

# For \$100 billion there can be peace

Some people think that peace between Israel and Palestine is impossible.

One way to solve an impossible problem is to first remove a major constraint to its solution. If the now-simplified problem can be solved, the constraint can be re-added subsequently. For instance, if we remove the financial constraint, which always puts peacemaking at a lower priority than military action, we could ask: How might the conflict be solved given funding on the scale of the pending war with Iraq?

The cost of the pending war with Iraq is estimated at \$200 billion, not including the loss of human capital. Rather than spending these vast sums on consumable munitions for a hope of lower oil prices, couldn't large-scale investment that addresses the Israel/Palestine conflict have a much higher return? Besides the lowered costs of security aid, increased tourism revenues, growth of human capital, sustained value of real estate and infrastructure, and so on, such an investment in peace could actually create wealth through economic growth tied to consumer and investor confidence in stability, worldwide.

If the business case can be made, then a team composed of business development experts, mediators, construction companies, consultants, architects, scientists, etc. could develop a plan which resulted in a Palestinian state, autonomous but demilitarized, on the model of Costa Rica. A small private seed capital investment could be used to detail the architecture, and gain, from the involved parties and allies, "Letters of commitment" to "buy in" under agreed-upon conditions.

Starting with a budget of \$100 billion as a ballpark figure, here is a rough estimate of the main components of this project, each of which addresses one of the major hurdles for a two-state solution.

## 1) No right of return - \$30 billion

Descendants of the 750,000 Palestinians who were forced out in 1948, and those dispossessed in later annexation and bulldozing, would share \$30 billion, which amounts to \$10,000 to 3 million people. Disbursement of the funds would probably require the creation of a better banking system with anti-corruption safeguards.

## 2) Sell the settlements - \$20 billion

The 200,000 settler families would then be able to sell their properties to this new middle class of Palestinians. The market demand for settlement housing units, together with the expected decrease in violence, would dramatically increase the value of those homes. Each settler family who sells would also receive a \$100,000 inducement, a relocation bond toward qualified moving expenses or to deposit as equity in mortgage applications for expensive Israeli real estate.

## 3) The "Big Dig" - \$15 billion

To connect the West Bank and Gaza, a very

large-scale construction project would be undertaken, similar to the "Big Dig" of Boston. The development of a six-lane underground highway tunnel, vented and well-lit, would result in two continuous nations, a topological first in world history. This "Big Dig" would create union scale construction and maintenance jobs for many unemployed Palestinians and Israelis, both men and women, who would be required to sign a non-violence pledge. The threat of immediate termination upon evidence of coworker harassment would guarantee a cooperative workforce. American companies such as Bechtel or Halliburton could bid to manage this major project.

## 4) Water projects - \$20 billion

Currently, water is at the core of the dispute, and resolving it would reduce security and economic pressure. An aqueduct project which allocated the water flowing from the north, public works projects throughout Palestine to manage the aquifers, and advanced software to create a market in water rights would help. Peace, as well as an annual contribution to the treasuries of Lebanon and Syria would help keep water flowing. Finally, nuclear-powered desalination plants (American-made and guarded) could supply more freshwater to both nations.

## 5) The Jerusalem Real Estate Investment Trust - \$15 billion

The capital of the Holy Land would be demilitarized, to be administered in perpetuity by an international nonprofit Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) with an interdenominational board. With its \$15 billion in seed capital, the trust would begin to buy up all available properties in Jerusalem, and then rent them, perhaps to current owners. Both Israel and Palestine could establish their capitals there, as well as embassies of foreign powers. The idea is that this REIT would, over time, become wealthier and wealthier through rental and fees, and after 50-100 years, end up owning almost all Jerusalem property. Stock in the REIT would be publically traded, providing worldwide shared public ownership of Jerusalem.

Radicals are calling for an end to U.S. aid to Israel. Professors are signing petitions for divestment from Israeli corporations. And although neither Israeli nor Palestinian covert intelligence operations were implicated in the 9/11 attack on the U.S., the stress which emanates from the occupation/intifada clearly fans the flames of hate which drives such acts. The anger caused by the last 50 years of conflict and terror is real, but can rapidly pale in time with economic development and coexistence.

**Jordan Pollack**  
Sudbury, MA

*The writer is a professor of computer science at Brandeis University.*