



Lessons for Israel and Palestine from Conflict Comparisons

Dr. Dahlia Scheindlin

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A. Introduction

In 2016, the Mitvim Institute embarked on a process of comparing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to other protracted ethno-nationalist or religious territorial conflicts. The project was designed to consider parallel – or contrasting – themes, situations, developments policy lessons and insights for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This paper summarizes the overall information and learning that emerged from the detailed study of three conflicts, Cyprus, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Serbia-Kosovo, while considering relevant insights from others, including Colombia and Northern Ireland, although these were not the direct focus of this research.

The initial goal of the research was to use such outside thinking to locate new ideas related to several specific major topics: (1) Process lessons and insights on how to advance diplomatic negotiations, find ideas or warning lessons about what has worked to advance negotiations, getting societies to ratify diplomatic agreements or at least not sabotage them, and predict and avoid pitfalls in implementation; (2) Political and constitutional frameworks for resolving conflicts, that have been tried in other cases to consider and assess possible solutions; (3) Policy ideas for addressing specific core conflict issues, beyond overall political, constitutional, territorial or sovereignty status.

The project was undertaken on the basis of extensive field and academic research in different regions that yielded intriguing similarities, or comparable contrasts to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The working assumption was that those parallels were not just interesting, but held potential for constructive policy ideas, lessons, insights and recommendations both for policy directions to consider, and those to avoid.¹

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¹ Dahlia Scheindlin, [The curse of stagnation and the need for conflict comparison: Seeking a breakthrough towards Israeli-Palestinian conflict-resolution](#), (Ramat Gan: Mitvim - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies, May 2016).

The paper includes two main sections:

- *Case study summaries:* In this section, the insights and lessons learned from each of the project's three case studies are summarized. By necessity, the larger observations from each case are summarized and portrayed in broad brushes; the supporting evidence and detail are found in the research papers themselves.
- *Thematic insights:* In this section, the relevant observations are considered thematically, based on the larger themes we hoped to advance: How to improve processes of negotiation? When are leaders able to advance peace and how do they navigate public supporters and spoilers in the process? What are different constitutional frameworks invoked for conflict resolution in related cases? How to address or understand specific similar core issues of each conflict? What are the lessons to be learned, and what are the warnings and pitfalls to be avoided on these topics? This section will draw on the three in-depth research papers as well as other more limited comparisons collected and analyzed through the project.

The conclusion summarizes the efficacy of this comparative framework, and assesses the perceived and actual benefits of conflict comparisons.

B. Case Study Comparisons

1. Cyprus: Non-resolution/status-quo bad for all

The Cyprus conflict recalls Israel and Palestine in its longevity, as both involve a military occupation and remain unresolved for roughly 50 years. Since the research paper on Cyprus was published in September 2016, negotiations have failed yet again, later in the fall of 2016 and in mid-2017.² It is tempting to compare and conclude that conflicts can be managed fruitfully in perpetuity. But the study found that protracted non-resolution has eroded the political ambitions of both sides: lowering chances of reunification – the goal of the Greek side – and allowing the increasing encroachment of Turkey, against the wishes of both sides. Therefore, unlimited conflict management is not in either side's interest. Some Israelis or Palestinians believe resolution can be indefinitely postponed, but the comparison is a reminder that both demographics and land control shift steadily over time, eroding the positions of both sides. Further, the contrast between Cyprus' low level of violence compared to Israel-Palestine, and the fact that in Palestine citizens are directly controlled by an active military regime (by contrast to Northern Cyprus) make resolution more urgent, and conflict management even less suitable, for Israel-Palestine than for Cyprus.

For these reasons, as difficult as negotiations are, and their success rare, they remain the preferred course of action. However, the paper found caveats to negotiations: Incentives for peace such as likely economic benefits, have not

² Arthur Beesley, "[Cyprus reunification talks hit a roadblock](#)," *Financial Times*, 22 November 2016.

been sufficient to induce the Cypriots to make the necessary compromises for an agreement. This corroborates with a similar experience in Israel and Palestine and leads to the question of when negative incentives, or pressure tactics are more effective.

