

Options open to the Palestinians

Attendance (without distinction): Azmi Shuabi, Samir Huleileh, Mohammed Madani, Reema Nazzal, Husam Izzedin, Mohammed Shtayyeh, Fadwa Shaer, Lily Feidy, Qays Abdel Karim, Saleh Rafat, Majeda Al Masri, Hanan Ashrawi

MIFTAH Team: Bisan Abu Ruqti, Riham Kharroub, Nida' Ibrahim, Joharah Baker

Introduction:

In light of the international efforts to re-launch direct Palestinian-Israeli negotiations in addition to the continuing political crisis because of Israeli occupation measures, US policies and the deadlocked reconciliation talks, it is imperative to devise alternative options to the current situation. In this context, President Mahmoud Abbas has floated seven "alternatives" should the negotiating process fail including resorting to the United Nations for recognition of a Palestinian state. Whatever the options available may be, there is a consensus that the current formula for a solution, i.e. the negotiation track, has hit a dead end. Hence, there is a need for "radical" and/or creative ideas to pull Palestinians out of the quagmire they are currently in and devise a unified front and policy to change the negotiating framework.

Current Challenges facing Palestinians

While all were in agreement that the Palestinians currently face a number of challenges and difficulties because of the current right-wing Israeli government, the US administration position and the continued internal split among Palestinians, the participants differed in their proposed approaches to solving the issues.

On the subject of reconciliation, there doesn't seem to be any prospects of reunifying the two sides [Fateh and Hamas] in the near future. Some suggested that Hamas had a counter-program to that of our national program. While most of the participants agreed that reconciliation between Palestinian political parties was imperative in order to create a united front, one viewpoint was to the effect that the Palestinians would have to learn to live with the split. That is, Gaza would become somewhat of a "federation" as part of the future Palestinian state.

Most importantly, however, was dealing with the current status quo in the negotiating process. Palestinians have focused mostly on the settlement issue, which is only part of the

problem. A solution to this problem must be integral and comprehensive. Palestinians must not rush to achieve their goal of statehood because there are too many obstacles in the way. For one, the PA's mentality is a weakness for us; there is a struggle over authority, that is between the West Bank and Gaza and there is constant Israeli escalation on the ground, namely settlements. Furthermore, Israel's long term plans have always been to prevent a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders. Gaza, according to the Israeli plan, could be left to become an Islamic emirate and the West Bank would become cantons administered by the Palestinians.

All were in agreement that calls for the dissolution of the PA were not practical because this would lead to a state of chaos and would compel the US and Israel to call on Jordan or another authority to take its place.

Future options/scenarios

The participants proposed a number of options, many of them "radical" in the sense that the current formula needs a complete "makeover." One proposal was to create a National Front to govern the West Bank as an alternative formula to the program of the Palestinian Authority, which most agreed, had failed in its own program (elections, competition between political parties, etc.). This however, could not be applied to Gaza, which would become a federation of Palestine. We need to think of the two entities separately since Israel will eventually leave Gaza, which is not the case for the West Bank. A united national front was no call for the dissolution of the Palestinian Authority but rather a change in its form. This change needs to be discussed within the corridors of the PLO.

One scenario was that although there were many difficulties in the path of statehood and the exercise of the right to self determination, the Palestinians should continue to adhere to the two-state solution. Within this framework, there needs to be a popular movement to confront Israeli measures on the ground in all of the Palestinian territories. The PA and the PLO need to find a way to encourage the people to rise up.

Since the Palestinians' main goal was to rid itself of the Israeli occupation, participants indicated that we would have to make this occupation too "pricey" to Israel. At the moment, it was not only cheap, but profitable to Israel. This could be achieved through calling Israel out on all of its violations instead of playing the US waiting game. We have been hostage to this game for too long and this has been part of the overall failure of the process. For example, settlements must be halted and the basis for the negotiations must be fair and balanced.

One way to achieve this is to isolate Israel in the international community. We need to go to the Security Council every chance we get, even if the US vetoes the resolutions. The same

should apply to the International Court of Justice. Even if we are turned down, we need to make noise.

Also, if Israel does not adhere to its obligations, the Palestinians should also not be forced to adhere to theirs. It is not about cancelling out the option of negotiations. All agreed that there was no real alternative to negotiations. However, the bar would have to be raised in terms of their framework. Now, all prospects for the negotiations were barren.

Recommendations

- Initiatives must be taken and political wheels set in motion so that we can move from the cycle of reactions to that of actions. The initiative should not be left in the hands of outside parties such as the US and Israel.
- The foundations on which the current negotiating process is based must be clearly defined and its procedural mechanisms changed in order to create a formula that would ultimately end the occupation of Palestinian territories. The 1991 formula created by the Oslo Accords has gotten us nowhere.
- The Palestinians' national program and makeup need radical changes from within to confront the current challenges.
- The international community must be more engaged in pushing to end the occupation. This is not a "peace process" but a process of decolonization.
- We need a national agenda for popular resistance, one that the PA would be involved in, or led by a non-partisan national front.
- We need to focus on the boycott of settlements in all its forms – working in them, boycotting their products and politically, internationally isolating them.
- More efforts need to be exerted to isolate Israel through holding it economically, politically and judicially accountable; there should be more cooperation with international civil society in supporting the global BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions for Palestine) campaign.