1967 , A starting point to peace

The Six Day War was a watershed in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It brought major points of contention to the surface, but also generated potential for resolution.

By Shaul Arieli | Dec. 6, 2013 | 9:54 AM | 2

Without a common conception of time, it’s impossible to maintain a common life as a society, French sociologist and psychologist Emile Durkheim maintained. A common conception of time is also important in understanding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Three key years in the conflict, 1917, 1947 and 1967, mark three sets of events, each year with its own significance, on which in principle an agreement between Israelis and Palestinians can be based.

The conception of 1967 includes the Six-Day War and UN Security Council Resolution 242, which suggests parameters for a settlement based on the pre-1967 borders. The conception of 1947 includes both the UN partition resolution-providing for a Jewish state and an Arab state in Palestine - and the 1948 war that resulted. It is a conception that seeks primarily to resolve the refugee problem through a significant return of refugees. And there is the conception of 1917, which goes back to the Balfour Declaration - supporting the establishment of only a Jewish homeland in the Land of Israel - and to the British Mandate over Palestine.

It would be appropriate to resolve the public controversy over the timing of the beginning of the conflict and designate the Balfour Declaration as its opening shot. It is unique in how it created the national narrative of the two sides. The Jewish-Zionist side views it as international recognition of the right of the Jewish people to establish an independent state in the Land of Israel. The Arab-Palestinian side sees it as a historic injustice because it did not apply the principle of self-determination to the Arabs of Palestine, who constituted a decisive majority in the country at the time.

1947 is the “product” of 1917, because it was 1917 on one hand that made possible the political and physical fulfillment of the Zionist vision. On the other hand, it spurred the appearance of the Arabs of Israel, the Palestinians, as a party with specific national demands, the most important of which was a claim over that same territory. 1917 was therefore the “big bang” that set the conflict in motion. 1947, despite its being the Culmination of the process, is one of the consequences of 1917.

That is all the more so regarding 1967. That year’s events stemmed mainly from the Arabs’ refusal to accept 1947 as an established fact. Even if 1967 created new possibilities for a settlement of the conflict through Resolution 242, which was adopted in the aftermath of the war, it is clear that it should not be viewed as the point of departure of the conflict, because the negotiations also concern mutual recognition with its origins in 1917, and the refugee issue from 1947.

Anyone who seeks to establish the Palestinian narrative, or the Israeli one, as a basis for negotiations places an impassable roadblock in the path to an agreement. The different narratives cannot currently be bridged, due to the residue of the past and its consequences for the outcome of the negotiations.

From my standpoint, it is not possible to come to a final peace agreement without complete adoption of Resolution 242, which represents the 1967 conception. The 1967 war was a watershed in the conflict. It brought about fundamental changes that not only brought problems to the surface that required a solution, such as the “legacies” of the 1948 War of Independence - borders, security, Jerusalem and refugees. It also created possibilities with the potential to resolve these problems.

Through the 1967 conception, the parties can agree on a solution to all of the issues in a way that of course will not do away with their conflicting and colliding narratives, but that would avoid a rift between pragmatic leaders and those segments of their populations that oppose a compromise. The inherent advantage in the 1967 conception lies in its ability to present a solution without having to address the conflicting narratives head-on. Bypassing the narratives can make it possible for the Palestinians to maintain the dream of the homeland, meaning all of Palestine of the British Mandate, from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River. And Israelis would be able to continue to dream about all of the Land of Israel - within those same borders, on the clear condition that in practice the two parties respect one another’s sovereignty, based on the agreement that their two states sign.