arab societies in Israel. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, Jewish society has faced various conflicts pertaining to the Ashkenazi-Mizrachi divide, with the latter group facing discrimination on many fronts. Structural and cultural discrimination also affect most Jews of Ethiopian origin, who arrived in large waves to Israel since the 1980s. In addition to these tensions, Jewish society suffers from a strong conflict between religious and secular communities. This can be seen in their opposing views on various issues, such as such as marriage, divorce, military conscription, and public transportation, and more broadly, on the separation of religion from government policy. Meanwhile, the Arab society is sub-divided among Muslim, Christian, Druze, and Bedouin (historically nomadic tribes from the desert region) communities, and even Palestinians from the Occupied Territories who were moved to Israel for safety after collaborating with Israeli Intelligence in Gaza and the West Bank.

Lessons Learned

This document is based on the knowledge and analysis gathered by 32 experienced opinion leaders, civil society activists from key NGOs promoting shared society, and academics, all balanced in national and religious identity and gender. They came together in two working groups over a period of eight months to join in-depth discussions that focused on:

1. Understanding several approaches to state-minority relations from the political philosophy discipline.

2. International case-studies, mostly from Europe, which show best practices and features we should know to either adapt to our reality or to avoid.

3. Lessons from their own long-term work on the ground.

The learning process drew from these three sources and combined them in a way to search for more clarity and new insights. Our goal was not purely theoretical, and surely not academic, but rather to improve our understanding of which practical steps can move us towards a better Israeli society. We came into this project with the understanding that no single input provides a simple answer to a complex situation. We focused on international case studies knowing that they do not perfectly fit the Israeli-Palestinian reality (for an abridged description of several case-studies see the Addendum); we analyzed political philosophy theories about state-minority relations, aware of the gap between ideal abstract models and complicated situations on the ground; and we listened to the practical knowledge and dilemmas that our experienced participants gathered through their long-term activism. Through the combination of such rich resources, an initial attempt was made to find significant paths that fully grasp the complexity of our society and the needs of all relevant groups.

In the multicultural character of Israeli society, even the task of agreeing on which groups are "relevant" and how the "common good" should be reached is tainted by the political or philosophical stand of the beholder. Among the main questions considered through the prism of each approach were:

- How should the society be organized to create the best balance between the state, majority, and minority?

- Should the ideal common good represent the uniqueness of each national component or should we strive towards a new, supra-national, unifying identity?

- Which institutions or processes should protect the particular values and identities of each group? Can a truly "different but equal" formula be reached?

- What is the current, and what the ideal, dynamic between groups?

The first threshold that needs to be considered is whether we are referring to a dynamic that recognizes or rejects national identities as the building bloc of the pluralist society. Liberal

perspectives refuse to grant national characteristics to the sub-groups in society. The individualist-atomist branch of liberalism strives to reach a neutral ideal of the common good. The usual guiding policy in these cases is the "melting pot," which seeks to create a homogeneous identity at the societal/state level, generally tolerating particularistic (religious, cultural) elements at the individual-family level. Best known examples of this approach are France and the United States.

A more relevant liberal perspective, in our case, is the cultural-republican liberalism. In it, the ideal common good is supra-national, and the approach towards identity groups within society is to recognize their cultural uniqueness, actively ignoring any national elements. The republican common good is seen as having a shared center that balances centrifugal forces that strive to maintain the separation and differences between groups, and centripetal ones that push them towards the evolution of a common identity. Different authors and activists propose their own ideas of how such a balance should be reached. For example, some suggest that the education system be used in an integrative manner, while others support maintaining separate and parallel educational streams for each community. European case-studies within this liberal-republican approach include South Tirol and Northern Ireland.

