

Israel-Pakistan Public Diplomacy Campaign

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Program

To carry out a public diplomacy campaign to introduce elements of Pakistani and Israeli society and diasporas, and educate each respective side of the long-standing but relatively unknown ties. By creating a basis of understanding between civil societies from the two states and in their diasporas, this public diplomacy campaign would help lay the foundation for positive relations between Israel and Pakistan when such ties come to fruition.

Situation

Although Pakistan and Israel have no official diplomatic ties, there has been considerable cooperation between the two states dating back to their respective beginnings as sovereign entities. Although it seems counterintuitive, Pakistan and Israel have actually maintained solid, but behind-the-scenes, relations[•] based on Cold War dynamics, regional politics and political expediency. These relations have existed at the very apex of Israeli and Pakistani society, yet these ties still remain rather unknown to each respective population. Since the diplomatic ties have been unknown until recently, the existence of any form of public diplomacy between the two states has been minimal[•].

At various times, Israel and Pakistan have flirted with forging diplomatic relations, as early as the 1950s and as recently as the period of the Oslo Accords and in the wake of the Gaza disengagement. Following Israel's withdrawal from Gaza, Pakistan and Israel's Foreign Ministers met for the highest-level official meeting in Istanbul, Turkey on September 1, 2005. Meanwhile, President Musharaf met Prime Minister Sharon on the sidelines of the United Nations some two weeks later. President Musharaf went on to address major American Jewish organizations, marking the first time a Muslim leader of a country with no ties to Israel conducted a public dialogue with Jewish leaders. Pakistan has also discussed trying to serve as a possible bridge between Israel and the Arab world, from as far back as 1952 when Pakistani Foreign Minister Sir

[•] For more on the history of Israel-Pakistan ties, see: Paul Rockower, "Dancing in the Dark: Pulling the Veil off Israel-Pakistan Relations," *Children of Abraham Project*, Harvard University 2007, available at <<http://home.comcast.net/~srockower/psr/pakisraelrelations.pdf>>; P.R. Kumaraswamy, "Factors Involved in the Normalization of Relations between Pakistan and Israel," PINR (Power and Interest News Report), June 8, 2005, available at: http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_printable&report_id=311&language_id=1; P.R. Kumaraswamy, "The Strangely Parallel Careers of Israel and Pakistan," *Middle East Quarterly*, June 1997, available at: <<http://www.meforum.org/article/348>>;

[•] there has been some "diplomacy by deed" in the form of American Jewish and Israeli assistance to Pakistan in wake of the Oct 2005 earthquake, and there has been some high level religious pilgrimage and exchange from Pakistan, see: Zaigham Khan, "Shalom Maulvi," *The Herald*, July 1997 .

Zafrullah Khan offering to mediate Israel's acceptance into the region, to similar offers from President Pervez Musharaf some 55 years later¹.

Meanwhile, groups in the respective diasporas reached out to form grassroots organizations such as the Pakistan-Israel Peace Forum². Founded in 2005, the Pakistan-Israel Peace Forum was created to foster cultural, social and business links between Israeli and Pakistanis, and the organization set up an online petition calling for strengthening contacts between Israel and Pakistan. The online petition received more than 500 signatures of support.

Within Pakistan, in the media and other facets of civil society, the issue of Pakistani recognition of Israel was discussed and debated. In the ensuing discussion, common sentiments expressed included: "Why shouldn't Pakistan recognize Israel? Has Pakistan and Israel ever fired a shot at each other? Pakistan has relations with India, whom it has been to war with three times, why shouldn't it have relations with Israel?"³ Ultimately, many Pakistanis declared their reservations concerning the Palestinian issue and its symbolic value to the Islamic world, but that a just and equitable solution between the Israel and the Palestinians, or at the very least substantial progress towards such a goal, would allow Pakistan to move towards recognition of the Jewish state.

Yet in wake of events such as the Second Lebanon War, fall of the Musharaf government and increased instability in Pakistan, as well as the ongoing political turmoil in Israel, the efforts for outreach have hit a lull. With a vigorous public diplomacy campaign carried out by Jewish, Israeli and Pakistani NGOs, there exists the opportunity to strengthen the relationship between the two communities to help pave the way for a successful relationship when future ties become a reality.

Benefits

In light of the absence of official ties, there remains the distinct opportunity for nongovernmental organizations to play a role in formulating a public diplomacy campaign to educate Israel, Pakistan and their diasporas on the long-standing history of ties and lay the foundations for future relations. Through a public diplomacy campaign that focuses on creating understanding of the virtually unknown relationship, and dynamics of future relations, there exists the possibility paving the way for future cooperation between Jewish, Israeli and Pakistani civil societies as a pre-cursor to relations in the future.