The Cyprus experience also provide warnings of the dangers of negotiation failure. After the 2004 process and failed referendum, there were no meaningful negotiations for over a decade; political realities become entrenched and resolution ever-more elusive as a result. In the Middle East, the dangers of failed negotiation include violence, and therefore even if preferred, negotiations may not always be the appropriate approach. Next, the referendum in Cyprus exposed the mistake of alienation of the public from peacemaking. It is wrong to presume that enthusiasm for peace alone wins a vote; painful concessions that are not explained or argued well can undermine public support. Similarly, if the leaders promoting the agreement are not sufficiently popular, a vote on the agreement can fail – as seen in the Colombia referendum in late 2016 on a peace agreement with the FARC which was struck down by voters. And concessions on the most emotional issues such as return and property (for Greek-Cypriots, as for Palestinians) are a reminder that the need for historic justice can take down an agreement, if the voters have yet not come to accept this need.

However, on two overlapping core issues, Cyprus provides possibilities: the constitutional framework of a federation includes elements of joint authorities and border regimes that can be valuable for new thinking in Israel and Palestine. And property restitution solutions, including the very acknowledgment of historic loss and displacement through war, can be examined in greater depth for solutions that may yet be adaptable to refugee claims in the Israeli-Palestinian context.³

2. Nagorno-Karabakh: The dangers of conflict for democracy

This conflict in the Caucasus shares several features with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but the most urgent one is the tendency of both regions to erupt with deadly violence. In 2016, the year in which this research was conducted, Nagorno-Karabakh saw its greatest escalation since the ceasefire of 1994; less than a year later, a former American diplomat assessed the likelihood of renewed violence as high and there have been military incidents in 2017 as well.⁴ Israel and the Palestinians wage regular wars and experience ongoing lethal violence in between them. In both cases, stabilization is urgent and the diplomatic process is moribund. This inverse relationship between high violence and low negotiation prospects raises questions: are phases of non-violence needed to embark on negotiations, and does violence effectively

³ For the comparative research on Cyprus, see Dahlia Scheindlin, [Lessons from Cyprus for Israel-Palestine: Can Negotiations Still Work?](#), (Ramat Gan: Mitvim - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies, September 2016).

⁴ Carey Cavanaugh, ["Renewed Conflict Over Nagorno-Karabakh,"](#) Contingency Planning Memorandum No. 30, *Council on Foreign Relations*, 21 February 2017; see also incidents in May 2017: News Agencies, ["Nagorno-Karabakh: Azerbaijan hits Armenia defence unit,"](#) *Al Jazeera*, 17 May 2017.

destroy diplomacy? Are there political leaders who are sufficiently committed to resolving the conflict; or might they actually have an interest in escalation?

Nagorno-Karabakh and Israel also share significant core conflict issues: the political status of the land and sovereignty claims; the question of how to treat refugees displaced during the wars; and the return of occupied areas. The Karabakh negotiations have met a dead end largely due to Azerbaijan's insistence that the region never attain sovereignty, only various forms of autonomy, and the corresponding refusal of Karabakh Armenians to accept Azerbaijani sovereignty. Azerbaijan's "all but sovereignty" approach did not help Serbia retain control over Kosovo (as seen below) and it seems unlikely to work here.⁵ Recent calls in Israel for a "state-minus" for the Palestinians echo the concept, but the comparisons show that "partial birth" formulations are unlikely to succeed. However, Israel contrasts with Kosovo and Karabakh in that it retains de facto controls the disputed area.⁶ On the refugee question, like in Cyprus, Karabakh resolution plans assume some form of acknowledgement, and in this case, return for Azeri refugees displaced during the war.

