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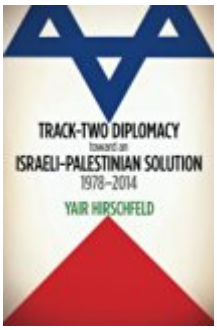

Yair P. Hirschfeld. *Track-Two Diplomacy toward an Israeli-Palestinian Solution, 1978-2014.* Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, xvi + 452 pp. $45.99, paper, ISBN 978-1-4214-1414-0.

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Published on H-Diplo (September, 2015)

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Yair Hirschfeld's painstaking and often very personal account of over thirty years of track-two diplomatic efforts of peacemaking between Israeli and Palestinian interlocutors leaves the reader with both optimism and pessimism about the likelihood of a Permanent Status Agreement that will provide the foundation for a realistic two-state solution. As one of the main architects of the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords, Hirschfeld is a veteran peacemaker who offers the reader a rare glimpse into the tangled web of the Israeli-Palestinian process and hopes to show the path forward toward a solution. Relying on countless personal papers and interviews as well as the unpublished policy documents of the archives of the Economic Cooperation Foundation (ECF), an Israeli nongovernmental organization (NGO) he co-founded in 1990, he reflects upon the trial and error of back-channel negotiations that continued even in times of official stalemate, undeterred by violence and war. The story that emerges is, as the author points out, "a classic case study of multitrack diplomacy" (p. xii), rich in detail about various proposals and counter-proposals that were being floated among Israeli, Palestinian, Jordanian, Egyptian, American, and European negotiators. Yet most striking is Hirschfeld's emphasis on the basic elements of trust, respect, and shared experiences among the small group of dedicated Israeli and Palestinian interlocutors, who have been at work for decades seeking common ground. But it leaves the reader wondering whether the new generation of Israelis and Palestinians—who have grown up in the aftermath of Oslo, against the background of the Second Intifada, continued settlement expansion in the West Bank, the rise of Islamist movements, and three Gaza wars—will weave those connections of mutual trust and is still committed to a two-state solution as the outcome of a Permanent Status Agreement.

Hirschfeld fondly remembers his family's participation in a large demonstration for peace in Tel Aviv in August 1978. Among the demonstrators were also his future colleagues in working for peace—Yossi Beilin, Boaz Karni, and Nimrod Novik—all activists in the Israeli Labor Party (ILP)

with close ties to Shimon Peres. Hirschfeld explains that the serious work toward conflict resolution began with the signing of the Camp David Accords a month later, when Egyptian president Anwar Sadat "laid the foundations for a negotiating process that aimed to establish the State of Palestine through a peaceful Israeli-Palestinian two-state solution" (p. 2). Whereas officials and governments were not ready to embrace a two-state solution then, non-officials (academic scholars, retired civil and military officials, public figures, and social activists), he explains, began to pursue a more informal track-two diplomacy by engaging in dialogue "with the aim of conflict resolution and confidence building," and "to assist the official negotiation tracks, known as track-one diplomacy, to succeed" (p. 8). Camp David provided the framework for conflict resolution, but the next three decades were preoccupied with filling in the details, trying to "bridge the gap" (p. 8) between seemingly irreconcilable positions on borders, the status of Jerusalem, the refugee question, and Israeli settlements that address both Israel's existence and security needs and the Palestinians' right to self-determination, including territorial sovereignty and statehood. Trying to keep track of the evolving concepts, principles, and positions can be mind-boggling at times, and the author's inclusion of various tables delineating the lists of demands and conditions proves helpful. Hirschfeld's summing up of the successes, failures, and lessons learned at the end of each chapter are insightful and self-critical, but they also serve to highlight and validate the hard labor of those who rarely receive the credit they are due for their confidential and secret work in support of track-one diplomacy.

Hirschfeld's own involvement in conflict resolution began with an unexpected invitation from Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky. And while their collaboration proved promising at first—owing in part to a shared Austro-Jewish background—the author's track-two efforts with Kreisky proved less productive and in the end turned downright "confrontational" (p. 10). Kreisky, who was Jewish and a socialist, would draw heavy criticism from most Israelis for his public embrace of Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat and solidarity with the Palestinians. It is no small irony and one can sense Hirschfeld's personal regret, that he as the committed peacemaker was unable to mend his relationship with the late Kreisky. Still, the early meetings in Vienna, hosted by the Austrian chancellor, revealed to him the immense investment in time and money necessary to bridge the gap between the two sides.

Guided by the teachings of the ILP and the political thought of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, and deeply shaken by Israel's high losses in the Yom Kippur War, Hirschfeld and his partners strongly believed that "military power in itself could not create long-term stability," that "Israel had a strategic interest in ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza," and "that definite success could only be achieved by political and diplomatic means" (pp. 13-14). As a result, Hirschfeld and his team embarked on a multi-track diplomatic effort from 1979-88 that would "enable Jordan in coordination with the Palestinians to negotiate peace with Israel" (p. 17). The so-called Jordanian Option ended in failure, but the author insists that the early discussions between Peres and pro-Jordanian Palestinian mayors "set off an important exchange of ideas that would have an impact upon the policy planning of the future Peres government" (p. 29).

