

# Mirror Imaging: On the Fallacies of Western Peacemaking in Gaza

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So many negotiations, and so little success. Not only between Israelis and Palestinians, but also in most other violent political conflicts – in Sri Lanka, Africa, Ukraine, between India and Pakistan, and elsewhere. Surely, there must be something fundamentally wrong the ways that negotiators approach their tasks.

Indeed, an analysis of international negotiations over the past 50 years shows a common error in the behavior of would-be peace makers, particularly in the Middle East, based on the belief that individuals and nations have common values. Building on this faith-based foundation, politicians like John Kerry and UN Secretary Ban-ki Moon, as well as journalists, social psychologists and others stress the importance for each side to “recognize the other’s humanity” as the basis for peace.

This “one size fits all” approach erases the very different and unchanging collective identities, including religion, which fuels these conflicts, rendering the prescriptions not only useless but counterproductive. In his keynote speech in Jerusalem last March, President Obama noted that some Palestinians the same bright futures for their children as Israelis want for theirs. But many do not – the evidence clearly shows that a large number of Palestinians teach their children to hate and prepare them for “martyrdom” in the form of killing Israelis.

In academic theories, this basic error is known as the fallacy of mirror imaging – the assumption that “they” (meaning the terrorists and their supporters) are just like “us”. Obama, Kerry, most European diplomats and journalists, as well as the leaders of Israel’s peace industry, are guilty of mirror imaging — of projecting their own experiences, cultural frameworks and perceptions onto different societies around the world. Similarly, for the same reason the many well-funded and hope-filled academic peace dialogues, such as those run by Harvard social-psychologist Herbert Kelman and his followers, have produced little of significance, and caused damage.

In the Israeli-Palestinian case, for example, the mirror imaging fallacy assumes that if the people of Gaza were able to thrive economically, they would act to protect their investments and adopt middle class values, like Americans and European, for example. As in the cases of other faith-based concepts, this belief is never examined in detail. If it were, the proponents would see that the massive economic aid to Gaza was funneled off into an industry of terror tunnels and rockets to attack Israel, and not to develop jobs and economic growth. (The Hamas leadership in Gaza poured an estimated \$1.25 billion into attack tunnels alone.)

As a result, while the Europeans and Americans are pushing for an end to the blockade of Gaza, including the rebuilding of the shipping port, Israelis, who are largely aware of the mirror image fallacy, are firmly opposed. From experience, Israelis know that in Gaza, as long as the hate remains, any and all facilities and goods will continue to be used for war and terror. The values, culture and collective goals of Hamas are very far removed from those of modern Western liberal societies.

In contrast, peace, or at least conflict management which is often the best that can be realistically achieved, as in Northern Ireland, is primarily based on core interests and deterrence – on the fear that the

leaders recognized that for both, further warfare would be disastrous and Kissinger emphasized negotiations based on deterrence and demilitarization of the Sinai. Going further, Begin and Sadat began

direct talks that led to the 1979 peace treaty. In this very successful example, there was no mirror-imaging, and the social-psychological dimension that Jimmy Carter kept pushing, was irrelevant.

If the conflict in Gaza is to be managed, without the very high cost of destroying the Hamas leadership, it is necessary to establish long-term Israeli deterrence, requiring major military operations with the resulting casualties and damages. This approach, and not mirror imaging, proved largely successful in the West Bank after 2002, and any “two state” formula must first and foremost retain Israeli deterrence. Stability and economic development is taking place within the framework of unquestioned Israeli military dominance, and would end immediately if Israeli power was weakened.

Therefore, if they want to be successful, the eager mediators from the US and Europe must change their understanding of negotiations in such conflicts. Mirror imaging and projecting their own cultural values onto the leaders of jihadist terror groups (and the Islamic Republic of Iran) are dead ends.