The Caucasus comparison also brings to light the fraught relationship between protracted conflict and democracy. In both Armenia and Azerbaijan, the conflict is linked to hardline nationalism, political stagnation and corruption, and authoritarian behavior (manifest in different ways and different levels in each state). At a first look, the former communist societies of Armenia and Azerbaijan may not appear comparable to Israel's strong democratic culture. However, Israel too emerged from a non-democratic system (colonial rule), and has built non-democratic institutions and norms from its inception, primarily linked to the conflict – such as the military government that ruled Arab citizens under martial law from 1949 to 1966, and the military regime governing Palestinians in various forms and degrees since 1967, six months following the end of military rule inside the Green Line. Over decades, undemocratic elements are encroaching (again) on Israeli political culture inside the Green Line.⁷ In Palestinian society, democratic progress of the Oslo years has been severely curtailed by the leadership split, ongoing occupation, and the unrelenting need for heavy security control implemented by both Israeli and Palestinian authorities – all linked to the conflict. Democratic erosion may not be a hard rule, but it is certainly a likely trajectory in situations of protracted conflict – for

⁵ There are cases of sub-sovereignty arrangements, such as Quebec and Northern Ireland, but in those cases the arrangements reflected the acceptability of an alternate scenario to both sides – when no such scenario is available, simply retaining the demand for control appears unlikely to quell ongoing conflict.

⁶ Azerbaijan does not have de facto control over Karabakh; while Serbia has significant power and influence in the northern part of Kosovo where a majority of the population is Serbian, and, some claim, through the Kosovo Serb representatives in Kosovo's legislature. But it has no actual control or presence over the rest of the region.

⁷ A central (but not the only) example of the threats to democratic values in Israel, is the presence of bills and legislation that contradict democratic norms. The threat they pose for Israeli democracy is documented and analyzed by civil society groups such as the Israel Democracy Institute (IDI), and the Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI), such as the entry "[Anti-Democratic Initiatives](#)," by ACRI), or the following debate among IDI researchers: "[Is Israel's democracy in danger? The controversial proposed legislation of the ruling right-wing coalition](#)," *Freidrich-Ebert-Stiftung*, 5 January 2012.

both sides of an asymmetrical conflict.⁸ This comparative insight is a warning: while Israel often questions whether it can be both Jewish and democratic, the broader question for both sides is whether the conflict and democracy can coexist in any sustainable way.⁹

3. Kosovo-Serbia: Negotiation breakthrough and stagnation

The last unresolved conflict of the former Yugoslavia shares with Israel and Palestine the Albanians' unwavering nationalist demand for independence of Kosovo, on territory where ancient and modern history ties Serbs viscerally to the land. Minorities of each group still live in the territory of the other national group. The Balkan and Middle East conflicts differ in that Kosovo was once Serb sovereign territory that has been effectively lost, while the West Bank and Gaza were never incorporated into sovereign Israel, and the people there have no dispute with other countries that once controlled them, Jordan and Egypt, respectively. But in both places, the people seeking statehood have provoked violence, rallied the international community to their cause, and endured years of non-statehood, while the sovereign state has gone to extensive political and military lengths to prevent the establishment of such a state, including long phases of military rule. These competing forces have taken different forms at different times among the two conflicts, with the end result of a lengthy political stalemate.

The diplomatic breakthrough of 2013 between Serbia and Kosovo gave hope to the region, the EU, and to protracted conflicts everywhere seeking good news. Our analysis shows that it came about due to a confluence of factors: Powerful incentives offered by the international community, rooted in "push" factors, primarily domestic economic difficulties, and the pressures of international isolation (primarily but not exclusively for Kosovo); a government and leaders in Serbia who had credibility among hardliners based on their past, and who enjoyed a strong mandate in the present. However, there was also the legacy of an aggressive international military intervention in 1999, which drastically altered political facts on the ground in ways Serbia was ultimately unable to turn back. These offer both insight and warnings for Israel and Palestine. The capacity of hardline leaders with strong political legitimacy to advance peace should highlight the responsibility of Israel's current leadership to do the same. The search for incentives for Israel and Palestine have been unsuccessful to date, but it remains a valuable pursuit. And the Balkan experience shows that the alternative of international pressure tactics can take

⁸ There is significant evidence that some unrecognized states – which are essentially unresolved conflicts – manage some measure of democratization. Nagorno-Karabakh itself has experienced democratic development since the war, see for example Nina Caspersen, "Democracy, nationalism and (lack of) sovereignty: the complex dynamics of democratization in unrecognized states," *Nations and Nationalism* 17(2), April 2011, pp. 337-356. However, there are fewer systematic studies of the stronger and weaker parties in an asymmetrical conflict, and the claim here is not that such erosion is inevitable – rather that it is one likely development based on systems and practices involved in conflict maintenance.