In contrast to these, there are political-philosophical perspectives that do recognize the centrality of national elements in the identity and motivation of minority groups within states. The idea is that this recognition might generate a strong tension, especially among those forces that still refer to the homogenous Nation-State as the ideal model to strive for. In these situations, a second threshold appears: should the different national groups coexist equally within the realm of the same state? For most of those that reply negatively to this question, the practical step is clear. The answer is separation. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this is the guiding principle of the "two state solution," although Jewish opponents point out that even after the creation of a Palestinian state, complete separation will not have been reached because of the Arab citizens of Israel.

Separation can be achieved in a peaceful manner like the division of Czechoslovakia, or in a violent one like the tragic disintegration of Yugoslavia. A less democratic answer is provided by those who do not want either the equal coexisting of different national groups or the division of their country – they propose the domination of one group over another. The clearest example of such a situation was the apartheid regime in South Africa that created a systematic and institutionalized hierarchical differentiation for whites, colored and black people. Many critics of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip argue nowadays that Israel is also becoming (some say it has already become) an apartheid regime. In academic terms, a governmental system where all types of power are concentrated in the hands of one national group while others are prevented from enjoying such power or even equal opportunities is called an ethnocratic regime.

It is important to note that these categorizations are not frozen. An ethnocratic state can improve its democratic behavior and its institutional work, thus becoming an ethnic democracy. In these cases, like some scholars refer to Latvia and Estonia for example, although the ethnic element is still predominant, the democratic institutions allow for the active participation of minority groups and their potential increase in influence to change the balance of power. Israel is considered by different scholars to be a liberal democracy, an ethnic democracy, or an ethnocratic regime.

In states that both recognize the existence of multiple national communities and are committed to creating a democratic system that ensures full equality among them, the question becomes: how is such a balance best achieved? Some suggest maintaining the nation-state as the building bloc that secures each nation's right for self-determination. However, they do not see the establishment and the functioning of the new states in a fully independent manner like the proponents of separation mentioned above. Instead, they suggest adopting confederal arrangements or close partnerships between the states, so as to create some kind of synergy and ensure cooperation despite the territorial division. The best-known example of a functioning confederation nowadays is the European Union.

Others, who want to enjoy the benefits of cooperation and self-determination without paying the price of a formal division, prefer a federal system in which the national identity is expressed and the communities' rights are protected at the regional level. Belgium and Switzerland are the clearest examples of federal states, who despite their problems, have succeeded in developing and maintaining peaceful relations between their internal national groups.

Lastly, shared society, which is the model promoted in this work, can be characterized as a comprehensive approach even though it is a relatively new idea and not an actual system of government. Shared society presents the potential for developing a truly inclusive, tolerant, and engaged society in which different identities are celebrated and not just tolerated.

Key Insights and Recommendations

Building a shared Israeli society will take much time and effort. Following the intensive learning process by the participants in our project, and as mentioned in our opening section, we came to the realization that in the Israeli context, the most efficient way to work towards this goal is by tackling different levels simultaneously: bottom-up, top-down, and international.

By bottom-up, we refer mostly to actions of civil society organizations that promote people-to-people encounters. These encounters can be focused on getting to know each other and reducing fear, stereotypes, and apprehension (following the "contact theory"), or they can lead to more substantive cooperative work towards solving specific problems. The key feature, from the shared society perspective, is that they also develop egalitarian arenas that break the usual balance of power between the groups. Perhaps the clearest example of bottom-up processes at work are models for shared education in Israel, which aim to promote positive Jewish-Arab encounters in order to create a more egalitarian environment.

"Hand in Hand – Center for Jewish-Arab Education in Israel", for example, currently runs seven bilingual and bicultural k-12 schools in Israel. Their curricula reflects both cultures and languages and instills values of shared society. Similarly, the "Abraham Initiatives" runs a project called "Shared Learning," which pairs Jewish and Arab classrooms from neighboring towns to learn English together several times a year. We believe it is important to spread awareness of the benefit of such models, and ultimately promote widespread adoption across the country.