Hirschfeld admits that it was much later when he realized that in order to effect substantial changes on the ground, one had to cooperate with the "professional echelons of the Israeli security authorities" rather than senior politicians and decision-makers in the government (p. 39). The effectiveness of the ECF, he maintains, became largely based on cooperating with the relevant senior military and civil servants, who were the ones to determine and manage Israeli policy in

the West Bank and Gaza. Such close collaboration between ECF and Israeli security officials, however, raises the question whether this simply amounted to another top-down effort at enhancing Israeli security and normalizing the occupation. The training of a Palestinian police force by Israel, for example, was perceived by many Palestinians as a mere attempt to continue Israel's control of Palestinian life.[1] Even Hirschfeld acknowledges that as much as the ECF pursued projects of economic and political empowerment for the Palestinian leadership, it "did not work on how to obtain majority support in Palestine" (p. 348). The People-to-People Hub projects, for instance, permitted joint professional Israeli and Palestinian teams to coordinate on health and social welfare projects. However, the author explains, "these activities tended to mobilize peace camp supporters on both sides"; they "did not reach the population groups that needed to be won over the most" (p. 207).

While aware of the limitations of an Israeli NGO in winning the hearts and minds of the Palestinian public, Hirschfeld is adamant in his conviction that intervention and interference by outside actors, especially the United States, has been and continues to be crucial in advancing the cause for peace. He fervently rejects the charge that US meddling in the conflict has hurt rather than helped the prospects for peace. In fact, he argues that the United States has "the power to define in an intense dialogue with all the concerned parties, sooner or later, the contours of the endgame" (p. 346). Despite US missteps—as in President Bill Clinton's "pressure-cooker tactics" (p. 245) at Camp David II or the recommendation by the Mitchell Commission to freeze all settlement activity—the United States has, according to Hirschfeld, especially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, a clear strategic interest in addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and thereby garnering significant regional support for the US and international counterterrorism efforts.

Yet all hope cannot rest on the power of external actors, and Hirschfeld repeatedly points to Israel's excessive settlement policy in the West Bank as an internal stumbling block to a strategy that seeks a two-state solution. While he admits that settlement expansion did not significantly slow under Labor's rule, he blames Likud's right-wing agenda for declaring land seizures a judicial matter and hence complicating any governmental interference to stop settlements. He lists "extensive settlement expansion" as one of the three main obstacles to peace (p. 335), but at the same time, he concludes that an all-or-nothing approach will fail. Instead, he advises a compromise of continued settlement expansion in an area that will be incorporated into the sovereign territory of Israel, and insists "on a freeze and encouragement to relocate settlements beyond that line" (p. 336).

At the heart of Hirschfeld's account are the negotiations leading up to the Madrid Conference and the complex web of back-channel diplomacy that would lead to the famous 1993 Oslo Accords between the Israeli government under Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. Hirschfeld's insider story does not provide any surprising revelations, but his account does convey that the personal connections and relationships of trust that he and his team had been cultivating with their Palestinian interlocutors were instrumental in reaching a deal. While the author acknowledges that developments in the last two decades have seriously diminished the achievement of Oslo in the historical record, he refuses to join the voices that call it a failure.[2] Despite cycles of violence, a second intifada, the construction of a separation fence and continued settlement expansion, the rise of Islamist movements, and three Gaza wars, Hirschfeld places his trust in the track-two efforts of the seasoned negotiators on both sides. He advises that an all-or-nothing approach stands in the way of a final peace agreement. "The core issues of conflict" need to be "separated from the process of Palestinian state building and the entire complex of Israeli-Palestinian

state-to-state relations." In other words, he concludes that "without prior state building and the development of good neighborly state-to-state relations, no party will possess sufficient legitimacy to solve the outstanding core issues of the conflict" (p. 328). Hirschfeld remains cautiously optimistic that peace will be reached in his lifetime, but fully expects the cycle of breakthroughs and setbacks to continue. Peace, he explains, "will never be a single event," but an "ongoing process of developing mutual trust over time and pursuing joint interests" (p. 347).

Yet this raises the question whether peace overtures and negotiations among the echelons of the elite can stem the tide of popular frustration, extremism, and radicalism on both sides. In other words, is an incremental approach toward peace still good enough? Will the generation born after Oslo work as tirelessly as Hirschfeld's generation, whose defining moments were the successful conclusions of Camp David I and the Oslo Accords? Or will, as Uri Ben-Eliezer argues, institutional changes that derived from internal societal conflicts over the Oslo Agreements lead the leadership to move from the brink of peace to new wars despite objections from external actors?[3] Is Hirschfeld's peacemaking scenario too dependent on rational actors of track-one and track-two diplomacy? Will the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement that aims to delegitimate and ostracize the state of Israel internationally emerge as a more potent external actor than the United States? Hirschfeld sees the glass half full. His message after more than three decades of peace work is at its core a plea for patience, perseverance, and strength to keep going, to continue the good fight for peace.

Notes

[1]. Sandy Tolan, ***Children of the Stone: The Power of Music in a Hard Land*** (New York: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[2]. Jonathan Rynhold, "Liberalism and the Collapse of the Oslo Peace Process in the Middle East," ***Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*** 10, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2009): 45-57.

[3]. Uri Ben-Eliezer, "Globalized Hopes and Disillusion: Israel's Institutional Transition from the Brink of Peace to New Wars, " ***Journal of Historical Sociology*** 27, no. 2 (June 2014): 177-203.

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Citation: Sonja Wentling. Review of Hirschfeld, Yair P. *Track-Two Diplomacy toward an Israeli-Palestinian Solution, 1978-2014.* H-Diplo, H-Net Reviews. September, 2015.

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