⁹ For the comparative research on Nagorno-Karabakh, see Dahlia Scheindlin, [Lessons from Nagorno-Karabakh from Israel-Palestine: Does Unresolved Conflict Destroy Democracy?](#), (Ramat Gan: Mitvim - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies, December 2016).

far worse forms than the rhetorical criticism that characterizes pressure on Israel and the Palestinians today.

The “Brussels agreement” of 2013 focused primarily on protecting the Serb minority that remained within Kosovo, and stipulated that each side would refrain from blocking the other side’s progress towards EU accession. Yet the question of Kosovo’s final status was not addressed explicitly. The analysis found that while avoiding the sensitive issue with “constructive ambiguity” certainly facilitated the progress, in the absence of a horizon for clarifying these ultimate goals, the ambiguity has begun to turn destructive. Both sides are leveraging the areas open to interpretation for their diverging visions, provoking the other in the process and undermining negotiations, perhaps mortally. For Israel and the Palestinians, and other conflicts, this points to the limitations or dangers of constructive ambiguity regarding final status goals – particularly with regards to territorial sovereignty determination – and prompts further questions: perhaps ambiguity should be employed only under specific circumstances, or for limited phases. Other insights emerged from comparing the negotiations breakthrough and stagnation: regarding the advisability of including parties who are directly affected by the conflict as more active participants in its resolution – such as Kosovo Serbs or even Israeli settlers – primarily in order to lessen the resistance of potential spoilers.¹⁰ Further, minority protection is crucial to conflict resolution; but the lines of sovereignty over a given territory should be clear – this too should avoid ambiguity.¹¹

C. Thematic Insights: Lessons Learned

This section considers the themes and insights that cut across the specific cases. These are structured around the main questions of the research and the responses here draw on the various cases to consider common conclusions. The insights below are not intended as hard rules nor expected to apply in every case, but provide patterns and outcomes for consideration, including potential applications of the lessons derived from the study.

1. Process and negotiations

Under the question of how negotiations can best succeed, the main topics that emerged revolved around the identity of ideal leaders for negotiations, which parties are involved in the process, when negotiations are constructive or damaging, the role of the public, and international involvement.

- *Doves, hawks and peace.* Negotiations sometimes advance significantly with two dovish leaders on each side of the conflict (Cyprus) – but this does not

¹⁰ See a thorough analysis of how and when to include groups that pose obstacles to peace process, but have limited demands, in Stephen John Stedman’s typology, “Spoiler Problems in Peace Processes,” in Paul C. Stern and Daniel Druckman (Eds.), *International Conflict Resolution After the Cold War* (Washington D.C.: National Academies Press, 2000), pp. 178-224).

¹¹ For the comparative research on Kosovo-Serbia, see Dahlia Scheindlin, [Lessons from Serbia and Kosovo for Israel and Palestine: All Process, No Peace?](#), (Ramat Gan: Mitvim - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies, March 2017).

necessarily bring a breakthrough. Serbia and Kosovo saw clearer progress on negotiations when a set of principles was agreed by two hardline leaders with strong nationalist credentials (Aleksandar Vucic in Serbia and Hashem Thaci in Kosovo). Karabakh has had the least movement of all; although there are existing plans for a diplomatic resolution, there has never been significant or official agreement on them. Thus, of the two regions that have seen progress, the more significant advances in negotiation were made by hardline leaders together, who possessed the credibility to bring other hardliners to accept deals that were likely in any case to attain support from the dovish portions of the public.