Other models for Jewish-Arab encounters can be found in Israeli hospitals and workplaces, where Jews and Arabs work together on a daily basis. The power of this cooperation should be leveraged to show that the only way forward for Israel is through Jewish-Arab partnership across all realms of society. Additionally, all points of contact between Jews and Arabs should be equipped with individuals who are trained to manage conflict when it emerges. For instance, teachers and principals should be prepared to navigate difficult conversations around key issues pertaining to the conflict (e.g., Gaza, Jerusalem, etc.) among their students.

A second strategic direction to promote shared society in Israel is top-down. By this, we refer to changes in policy, budgeting, and other institutional aspects with the goal of facilitating a structural adaptation of the state to the new paradigm. Suggestions of top-down policy change in support of shared society include: closing existing gaps in almost all areas of life by allocating more budgets to Arab society, granting back the Arabic language its status as an official language of the state (which was derogated in 2018 by the Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People), and following the example presented above, promoting the scaling of models for bilingual education as a priority for the Ministry of Education.

Another way of implementing top-down transformation is by supporting practical steps for the decentralization of the government. Israel is one of the most centralized states among developed countries. A process of power devolution to regional and local authorities is expected to open up more opportunities for egalitarian representation in government and higher participation of minorities in cultural and economic areas. This, in turn, will allow more Arab citizens to step into decision-making roles and take care of the needs of their community.

A good example of the many benefits of promoting local initiatives was the establishment in 2010 of the Idan Ha Negev industrial park. This Park was launched in cooperation by the Bedouin city of Rahat and the B'nei Shimon Regional Council, who agreed to the construction of the park on shared lands – that is, after both sides came to the realization that receiving a smaller portion of revenues generated from the park was preferable to none at all had the park not been built. The Park, which is internationally known for its location of the SodaStream factory (in itself usually mentioned as a model for cooperation and coexistence) generates other socio-economic benefits, as the increase in employment promotes better life conditions and reduces poverty and crime in the region.

The third strategic direction that is needed in conjunction with both bottom-up and top-down efforts is connecting our efforts with international developments. We cannot talk about shared society in Israel without addressing the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is the general context of our internal reality. Moreover, Arab citizens of Israel are also members of the Palestinian people. Although their political fate differed from that of other Palestinians in 1948, their intrinsic connection with their families across the Green Line, in the refugee camps across the Middle East, and in the worldwide diaspora cannot be broken.

International influence can provide either a positive or negative impact on efforts to develop a shared society within Israel. A breakthrough in the so far stagnant peace negotiations would undoubtedly provide great energy for the improvement of inter-cultural relations in the state. Interestingly, the peace accords reached last year with the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco also played an important role. At first it seemed that they might become an obstacle, as Israel explained these Abraham Accords as proof that they can keep ignoring the Palestinians rights. This is exactly how the Palestinian Authority and the political leadership of the Arab-Palestinian citizens in Israel understood them. However, these treaties had an unexpected result: Israeli public opinion, which for a long time was extremely skeptical about any progress on the diplomatic front and has systematically supported right-wing parties, suddenly became enthusiastic and positive about prospects of Jewish-Arab cooperation (not only at the regional level, but also with Palestinians). Jewish citizens ultimately understood that a stronger partnership with their fellow Arab citizens would be in their best interest to open the newly discovered doors of the Middle East.

A different example of how the international arena affects prospects for a shared society in Israel is the recent decision by the US management of the Ben & Jerry's ice cream company to boycott Israeli settlements in the West Bank. This decision is in line with the BDS (boycott,

divestment, and sanctions) campaign led by Palestinian activists and international supporters of the Palestinian cause, who push for international pressure aimed at forcing Israel to change its policies. In contrast with the positive side-effect of the Abraham Accords, this new boycott generated a backlash that polarized public opinion once again and strengthened the influence of hard-liner politicians over mainstream attitudes. Regardless of whether BDS will achieve in Israel the same impact that economic sanctions had on the apartheid government of South Africa in the 1980s, with respect to the evolution of the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is reasonable to expect that BDS will make efforts for reconciliation between Jewish and Arab citizens much harder.

