

22/11/2007

Mechanisms for the Prevention of Separation between the West Bank and Gaza Strip

Present (without distinction): Salam Fayyad, Azmi Al-Shuaybi, Ahmad Majdalani, Mohammad Shtayyeh, Jamal Zaqout, Samir Huleileh, Daoud Talhami, Sami Abdel Shafi, Iyad Al-Sarraj, Rajab Abu Sareyyeh, Nadya Abu Nahleh, Raji Al-Sourani, Hasan Al-Kashef, Zaynab Al-Ghunaymi, Mkheimar Abu Sa'ada, Talal Okal.

Present from MIFTAH: Hanan Ashrawi, Lily Feidy, Bisan Abu Ruqti, Reem Wahdan, Shadia Al-Ghoul, Maysa Hindaileh.

Introduction:

With time, the abnormal situation in Gaza Strip continues to develop towards institutionalizing the financial and administrative systems and security regulations, in a way that enforces internal division. It became necessary not only to diagnose this exceptional situation, but to also examine how to remedy the predicament and respond to the de-facto authority in Gaza, in a time where no one foresees a clear mechanism to address the present political crisis.

Security is a central issue in the current argument on the Palestinian arena, since it is well-known to all; that the Palestinian society can, indeed, bear political diversity but can not bear pluralism in security matters by any means. Given the existing reality, there is fear from surrendering to the de-facto in Gaza, and enforcing its complete dissociation from the West Bank.

In light of the above, and following the assembly of the Legislative Council with special delegations from the imprisoned members in Gaza, the formation of a separate High Council of Justice, and the biased institutionalization of the security apparatuses, questions had to be raised on: what is the role of the Gazans themselves in resolving this crisis? How can a popular movement be initiated to abort separation? What are the means for guarding the basic rights of the Palestinian people? And how can we preserve the legal and institutional bodies that keep the Palestinian people united?

Prospects of Organizing the relationship between the West bank and Gaza Strip:

There have been several proposed mechanisms to organize the relationship between the West bank and Gaza Strip. Some people see that – given the present complexities- it is difficult to discuss separating the West bank and Gaza, by forming two separate local administrations in each, since this will expose Gaza- in particular- to more isolation and would form a threat to the national project. Historically, the Strip had flourished by economic and commercial openness, relying on the free movement of people and merchandise, and more seclusion will only deteriorate the living conditions in Gaza even

more. Also, this option will not resolve the sharp political dispute on the Palestinian arena, and would only cause more division and separation.

Others see that the de-facto in Gaza can not be ignored or neglected, and requesting the resumption of the situation to what it has been like on the eve of June 14th is impractical, knowing that no administration from outside the Strip can govern it. Given the current complexities, the chances of practically bringing back the legitimacy to Gaza can not be seen to happen soon.

Moreover, historically, the economic and social systems in Gaza Strip have had different characteristics from those in the West Bank. Therefore, the Strip must be given a broader space to form its own local administration that assesses its basic needs, and acquires support from the central government on all matters, within the framework of the decentralized governance of the state, except for the central issues relating to sovereignty. This option will alleviate the engraved stereotypes between the West Bank and Gaza, and should offer more space for dialogue and unity.

Prospects of Separation:

What happened on the eve of 14 / 6 was not a compelling transient case; instead, there was a complete integrated project that pays towards separation. This scheme managed to find space in light of the awful reality of the Authority in Gaza, and the absence of a strong leadership that is capable of influencing the public opinion. As time passes, the separation is strengthened not only economically, and in security, but also it is gradually building a psychological effect.

In this regard, there were various opinions regarding prospects of separation. Some believe there should be no fear from separation between the West Bank and Gaza, since Gaza has not been able, during any era in the past, to be separate. Still, the de-facto authority in Gaza and its ability to suppress the citizens can not be underestimated.