- *Representation of parties and spoilers.* In Nagorno-Karabakh, there is an ongoing question about whether Karabakh Armenians should be represented in negotiations; to date, they have not been invited to participate. This is an increasingly prominent issue in advancing the Serbia-Kosovo dialogues, which have come to focus almost entirely on the situation of the Kosovo Serbs, and may ultimately fall over their status as well. Yet this party is not represented at the negotiations. A related point is that each conflict contains spoilers, whose opposition needs to be contained. These comparisons raise the question of when they ought to be included in negotiations – either because their lives are directly affected by the results, or because their opposition could prevent an agreement altogether.
- *Lower violence and meaningful negotiations.* The two conflicts analyzed here that have seen the most significant and more recent diplomatic breakthroughs were Cyprus and Kosovo-Serbia. Both societies have experienced low levels of conflict-related violence since the actual wars (the Turkish army invasion 1974 in Cyprus; the NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999, and then the riots there of 2004). In 2004, Cyprus negotiations led to a potential agreement, which was then rejected in a referendum by one side. In Kosovo, the 2013 Brussels agreements were a major step forward although the actual progress has been halting and dissatisfactory. Still the causal relationship between these two should be considered: either phases of non-violence can foster the right environment for negotiations, a step – even if far from foolproof – towards resolution. Alternately, negotiations may help to keep the level of violence low, when people place hopes in a political process rather than joining in violence to change the political situation. But there are dangers of failure as well: Israel and Palestine can be a warning that when expectations are high, the disappointment can be violent and destabilizing. The second Intifada, which broke out following the failure of the Camp David negotiations in 2000 is a tragic example.
- *Public matters.* The peace agreement in Colombia in 2016 was a notable example of successful diplomacy to resolve a severe 50-year conflict. While it was not a specific case study for this project, the developments yielded valuable insight: like Greek Cypriots in 2004, a much-anticipated vote in Colombia saw voters reject the agreement. To the shock of outsiders, voters apparently placed a higher priority on bringing the perpetrators to justice than reaching peace at all costs. The unpopularity of the president who led the case for the agreement contributed to its downfall – highlighting again that

leaders who enjoy broad support have a greater responsibility to leverage their position, since weaker leaders may fail. As in Cyprus, the case for concessions must be made to the public in a committed and organized way – peace alone will not be sufficient to “swallow frogs,” as per the phrase for concessions in Colombia. The longer the case is made, the more those arguments can sink in; which calls into question the wisdom of keeping negotiation content secret. Yet the two experiences also raise the question of whether voters should always cast ballots for peace at all. Perhaps, especially when the process is fair, democratic elections are sufficient and referenda are not required.

- *International intervention.* Three different forms can be distinguished: diplomacy, military intervention, and sanctions. In the cases where there has been a diplomatic breakthrough, it has been midwived by international actors – this was true in Northern Ireland and in Bosnia, and it was true in Serbia and Kosovo (the EU sponsored the negotiations). Other than acting as hosts and guarantors however, formal international actors did not play a specific role in the Colombia negotiations – which was the only region to reach an actual agreement in 2016. Yet exhaustive international negotiation or mediation efforts have been undertaken in Cyprus, Israel-Palestine, and Nagorno-Karabakh – places that have seen negotiations breakthroughs (the Annan Plan, and Oslo for the first two), but no full peace agreements. It is a mixed result. International direct military intervention such as in Kosovo, or indirect, through arms sales (US/Middle East, or Russia in the Caucasus) also clearly changes political realities. Sanctions are another tool the UN or individual countries have imposed as a form of intervention. The UN imposed sanctions on the former Yugoslavia but they did not prevent war. It is worth noting that meta-state bodies such as the UN have so far registered few successes at brokering peace (although the EU facilitated the Serbia-Kosovo agreement). The Annan Plan was perhaps the closest, but it was never agreed upon by the local leaders. The UN has mostly been active in a declaratory way; while resolutions have not commonly changed the policy of parties to a conflict, they are often used by the sides as backing for their claims or as a guiding principle.

2. Overall conflict resolution frameworks

Comparing the final status constitutional frameworks for resolution yielded questions about the effectiveness of “constructive ambiguity” regarding final status, the viability of less-than-state status, the implications of unclear levels of sovereignty, and the viability of military occupations.

