

THE TURNING POINT

REDEFINING THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL PROJECT

Third Strategic Report By



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OUTLINE OF THE MAIN ARGUMENT

Introductory note: filling the strategy gap

The Palestine Strategy Group has been developing inclusive and sustained strategic thinking for Palestinians since 2006 and feeding this into the national debate at all levels. The purpose of its Strategic Reports is to bring all of this together at appropriate moments in order to fill the damaging strategy gap that otherwise prevents us from formulating a coordinated and dynamic program for attaining national liberation and self-determination.

Two previous Reports in 2008 and 2011 are available on line. They involve thinking through the Strategic Prerequisites without which collective strategic thinking is not possible, analyzing the Strategic Context within which the current situation has evolved (the complex system that needs to be changed), evaluating Strategic Scenarios (possible futures) in terms of desirability, attainability and likelihood, from this formulating short-term, medium-term and long-term Strategic Goals, establishing the Strategic Principles underlying those goals, assessing Strategic Strengths and Weaknesses, setting out the complementary (albeit sometimes mutually exclusive) Strategic Options available (strategic paths to our goals), comparing Strategic Means in terms of different sorts of power, and from this constructing a flexible and comprehensive set of interlocking routes that can be adapted according to changing circumstances and can together address the complex of sectors and levels necessary if the system as a whole is to be transformed. As also set out in the 2008 and 2011 Reports, integral to strategic thinking is to overcome damaging internal divisions, to look at the chess-board from the perspective of the opponent and act accordingly, and to maximize external support.

As such, in its 2008 Report the PSG evaluated different possible scenarios for Palestinian strategy and concluded that the route of bilateral negotiations has been used by Israel to prevent the outcome, namely ending occupation and achieving Palestinian historic and legitimate rights. The report recommended the re-orientation of Palestinian strategy towards clearer definitions of both ends and means and ensuring that the Palestinian declaration of independence on 22 percent of historic Palestine and the subsequent 1993 PLO recognition of Israel on 78 percent is not unconditional. In its 2011 Report, confronted by the expansionist Israeli policies, the PSG concluded that the bilateral ‘Oslo’ route was closed. It explored an alternative internationalized ‘UN’ route. This route is being pursued by the Palestinian leadership and culminated in overwhelming international endorsement for the Palestinian position in November/December 2012 (UN Resolution 67/19).

Purpose of the third report

The task of this third report, based on workshops, commissioned research papers, and group consultations undertaken since 2011, has been to think through the strategic implications of the refusal of Israel to countenance the establishment of an independent Palestinian State on the 22% of Palestine that is overwhelmingly recognized as occupied Palestinian territory in international law and successive UN Resolutions. During this period, the creeping expansionist colonization and Judaisation of our land and the intensification of the regime of segregation, discrimination, blockade and apartheid on the top of the military rule made the bilateral negotiation route to independent statehood, extremely difficult if not impossible. The swing to the right in Israeli politics embodied in the ascendancy of the current ruling coalition that publically prorogate the “greater Israel project” confirms this trend and makes it essential to find an alternative national strategy for Palestinian liberation and independence. This is the “turning point” that is the theme of this Report.

However, such a strategic shift does not ignore the continued adoption of policies based on the "two-state solution" paradigm, which has been adopted since the 1970s, on the local, Arab, and international levels, nor it ignores the heavy restrictions of the Oslo process. This requires adopting a strategy to bridge the gap between the limitations of the present moment with the prevailing balance of power, and the requirements for re-opening a strategic horizon for alternative options.

Bridging this gap is the focus of transitional strategy proposed by the Palestine Strategy Group in its third report to reach at the turning point towards the alternative paradigm to end the complex system mentioned above.

During the process of preparing the Report, the intensive efforts of US Secretary of State John Kerry to reactivate the otherwise moribund bilateral negotiation process are currently in a state of a deep crisis following Israel's reneging on agreements that led to entering the talks. However, the resumption of negotiations in accordance with the ideas of U.S. Secretary of State , John Kerry, without a clear terms of reference and objectives, attempting instead to present a framework agreement as an alternative terms of reference, not in line with international law and UN resolutions. This encouraged Israel to renegotiate principles that have been agreed since the start of the “peace process” and introducing new non-issues designed to hijack the process. Still, Israel was able to continue building facts on the ground and deepening the imbalance of power, particularly by expanding settlement construction, thus undermining the prospects for a two-state solution.

This Report is premised on the idea that the bilateral route has been closed by Israel. The alternative strategy analyzed in this Report is based on adopting a new strategy for the national liberation project based on the struggle to exercise the right of self-determination, in the absence of a negotiated settlement which leads to the achievement of independence in a sovereign Palestinian state on the territories occupied in 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital. This scenario is based on Israel's responsibility for blocking the way before the "two-state solution, and leading the bilateral negotiations to a dead end.

The central argument

When the route to genuine Palestinian statehood via bilateral negotiation has been closed by Israel, the strategic orientation of the Palestinian national project necessarily changes. This change is made up of three interlocking components, each of which is dictated by the logic of the new situation.

