

Nov 04, 2016 by *Naomi Leight-Give'on*

Corporate Diplomacy: A Better Path to Peace ^[1]

From all the terrible news typically coming out of reports from Israel and the West Bank, a March 15 article from *Bloomberg Press*, struck a happier note. For advocates of public diplomacy between Israelis and Palestinians, corporate diplomacy could be a key factor in restarting the peace process. The article, titled "Israeli Technology Company Turn to West Bank for Outsourcing," highlights the unspoken and growing partnerships between Israeli and Palestinian high-tech firms. According to the article, outsourcing of this type has occurred over the past decade and even more encouraging, citing a 2010 report by *Mercy Corps*, the article notes that 32% of Palestinian high-tech firms work with Israeli partners. In 2008, the Israeli-Palestinian Chamber of Commerce was founded to facilitate these partnerships. These developments are music to public diplomats' ears, for what better way to create peace between the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority than through collaboration and development between the two peoples?

This corporate diplomacy between high-tech firms and businesses in Israel and the West Bank demonstrates a willingness to overcome not only personal suspicions but physical barriers between the two peoples. Partnering with Palestinians on projects in the high-tech sector, one of the leading industries for Israel around the world, demonstrates that while the two governments may not be able to come to a public agreement, companies – with the desire to grow – can create mini-peace accords, through business negotiations.

Take for example MERCOSUR, a trade agreement between Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, ratified in 1991. This was not only an agreement to promote free trade between the four nations but also served to prevent historic rivals, Argentina and Brazil, from being able to use military force, or the threat thereof, to settle disputes. Other agreements, such as the Treaty of Paris signed in 1951 by six European nations after World War II which created the European Coal and Steel Community, helped to economically integrate Europe and prevent future wars.

Given these proven models for economic and peace-enforcing agreement, and considering the positive developments over the last decade in business and commerce between companies in Israel and future Palestine, these examples should not be overlooked. If corporations, which are natural competitors through capitalism, can work together to enhance profits, governments should be able to do the same. Trade agreements as a form of public diplomacy, and corporate diplomacy – already in existence between Israelis and Palestinians – are viable and necessary components of any path to peace.