In any case, the international arena is one that has a clear influence over the possibilities for shared society. To promote this, we must support peace initiatives and regional moves that encourage better understanding.

In sum, a combination of these three bottom-up, top-down, and international engagement is critical to increase the chances of building a truly inclusive, empathetic, and respectful shared society in Israel. It is clear that such an endeavor is bigger than the capacity of any single organization or actor, important and powerful as they might be. A comprehensive effort to generate synergy is required. This is the only way to ensure sustainable change in Israel.

Addendum – International Case-Studies

South Tirol, Italy

Overview:

South Tirol is an autonomous province in northern Italy whose population of 530,000 people comprises 69.5% German-speakers, 26% Italian-speakers, and 4.5% Ladin speakers. South Tirol was part of Austria until the end of the WWI, at which point it was annexed by Italy. After this annexation, Mussolini came into power and worked to Italianize the population by banning the German language in public spaces, closing German schools, and bringing Italian families to the region. In 1939, Mussolini and Hitler made an agreement that forced the South Tirol population to choose between staying or leaving for the Third Reich – more than 80,000 left at the time, and many more likely would have left had Germany won WWII. Autonomy was granted to South Tirol only in 1972 after a failed attempt in 1948, which was followed by a period of unrest.

Today, South Tirol is a very successful model of shared society. The society created systems that accept different cultures and does not place any pressure on people to minimize their identities. The province has a system of proportional representation, which ensures just distribution of funds and allocation of public and political posts. Moreover, all public workers are required to know both German and Italian, co-official languages in the province. Within the education system, parents are free to send their children to German or Italian schools regardless of their mother tongue – students learn both languages and are acquainted with the culture of the "other" in both schools.

Relevance:

- Like Israel, South Tirol has multiple language and identity groups living side by side.
- South Tirol has a unique concentration of a German-speaking group; by contrast, Arab citizens are spread all throughout Israel.
- There is no national element in South Tirol. The vast majority of the German-speaking population does not see themselves as former Austrians, even though they preserve their language, culture, and connections with family and friends across the border. In Israel, however, the national element is hugely significant – no work to promote a shared society can be done without factoring this in.

Lessons Learned:

- This model emerged from the bottom up, highlighting the importance of participation among the local community in creating change.

- The model also emerged after a long process of dialogue and changes to several formerly proposed models, highlighting the need for flexibility.

Northern Ireland

Overview:

Northern Ireland, which is part of the United Kingdom, saw decades of conflict between pro-UK Protestants and pro-secession Catholics before the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which created a new government to be shared by unionists and nationalists, and paved the way for disarmament.

Relevance:

- Like Northern Ireland, national aspirations and religion play an important role in the Israel-Palestine context. The religious component in particular dates back thousands of years, which resembles the protracted nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Lessons Learned:

- The key factors that led to the Good Friday Agreement included a combination of bottom-up efforts (e.g., investing in civil society and bringing Catholics and Protestants together to learn more about each other) and top-down efforts (e.g., diplomatic negotiations and pressure from leadership on both sides).
- There were many attempts at resolving the conflict until the right formula was found, highlighting the need for perseverance and flexibility.

South Africa

Overview:

Apartheid in South Africa lasted from 1948 to 1990, during which racial discrimination was enforced against the black majority – blacks could not own property, interracial marriages were criminalized, education was segregated (and unequal), and the African National Congress was banned. 1990 marked the beginning of a four-year negotiation process towards a democratic government led by Nelson Mandela, the country's first black president. The international community played an important role in ending the system of apartheid by imposing economic sanctions against the country.

Relevance:

- People across the globe are increasingly use the term "apartheid" to refer to Israel.
- Like South Africa, the international community is trying to force change through economic sanctions in Israel (e.g., BDS).