(1) A new route to national independence — international rather than bilateral

Because Israel blocks the bilateral route to Palestinian independence, the strategic response must be to switch to a longer-term international route. Implementation of the internationally endorsed path to a Palestinian State can be achieved via an international UN route — perhaps a Geneva Conference for Palestine similar to the Geneva Conferences for Iran and Syria, or even a UN Trusteeship similar to that for Kosovo. Because this will be resisted by Israel and the USA, the second change is that realistic prospects for Palestinian self-determination via a genuinely independent Palestinian State will now be a longer-term struggle based campaign rather than a shorter-term negotiation based campaign. This campaign will be based on convening of an international conference on the basis of international law under the supervision of the United Nations in order to implement its resolutions instead of negotiating these resolutions.

(2) A renewed rejection of the status quo — the revival of integrated resistance

Perpetuation of the status quo — which most Palestinians think will be the eventual upshot of the Kerry initiative — means ongoing discrimination, continuing occupation and deepening colonization. Palestinians reject this absolutely. The strategic response, therefore, has to be to revitalize national resistance. This will mean ending the present underpinning of occupation — for example by transforming the PA, redefining its functions and reconstituting the PLO to represent all Palestinians. It means creating an integrated program for what the 2008 PSG Report called ‘**Smart resistance**’ — the coordination of a national and international campaigns within the framework of international norms and international law.

(3) Palestinian rejection of the status quo and Israeli refusal to allow a genuine Palestinian State opens the space for a new strategic front. The strategic response is to demand immediate realization of Palestinian legitimate and historic rights for those in Palestine and for the refugees in exile. These internationally endorsed rights have been undermined and compromised while waiting for a solution to be reached and a state to be established for more than two decades of futile negotiations. Now that such a solution is blocked, the question is not about a different form of a solution but how to redefine the Palestinian national struggle in the absence of a solution and national independence. Palestinians cannot be expected to wait any longer for their internationally endorsed individual and national rights. It has been almost 50 years since the 1967 occupation and 66 years since the Nakba of 1948.

A new strategic front to bridge the transition between rejection of the status quo (2) and the as yet unrealized aspiration for a Palestinian State (1) — a paradigmatic shift from the framework of a political settlement and "a struggle between two national movements" based on the principle of the partition of the homeland on the 1967 borders, to the framework of decolonisation and equal rights in the historic land of Palestine.

This requires the dismantlement of the existing Zionist institutional setting and colonial structures and on the basis of rejecting the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, dismantling the existing colonial settler regime and ending the exclusive and preferential systems in historic Palestine practiced by Israel. This opens the way for different scenarios with equal rights for the Palestinian people and the Israeli Jews whatever the outcome — i.e. whether there or is not yet a Palestinian state. This is a transitional strategy. It does not mean accepting the status quo, but challenging and transforming it. And it does not prejudice the continuing aspiration of Palestinians for national self-determination through independent statehood, but reinforces it so that the cost of blocking it becomes higher for Israel.

Such a rights-based framework is a strategic goal that unites all Palestinians - in the area of 1948, 1967 and in exile. It is fully consonant with international ethics and international law. In this it is in marked contrast to the ‘greater Israel’ program of the current Israeli government. The greater Israel program seeks permanent effective control over the whole of Palestine. It is based on the demand for exclusive rights for the Jews — individual citizenship rights, collective majority rights, indigenous rights of return for all Jews worldwide and self-determination rights in a Jewish state as per Israel’s claim — that are thereby denied to Palestinians. . The greater Israel project is a mortal threat to the very existence of the Palestinian people. It contravenes every principle of international ethics and international law.

What does it mean to say that the third — transitional - component of the new redefinition of the Palestinian national project is to define and demand equal non-negotiable rights straight away in the current situation? It is a central purpose of this Report to begin the process of spelling this out. This becomes the central task in the new national strategy and one that must involve all Palestinians in the consultations that are planned to follow this Report.

Let us now briefly translate this into strategic language. Where we are now The present situation is as described in scenario (2) above. The current continuing discrimination, apartheid, occupation and deepening colonization of Palestinian land is sustained by an historically conditioned complex system. The system is made up of interlocking sectors (military, economic, political, social, cultural etc) and levels (local, national, regional, global). It is highly asymmetric, both qualitatively (there is only one state) and quantitatively (the discrepancy in military and economic power is extreme). The interests of the possessor, Israel, are upheld by the strongest world power. The challengers, the Palestinians, are scattered and our interests do not have a comparable international champion. This is the existing situation. As the possessor three scenarios embody continuing Israeli domination: (i) never-ending bilateral negotiations as a cover for continuing colonization; (ii) a pseudo-Palestinian state perpetually under effective Israeli control, (iii) unilateral separation and annexation of much of the remaining the

22% of Palestine. All three scenarios are rejected by Palestinians. The Kerry initiative is either close to endorsing a combination of (i) and (ii) or withdrawn because of the recent deadlock.

