

Inside the lab using mind-changing psychology experiments to solve the Israel-Palestine conflict

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To read a man's mind, first you have to outline his skull.

Last November, I watched a psychologist use a digital pen to draw the circumference of a man's head. The coordinates of his brain were quickly mapped, pinpointing the precise areas within his skull that process emotions. Behind him, a massive magnetic mind-reader—a neuroimaging device called a magnetoencephalography, or MEG—emerged from the wall, funneling into an oversized white helmet. It took two scientists to slowly maneuver the apparatus into position around his head.

As the man lay still, staring blankly up at a screen, researchers crossed wires over his body and taped sensors to his temples. Yoav (a pseudonym, as he asked to remain anonymous), a 28-year-old political science student at Bar Ilan University in Israel, was paid 110 shekels (around \$30) for his time, and didn't know he was about to become part of an experiment attempting to change his mind about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It's rare for psychologists to even create real-world experiments in geopolitical conflicts. Betsy Paluck at Princeton University, who won a MacArthur "genius" grant following her work [using radio to promote reconciliation](#) in Rwanda, is one of just a handful conducting such experiments. Separately, few academic psychologists use the results from their research to help shape policy; Stanford University psychology professor Greg Walton, who has done considerable work on the [best resources and messages in schools](#) to help children learn is a rare example. Combined, then, Halperin's focus conducting experiments within a conflict setting, and his work applying the results outside of academia, make his efforts unique.