Instilling Hope for Peace in Israel-Palestine: Effective and Ineffective Interventions

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The most deeply-rooted international conflicts can be defined as "intractable". Intractable conflicts are violent, demand extensive investment from the belligerent parties and persist for a long time. Intractable conflicts also share a more subjective quality: group-members embroiled in such conflicts perceive it as inherently irresolvable. The perceived irreconcilability of the conflict impedes resolution and keeps the conflict prolonged. The longevity of the conflict, in turn, feeds back and reinforces group-members’ hopelessness regarding future resolution.

A set of studies explored the perception that the conflict in Israel-Palestinian is irreconcilable and the extent to which this perception is malleable. A baseline study (N=110) confirmed that Jewish-Israelis’ hope for peace on both affective dimension (feelings of hopefulness) and cognitive dimension (belief in the likelihood of resolution) is very low. However, results from the experimental study (N=320) show that in certain conditions hope for peace can be induced. Specifically, participants’ hope for peace (on both affective and cognitive dimensions) increased after seeing an out-group communicator conclude that though obtaining peace was hard, it is possible. When the same conclusion was presented by an in-group communicator, hope for peace remained at the baseline level. Surprisingly, participants’ hope did not fall beneath baseline levels when the communicator, regardless of his nationality, concluded that peace was impossible. A follow-up survey revealed that the effects of the hope-inducing messages were sustained over time and through political turmoil. Interestingly, effects of our hope-inducing messages on participants’ political behavior were not observed in the first wave but emerged in the follow-up survey.