

Hope for peace may be encouraged by enemies in Israeli-Palestinian conflict

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Jewish Israelis may feel more hopeful when they hear messages of hope from Palestinians regardless of whether they are portrayed as peace activists or former militia members who had attacked Israeli military targets, according to new research published in *Social Psychological and Personality Science*.

However, similar hopeful messages from outside experts had no effect in instilling [hope](#), the study found. The group's research may provide insight not only for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but for other societies embroiled in protracted intergroup conflict.

"Your perceived enemy who you are suspicious of may be very effective in instilling hope for a resolution of the conflict," said lead researcher Oded Adomi Leshem. "People who are more persuaded by that message may then be more encouraged to engage in activities that promote peace."

The findings suggest that media campaigns in Israel that encourage peace should feature Palestinians sharing that message, said Leshem, a doctoral student in the School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University. A survey in 2013 found that almost half of both Israelis and Palestinians don't believe a peace agreement will ever be reached.

In an experiment conducted in Israel with 356 Jewish Israelis, the [participants](#) saw one of four videos featuring a Palestinian actor who said

he was a peace activist or a militia member who had served time in an Israeli jail. In different versions of the videos, the portrayed peace activist or militia member stated he was optimistic or skeptical that peace could be achieved.

Participants who heard the optimistic video reported a greater sense of hope, regardless of whether the message was from a peace activist or an insurgent, which surprised the researchers. There was no difference in those effects regardless of the right-wing or left-wing political affiliation of the participants. It may be the case that the Israeli participants focused more on the actor's Palestinian identity rather than his affiliation as a peace activist or former militia member, Leshem said.

A similar experiment with 376 American participants found that compared to the involved sample, the non-involved participants (i.e., Americans) were influenced to a much greater degree by any one of the four conditions. In other words, their beliefs are much more malleable. They were least affected by the militia member turned peace believer and reported greater feelings of hope after seeing the video of the peace activist who was still optimistic.

In a preliminary experiment with 70 Jewish Israelis, the participants didn't report greater feelings of hope after reading a newspaper article featuring outside experts who stated the conflict could be resolved. It appears that an optimistic message from a perceived enemy has greater effects in instilling hope, said Leshem, who grew up in Israel and has been involved in the peace movement there. He plans to conduct a similar study with Palestinian participants to see if there are similar results from the other side of the conflict.

"I know the situation is very, very dire so I'm not naïve, but my hope is still alive because I know so many Israelis and Palestinians who are committed to peace," Leshem said. "This research may help lead to

methods for instilling hope in societies that desperately need it."

More information: *Social Psychological and Personality Science*,
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