Nevertheless, despite such great asymmetry, it is the determined aim of Palestinian strategy to dismantle this unjust system. Palestinians have no illusions about how difficult this task is.

Where we want to go

The goal of the Palestinian national project is to end occupation and apartheid and to attain national self-determination along lines set out clearly in successive United Nations General Assembly resolutions, most recently in November/December 2012, which included, inter alia, demands for “the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem”, the “realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination and the right to their independent State”, a “just resolution of the problem of the Palestinian refugees in conformity with Resolution 194 of 11 December 1948” and “the complete cessation and dismantlement of all Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem.” (UNGA 67/19) (ICJ ruling 2004)

Only nine states voted against this resolution - Canada, the Czech Republic, Israel, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Panama and the United States. Most of these states voted against on procedural rather than substantive grounds. Three permanent members of the UN Security Council voted in favour, and one (the UK) abstained.

How we get there

The Report opens up discussion about the elements that need to be integrated into the overall strategy — strategic paths to the desired goals, strategic tasks to be performed, and the appropriate means for attaining them.

In particular, nine main strategic tasks are identified, which include two tasks related to the internal capacity of Palestinians ((a) (b) and (c)), three tasks related to the three components of the new national strategy ((d), (e) and (f)), and three further tasks related to relations with Israel, the Arab world, and the wider international community respectively ((g), (h) and (i)).

(a) The bilateral negotiations route under the USA auspices has failed. For more than 20 years, the ‘peace process’ has been designed to prevent the outcome and a way for Israel to entrench occupation and deepen discrimination rather than ending it. This route must be terminated. Future negotiations must be redefined, with clearer objectives, references and frameworks. Here the alternative to the failed bilateral route is the internationalisation of negotiations, i.e. convening an international conference under the UN umbrella, with full mandate, in accordance with the international law. This might be the last remaining chance to exhaust the possibility for achieving a negotiated settlement within the framework of the "two-state solution".

(b) Rebuild national unity and representation within PLO by seeking common ‘Ownership’ of the new national strategy discussed in the Report. This could form a key part of a consensual national charter.

(c) Begin a gradual decomposition of the obligations of the Oslo, and begin to transform the structure, roles, functions and obligations of the Palestinian Authority so that it no longer serves to reinforce continuing occupation, as explored in the Report.

(d) A gradual process to sign international agreements and join UN agencies on the basis of the new status of Palestine as an observer State. On this foundation initiate the new ‘international’ route to full independent statehood as discussed in the Report. In the case of failure of the two-state solution, the Palestinians could adopt a strategy of anti-apartheid at the international level in line with the requirements of the shift towards the colonial context of the conflict.

(e) Relaunch what the 2008 PSG Report called integrated ‘Smart resistance’ against the deepening of permanent Israeli control of the state of Palestine. Targeted direct action in conformity with international law include popular political protests, boycott and anti-normalisation measures. Consider the role of a reformed PLO as a unifying vehicle for coordinating national resistance from all Palestinian communities in the homeland and the diaspora.

(f) Formulate an operational plan for defining and demanding equal rights straight away in the current situation with the aim of transforming, not accepting, it, and without prejudice to longer-term aspirations to independent statehood, along the lines set out in the Report.

(g) Adopt mechanisms for influencing Jewish Israelis and Jewish communities around the world based on a discourse of core human values and equal rights as made clear in the Report.

(h) Launch a sustained campaign to restore the status of the Palestinian cause and secure sustained support for the new strategy from the Arab world.

(i) Launch a sustained campaign to secure sustained support for the new strategy from the wider international community.

Conclusion

This third PSG Report seeks to set out the parameters for a new strategy of national liberation for Palestinians. The logic that leads to this redefinition of the national project is triggered by Israel’s ending of any realistic possibility of a bilateral route to Palestinian independence. The three inter-connected components of the new strategy outlined above follow from this. A clear overall direction ahead is indicated, together with an outline of the main tasks to be undertaken. It is now time to gain endorsement and clarification from wider consultation among Palestinians, and then wider dissemination in Israel, in the Arab world, and in the wider international community.

It is evident that the Israeli governments’ colonial policies and practices in the past few decades have been inspired and informed by the Greater Israel project. This

project seeks perpetual control of the whole of historic Palestine. It demands rights for the Israeli Jews and Jews worldwide that it thereby denies to the Palestinian people. The Greater Israel project is a mortal threat to the very survival of the Palestinian people for it is premised either on their negation and denial as a people or in the best case on their subjugation and oppression. The proposed Palestinian strategy, on the other hand, seeks internationally endorsed principles of equal rights with or without a Palestinian State. The Palestinian project threatens no one. It does not threaten Israel. That is the decisive difference between the two projects. It is on this firm foundation in international ethics and international law that Palestinians now seek international support for this new strategic orientation of their just and principled national liberation struggle. We Palestinians will never give up our national aspirations. And because, in the long run, principles are more powerful than military strength, we will finally succeed.