¹ "Haughty answer to Pakistan," *Ha'aretz*, April 25, 2007, available at: <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/851874.html>

² Eric Fingerhut, "Let's Seize the Day' Two Twentysomethings create Pakistan-Israel Peace Forum," *Washington Jewish Week*, September 28, 2005, available at <http://www.washingtonjewishweek.com/main.asp?SectionID=4&SubSectionID=4&ArticleID=4145&TM=83058>

³ *Khabrain*, September 3, 2005, available at: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/pakistan/2005/wwh90512.htm>; Paul Rockower, "Pulling away the veil over Pakistan," *Jerusalem Post*, March 3, 2007, available at <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull&cid=1173173967403>

Given the isolation of Israel vis-à-vis the Islamic world, and given Pakistan's increasing isolation through the perception of its increasing radicalism, the opportunity to show a nascent dialogue between the second largest Muslim nation and the Jewish state would be a public diplomacy boon for two countries with flagging public diplomacy images. Dialogue with Israel gives Pakistan more credibility to burnish a moderate image, while dialogue with Pakistan allows Israel to reach beyond seclusion. All of this being carried out through non-diplomatic, nongovernmental channels helps mitigate the dynamic of the absence of formal diplomatic relations.

Strategic Goals

- To use the history of the behind-the-scenes diplomatic relationship between Pakistan and Israel as a catalyst for a public diplomacy campaign to forge relations between Pakistani, Israeli and diaspora civil societies in a series of conferences.
- To create ties between nongovernmental organizations that deal with Jewish, Israeli and Pakistani affairs as a foundation for understanding and a precursor for normalization of relations between the Israeli and Pakistani governments.
- To hold conferences for members of Israeli and Pakistani civil society to meet in neutral third party locations in the Middle East, and for American Jewish and Pakistani diasporas to meet in locations in the United States.
- To promote partnerships and avenues of communication between Israelis, Pakistanis and their Diasporas
- To offer the respective groups a web-based forum to hold discussion and debate.

Program

As a way of formally introducing Pakistanis and Israelis, a series of conferences would be conducted in neutral third countries that hold ties with both nations or maintain large diasporic communities. These conferences would be intended to further political, cultural, and social links between Israelis, Pakistanis and their diasporas. In the Middle East, nations like Turkey and Qatar would serve as ideal locations for such conferences. This conference would bring together Pakistani and Israeli journalists, artists, writers, filmmakers, students and other facets of civil society. Concurrently, conferences for the Jewish, Israeli and Pakistani diasporas would be held in the United States. Locations in America would include Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Houston and Washington, DC.

Sponsors/ Partners/Participants

On the Jewish/Israeli side, partner organizations would include the American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League. The three groups were all present at the meeting with former President Musharaf in 2005. All three groups also do work in Israel and could be contacts for recruiting participants from Israel and the United States. Another partner organization would be the Daniel Pearl Foundation, an organization created in honor of slain Wall Street Journalist Daniel Pearl. The Daniel Pearl Foundation works to promote cross-cultural understanding, and works with facets of civil society in Pakistan to carry out journalist exchanges and other dialogue initiatives.

On the Pakistani diasporic side, partner organizations could include the various Pakistani associations like the Pakistani American Congress, Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and various Pakistan Associations located in major cities including Houston, New York and Washington.

Organizations like the Pakistan-Israel Peace Forum in America and the Pakistan-Israel Friendship Society in the UK would represent grassroots groups founded abroad for the sake of Pakistan-Israel understanding. Grassroots organizations like the Pakistan-Israel Peace Forum offer a model of engagement for the public diplomacy campaign, and their membership would be ideal participants.

Media Environment

With no diplomatic ties, and considerable distance separating the two states, one way to bridge the divide would be to set up an internet site that hosts blogs, online chats and web videos to help familiarize the respective populations, dispel myths and offer a forum for discussion. In addition, Facebook and Myspace sites would be used to further tap into internet capabilities for connection.

Meanwhile, Israelis and Pakistanis would conduct webcast radio programs to discuss the past ties, present situation and future relations that would be streamed online on the aforementioned site. The webcast radio programs would feature content with Jewish and Pakistani Muslim religious leaders to discuss similarities in faith and religious practices and dispel misconceptions.

Israel has one of the most web-savvy populations in the world, while Pakistan possesses a burgeoning IT industry. Israelis also have a history of using the web to communicate with their enemies, even during times of war. The most recent case occurred during the Second Lebanon War in 2006, when Israeli and Lebanese bloggers discussed and debated the ongoing conflict in a civil manner, even as bombs were falling⁴. Given the proper forum in cyberspace, Israelis and Pakistanis could conduct this nascent public diplomacy dialogue.

Budget

Without getting into detailed figures, the budget for such a venture does not need to be extensive. Budgetary costs would include the creation, launch and maintenance of the website, as well as costs related to the various conferences. The project could be organized on for as little as \$10,000 and in a timeframe as short as 3-6 months, although a larger budget and more drawn out timeframe would help strengthen this venture.

Evaluation

Measurement of the effectiveness of the public diplomacy campaign could be quantified in the number of participants to attend the proposed conferences. In addition, evaluation can be gauged in the hits to the proposed web site and blogs, and the number

⁴ Gil Kaufman, "Israelis, Lebanese Blog To Each Other As War Rages." *MTV*, July 25, 2006, available at <http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1537066/07252006/id_0.jhtml>

of participants in the online chats. Online surveys would be employed to measure the effectiveness of the campaign's outreach efforts.

Conclusion

While Pakistan and Israel will likely remain without normalized relations until the resolution of the Palestinian issue, it is still possible to conduct grass roots dialogue efforts via conferences and internet sites as a way to create the basis of future relations. To bypass the lack of normalized relations, nongovernmental organizations in the Jewish and Pakistani diasporas can play a major role in spearheading the push for dialogue and understanding. This public diplomacy campaign will help further future engagement between the two sides.