- In Israel, however, this stance is widely considered illegitimate, as seen in reactions to Ben and Jerry's recent boycott of settlements in the West Bank.
- Like South Africa, Israel's population has two distinct groups, one with economic advantage and technological power, and the other facing poverty and prejudice.
- Unlike South Africa, the bi-national debate is central to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Unlike South Africa, there is a fear that the disadvantaged population will become the majority in Israel.

Lessons Learned:

- Reconciliation is ultimately what allowed for a transition to democracy in South Africa. In Israel, this remains a topic of debate – can we start a reconciliation process amidst ongoing conflict in the West Bank and Gaza?

Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia

Overview:

Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia offer valuable models around the idea of partitioning a country comprised of various groups. 1993, Czechoslovakia split into two independent states: Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The separation is commonly referred to as the "Velvet Divorce" due to its peaceful nature; moreover, the two countries remain closely linked to this day. Even though polls at the time showed that a minority of citizens on both sides supported the split, the Slovaks were more in favor of decentralization, whereas the Czechs embraced full governance from Prague. Ultimately, the partition was agreed upon by the Czech and Slovak prime ministers, whose leadership was very much marked by the countries' long communist legacy. Military equipment, foreign embassies, and other assets were fairly divided based on the sizes of each country's populations.

The breakup of Yugoslavia into Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Serbia and Montenegro in 1990-91, by contrast, was highly violent. This split came about largely because of cultural and religious divisions among the nation's various ethnic groups, as well as nationalist sentiments. Following the split, a war sparked by the Serb minority in Croatia killed tens of thousands and displaced hundreds of thousands; in Bosnia and Herzegovina, hundreds of thousands were killed and millions were displaced over the course of three years.

Relevance:

- Both case studies center on splitting a country into two or more countries as a result of diverse population groups.

Lessons Learned:

- It is critical to address ethnicity, religiosity, and their connection to national identity. Had such underlying tensions been addressed, fewer violent conflicts may have ensued following the breakup of Yugoslavia.

Belgium and Switzerland

Overview:

Belgium and Switzerland offer unique federal models for navigating two groups living side by side within a single country. Belgium has dealt with conflict (albeit nonviolent) between its two main communities, the Flemings and Walloons, since the late 19th century. Today, the country is divided into Flanders and Wallonia, two roughly equal regions, each of which has its own parliament; the capital of Brussels is in a third self-governing region where both French and Dutch are official languages.

In Switzerland, Germans, French, and Italians have managed to live in peace largely thanks to the country's 26 self-governing cantons, each of which manages its own affairs in in its own language languages. The only matters that are left to federal governance are currency and foreign policy. All groups contribute to self-defense, with German, French, and Italian soldiers serving in the army together.

Relevance:

- Like Israel, Belgium's conflict dates back to the late 1800s; both countries are about the same size geographically, have a similar population density and are made up of two main communities.
- Brussels is similar to Jerusalem in that both are contested as capitals by the countries' two main communities; however, Brussels ultimately brings Belgians together in the way that power is shared in governing the capital.
- Unlike Israel, Belgium is a relatively wealthy country whose two communities are of similar power; despite some historical and political clashes, the conflict between the two groups is much less severe compared to Israelis and Palestinians.
- Unlike Israel, all groups in Switzerland serve in the army.

Lessons Learned:

- Belgium's success can largely be attributed to the Flemings' and Walloons' willingness to find a middle ground rather than seek satisfaction for one community over the other.
- Declaring Jerusalem as the capital of both Israelis and Palestinians could potentially bond the two groups, and ultimately help advance peace talks.
- Decentralization, as seen in Switzerland, can prove valuable for local governance in Israel's Arab communities.
- Returning official status to the Arabic language would be a positive step for Jewish-Arab relations in Israel.

Acknowledgments

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