- *The limitations of “constructive ambiguity” for reaching final status.* Often, the deepest divide among conflicting parties is the question of final status of two conflicting sides of a conflict; or the constitutional framework for their future, whether together or apart. Once resolved, technical solutions for implementation can often be found – the comparison shows – and they may already be in place. In Karabakh, the principles of a solution have been proposed by different sides of the key international players. The Israeli-Palestinian “two state solution” has had clear parameters since 2000, with

only limited adjustments. Kosovo's trajectory is rarely spoken but appears clearly known: separation into a small but sovereign state, with a multi-ethnic society, protection and representation for the Serb minority. However, the refusal to agree openly on final status has held back processes such as in Nagorno-Karabakh and Kosovo; and perhaps implicitly in Cyprus and Israel-Palestine, where leaders claim to accept the end goals, but scuttle them in practice. The analysis in these papers finds that too much constructive ambiguity – primarily on determining these final status goals – contributes to negotiation stagnation and failure, and all the accompanying dangers.

- *Clear lines of sovereignty.* As distinct from the process in which final status needs to be determined, acknowledged openly and agreed, this addresses the related question of sovereignty determination in final status accords designed to end ethno-nationalist conflicts. Each of the cases is slightly different: Serbia offered Kosovo a notion of “all but sovereignty,” promising broad autonomy, but the option failed and Kosovo is closer to a recognized state at present, despite Serbia's protests (backed by Russia). In Karabakh, it appears that Azerbaijan will only be able to re-take the region by sheer force, in what would be a heavily armed war threatening the whole region. Still the sovereignty claims are zero-sum, and it remains unclear whether a partial-sovereignty solution can stabilize the region or not. Meanwhile, if Cyprus remains unsolved with unclear determination of sovereignty in the north, it is likely that Turkish encroachment will continue – the worst possible scenario for the Greek side.

The Kosovo arrangement determined in Brussels in 2013 provided a cautionary lesson for other regions with a territorial dispute. When ownership of a territory is unclear, such as the Serb-majority area in the north of Kosovo, this can create a breach of sovereign integrity – a hole through which governance is undermined and the opportunities for escalation grow. This is linked to the need for clear final status arrangements above, but relates specifically to the question of sovereignty over territory. Once again, despite the problematic comparison of their historic presence, Kosovo Serbs are in a similar situation to Israeli Jewish settlers who wish to remain in their homes under any situation. Settlers in Israel may not be forced to move; but it appears that a sustainable peace agreement is one in which territory belongs clearly to one side or the other, while minorities are protected.¹²

In sum, Israel has successfully avoided Palestinian statehood for five decades, but there has been no peace or even absence of violence during those decades. Drawing on these examples, an agreement that entrenches limited local autonomy for Palestinians, as some Israeli leaders have advocated, or provides a “state-minus” concept, seems unlikely to advance stability or lay to rest ongoing Palestinian national claims.¹³

¹² This is not to imply comparative protections for the two minorities cited here, due to contrasting historic circumstances as well as current political differences.

¹³ [“Netanyahu says Palestinians can have a ‘state minus’,”](#) *Times of Israel*, 22 January 2017.

- *Military occupations end.* The final status proposals for Nagorno-Karabakh all begin with Armenian forces withdrawing from the occupied areas of Azerbaijan surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. Serbia's military regime ruling Kosovo from 1991 was routed by a devastating NATO air war. Even Northern Cyprus, where the Turkish army has resided since 1974, is effectively governed by civilian rule, which in turn has led to increasingly state-like behavior. Regardless of final political status, military rule does not appear feasible in perpetuity; Israel will ultimately have to choose between Israeli civilian rule over Palestinians, or Palestinian self-governance.

3. Core issues

The conflicts examined here had several overlapping core issues. These can be mined to learn the range of policy options for resolution. Such core issues include: self-determination/independence/sovereignty, return of territories, refugees and property.

