

A capitalist peace

Annika Hernroth-Rothstein

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When I was in Hebron earlier this year, I walked through the Arab neighborhoods, surprised at the affluence, the hustle and bustle and normalcy of what I had expected to be a village in disarray. There was a mall, a huge taxi garage and a marketplace filled with strangers and neighbors going about their lives.

Later that day, as I was standing on a balcony in the Jewish community, overlooking both sides of the city, I asked my friend if he feared the violence exploding from over that hill. No, he said. "If a third intifada will come, it won't come from here. They live a great life, and during the search for the killers of Eyal Yifrach, Gil-ad Shaer and Naftali Frenkel this past summer the community came to a halt. They lost enough for a mother, later that year, to turn her own son in to the police for plotting a kidnapping. Imagine that."

That conversation comes to mind when I see the Israeli Arab mayor of Nazareth, Ali Salem, confront Ayman Odeh, a Knesset member on the Joint Arab List, for incitement and damaging Jewish-Arab coexistence in Israel while the MK attempted to conduct an interview in downtown Nazareth. Salem drives up in his car and yells at the Knesset member. "Ayman, go busy yourself elsewhere, you've ruined the city for us!" Salem shouts in a combination of Arabic and Hebrew from the window of his sedan. "Get out of here, enough with the interviews. You ruined the city for us. You've ruined everything, go to Haifa! There wasn't a single Jew here today. Not even one!"

I have no illusions of a peace based on mutual love and understanding. So-called experts like to say that the parties in this conflict need to understand each other, but from where I am standing, that is the least of our issues. Israelis and Palestinians live side-by-side and work side-by-side, and there is no lack of understanding of the other, nor will peace be achieved through closeness or meetings in big shiny halls, but rather by simple cost-benefit analysis.

Immanuel Kant said that commerce is incompatible with war and that the creation of a modern economy makes war unprofitable. Israel can help speed up the process for its neighbors. Over 50,000 Palestinians enter Israel every day to work. Perhaps stripping their permits is a good place to start in order to teach the difference between liberties and rights, and make them into paupers rather than martyrs for their cause.

If we are to assume that most Palestinians are not terrorists, one could hope that the majority would not react kindly to their livelihoods being taken from them by the murderous minority, or rather by the entity of power inciting and egging them on. We can wait forever for the Godot that is mutual understanding and respect, but why would we when financial push and pull is a much more reliable tactic? Eric Gartzke, a political science professor at Columbia University, writes in the 2005 Cato Institute report "Economic Freedom and Peace," that "liberal political systems, in and of themselves, have no impact on whether states fight. Gartzke claims that in particular, poorer democracies perform like non-democracies, and that the correlation between economic liberty and peace is 50 times as great as that between democracy and peace. "Democracy does not have a measurable impact, while nations with very low levels of economic freedom are 14 times more prone to conflict than those with very high levels."

If Israel were to close its borders in the short term, it could lead to them being safer and more open in the long term. Sanctions, from Israeli government to citizen, could help achieve what presidents and diplomats could not. Peace through capitalism, affluence through democracy and stability without the tedious parlor game that so far has been these negotiations.

For too long, Israeli politicians have believed that there will be a mutual understanding, but I believe that dream is as impossible as it is beautiful. Golda Meir famously said that we will only have peace with the Arabs when they love their children more than they hate us, and to that I would like to make a cynical addition. Perhaps peace will come when the Arabs find us more lucrative in life than in death, and their own methods of madness but a highway to self-destruction.

The Nazareth mayor yelled in frustration, not at Jews but at the Arab MK profiting off his town's destruction. It wasn't talks or coexistence conferences that made him see the light, but the loss of the almighty shekel.