Yet, the people are resisting the new policies by all means. Journalists resisted the press cards imposed by the de-facto authority, advocates and judges boycotted the newly formed High Council of Justice, and community activists protested against human rights violations. These are strong indicators that there should be no fear from the dissociation of Gaza from the West Bank.

Others say that the regional factors play a significant role not only in supporting the separation, but also in enforcing it. There are Arab and international interests in employing the Palestinian card to improve their negotiations terms with the United States. Israel – the main beneficiary from striking the national project- has a significant interest in this division, and is persistently working to enforce the separation by all its measures on the ground. In this, Israel aims to improve the ceiling of negotiations, so that Palestinians accept so little in the West Bank.

Also, Hamas bears direct responsibility by its connection to regional agendas. It is implementing a dangerous policy through its actions on the ground by creating a parliamentary cover and convening the Legislative Council in Gaza, forming the High Council of Justice, and operating the executive force as police. By this, Hamas is creating the three main powers consisting a comprehensive political system, and therefore, devoting more separation.

The political and economic situation in Gaza:

Gaza Strip is currently undergoing difficult economic and living conditions due to the siege and closing of crossings and borders. This has led to the suspension of production from Gaza due to the lack of primary raw materials for manufacture, and the lack of access for the export of agricultural and industrial products. The blockade has led to a rise in unemployment to quarter a million people, especially with the cessation of construction, and ban on exports of berries and flowers during their seasons.

Paying the salaries of civil servants in Gaza is indeed considered an important step in alleviating the effects of the siege. Still, this seems not to be enough given the scarcity of basic materials and the low purchasing power of the citizens there.

The Government policy and the siege

The government has repeatedly emphasized its refusal of the siege imposed on the Palestinian people in Gaza Strip. Still, it must work to organize a clear agenda and capture, support, and invest in factors of protest, so as to restore the national cohesion and prevent separation between the West Bank and Gaza. Also, work should be done to prevent Israel from manipulating the current dispute on the Palestinian arena so as to strike the entire national project.

Israel has deliberately pursued a policy of deception regarding the government's policy towards the Strip, aiming at increasing the divisiveness already happening on the Palestinian political front, especially with regard to the issue of opening the crossings. Historically, the decision to open the crossings has been a one-sided decision taken by Israel whenever it wants. Israel is now trying to put the blame on the Palestinian Authority in its policy towards the Strip, despite the persistent efforts the government is concerting to open the crossings, lift the siege, and manage the Palestinian side of the crossings, but Israel refused all the offered solutions from the Palestinian side.

In order to prevent deception, the Palestinian government should reassure its refusal of the policy of economic embargo since it believes that it is not possible, especially in light of the tunnels that led to the prosperity of illegal trade providing Hamas with cash money while deteriorating the living conditions of the ordinary citizen.

Recommendations:

1. The government continues to emphasize its rejection of the separation and the siege imposed on Gaza Strip. It must take comprehensible measures and practical steps towards the re-fabric between the two wings of the nation and continue to provide necessary services to citizens in the Strip.
2. Finalize the ratification of Palestinian laws unifying the West Bank and Gaza Strip, even if by presidential decrees.
3. The government sets a solid economic program, and recruits all its available resources to implement it.
4. Appeal to the popular will and support its resistance to the de-facto authority, so as to prevent the devotion of separation.
5. Maintain all the constitutional institutions that form an umbrella for the Palestinian people, mainly the presidency and the Legislative Council, not allowing any manipulation of their roles and functions.
6. Preserve the democratic achievements of the Palestinian people, especially those accomplished after the genuine elections of January / 2005.
7. Return to national dialogue in order to resolve the crisis and bridge the existing gap in the Palestinian politics.
8. The government grants privileges and incentives for the establishment of joint companies and trade unions between the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
9. Re-formulate strategies, tools and mechanisms of the Palestinian political system to guarantee non-recurrence of the situation in Gaza.
10. Integrate non-governmental organizations towards developing ideas and proposals for the advancement of the daily living conditions of citizens.