- *Self-determination.* This is a common point of dispute in the specific cases addressed here, chosen partly for their comparable nature. What stands out about each of the cases is their longevity – despite bitter fighting, and protracted unresolved conflict, none of the sides have surrendered its right or claim to self-determination. This contradicts the right-wing argument in the Israeli-Palestinian context, that Palestinian national identity is either not genuine, or can be expected to dissipate over time. There is no evidence of this in any of the comparable cases.
- *Return of territories.* The reality is that the parameters of solutions are not uniform on this issue. Nagorno-Karabakh is expected to return additional occupied territories to Azerbaijan, but not the region of Nagorno-Karabakh itself. Israel is expected to withdraw its army and allow the Palestinians to become sovereign (not formally a return, since the Palestinians were not sovereign in the past). Kosovo does not expect to return anything to Serbia, but Serbia has interpreted the agreement as an expectation of ownership of the north. Turkey is expected to “return” Cyprus to the control of a unified island by removing most of its army. But none of these have come to fruition. The main observation is that solutions appear to be determined less by a hard rule about returning territory based on law or history, and more by the question of whether national identity groups must be territorially separated or whether they can live together in some form. The other central observation is that it has proved almost impossible for outside actors to cause an intransigent party to release its hold over territory other than through negative action (such as the military intervention in Kosovo, which broke Serbia's control on the ground). However, in the same case, positive incentives – the promise of EU accession – proved useful for implicit political concessions on territory in the same case.
- *Refugees/property.* One valuable observation is simply that Israel and the Palestinians are not unique: other conflicts have generated refugees or displaced people, as well as lost property and a sense of historic injustice. Refugee claims become an enduring factor in each such case: Cyprus has

not forgotten about this issue since 1963 or 1974. Azerbaijanis who fled over 20 years ago also expect to return. In Kosovo, Albanian refugees returned almost right after the war. Thus the demand of Palestinian refugees for recognition and return need not be viewed in terms of a desire to destroy Israel, but rather as consistent with international norms and expectations. The next observation is that in some cases, there is little expectation of full return. In Cyprus, the solutions assume some combination of restitution, compensation and possibly return. This should help to demystify the fears of addressing the problem in Israel-Palestinian negotiations; it also highlights that at the very least, acknowledgment of the history and experience of refugees is generally included in peace agreements.

D. Conclusion: Perceived and Actual Benefits of Comparison

One of the overarching goals of project, beyond advancing policy ideas, was to erode perceptions of uniqueness in Israeli-Palestinian thinking, to reduce isolation and defensiveness, while learning lessons and solutions from other societies. However, the intention was not to affirm a biased presumption that conflict comparison is inherently useful; there was also the possibility that the cases would be too different to compare, or the lessons so specific to each that they would be of little value for the Israeli-Palestinian situation.¹⁴

However, the substantial list of comparable elements found in each of the cases yielded considerable the value of the exercise. Rather than finding cases too different or specific, the opposite situation emerged: detailed research into each conflict turned up a wide range of potentially useful points of comparison, and narrowing the topics to a coherent range became an important analytic challenge. Therefore, the list of comparable aspects shown here is far from exhaustive, and there are numerous policy sub-topics to be explored further. Beyond the hard policy examination, comparable aspects include narrative, conflict perceptions, national and group identity issues, sacred, religious, and emotional themes that are often no less important for unraveling the Gordian knot of unresolved conflicts. We hope these become topics of future research within the framework of this project.

Further, the comparisons have allowed a somewhat more objective assessment of conflict dynamics through a close observation of what has transpired elsewhere. However, an honest assessment is also necessary: the study of contemporaneous conflicts, just like the study of history, can be guided by biases as well. The researcher can select and interpret developments in ways that are convenient, or advance a desired finding. We have tried to limit the bias to searching for insights that advance peace, while providing an honest assessment on all other aspects. But studying conflicts in which the researcher has no clear personal investment offers a promising additional means to advance more objective study.

¹⁴ It should be stated that the author's previous academic and professional research into the case studies had already yielded numerous potentially comparable themes. This was the basis for undertaking the project – an educated conjecture that a more systematic analysis would add to existing comparable insights.

The importance of the task remains clear. In an article addressing how Colombia's negotiators reached their summit of an agreement, the high commissioner for peace said his task was greatly aided by "wide reading and lessons" from peace processes elsewhere, from El Salvador and Northern Ireland to South Africa.¹⁵ The learning in this project sought to collect, organize and ultimately disseminate such lessons – in the service of peace.

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