



REVITALIZING PALESTINIAN NATIONALISM

Options Versus Realities

editors

PERRY CAMMACK

NATHAN J. BROWN

MARWAN MUASHER

Adnan Abu Amer, Nur Arafah, Bashir Bashir, Tariq Dana, Nadia Hijab,
Ali Jarbawi, Oussama Kanaan, Ghassan Khatib, Halla Shoaibi

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Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Publications Department
1779 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20036
P: +1 202 483 7600
F: +1 202 483 1840
CarnegieEndowment.org

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

PERRY CAMMACK is a fellow in the Middle East Program at Carnegie. He previously worked on the Policy Planning Staff for U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and for nearly a decade on the staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He has degrees from the University of Maryland and Columbia University.

NATHAN J. BROWN is a professor of political science and international affairs at George Washington University, where he directs the Institute for Middle East Studies. He is also a nonresident senior fellow in the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He has served as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow, a Guggenheim Fellow, and a Fulbright Scholar. Brown is the author of seven books, including *Palestinian Politics After the Oslo Accords: Resuming Arab Palestine* and *When Victory Is Not an Option: Islamist Movements in Arab Politics*. Brown's latest work is *Arguing Islam After the Rebirth of Arab Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

MARWAN MUASHER is a vice president for studies at Carnegie, where he oversees research in Washington and Beirut on the Middle East. Muasher served as the foreign minister (2002–2004) and deputy prime minister (2004–2005) of Jordan, and his career has

spanned the areas of diplomacy, development, civil society, and communications. He is the author of *The Arab Center: The Promise of Moderation* (Yale University Press, 2008) and *The Second Arab Awakening and the Battle for Pluralism* (Yale University Press, 2014).

SUMMARY

Fifty years after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, the Palestinian national movement seems to be at a crossroads. Repeated efforts to negotiate a two-state solution have faltered, and the traditional instruments of Palestinian nationalism—the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Fatah, and, since 1994, the Palestinian Authority (PA)—face crises of confidence. While the current path is likely to lead to continued occupation, settlement expansion, and further internal division, the strategic alternatives could unravel Palestinian institutional and diplomatic achievements, with no certainty of success. A coherent strategy is needed, along with a new generation of leaders that can stem the political ruptures and inject new life into Palestinian institutions.

PALESTINIAN VOICES

- The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace recently conducted a survey of fifty-eight selected Palestinian leaders in various fields. As expected, participants view the Israeli occupation and settlement activity as critical impediments to Palestinian sovereignty. However, they are equally disturbed about internal and social divisions. In particular, the West Bank–Gaza split is seen as a massive barrier to fulfilling Palestinian aspirations.

- A majority of respondents are pessimistic about the future and believe that the two-state solution is no longer viable. Youth are especially inclined to believe the Oslo Accords have not served Palestinian interests, and a significant number view armed resistance as a more effective method for advancing Palestinian nationalism. Carnegie also found a dwindling faith in Palestinian political institutions. Meanwhile, there is a growing focus on the importance of civil society and educational institutions.

POLICY ALTERNATIVES

In recent decades, most Palestinian national institutions have been organized around the assumption that they would eventually assume control of a sovereign state. But with Palestinians increasingly skeptical of the two-state solution, alternatives have emerged as plausible paths forward. Each has shown signs of percolation among grassroots actors, but none enjoys, nor is likely to enjoy, the full backing of the Ramallah-based leadership.

- **Binationalism.** Public support for binational proposals, in which Palestinians and Israelis would share a single state, remains relatively low; and advocates have yet to articulate a viable strategy to achieve that vision. However, given the emerging Palestinian demographic majority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, binational options may become more appealing in the years ahead.
- **Rights-based approaches.** There are indications that approaches seeking greater legal protections for Palestinian human and civil rights are gaining traction; they encompass various measures and tactics—from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement to international legal instruments to nonviolent resistance. But a sustainable civil disobedience campaign would be difficult to organize and could spin out of control without a national consensus, energetic leadership, and strong discipline.
- **Armed resistance.** Armed resistance, which is seen in Israel as synonymous with terrorism, is the most radical approach. The second intifada left thousands dead and was catastrophic to Palestinian aspirations. However, there is evidence that militancy is gaining traction, and Palestinian political stagnation has created a vacuum for disillusioned individuals or fringe elements to fill with violence.

TOWARD INSTITUTIONAL RENEWAL

- Palestinian political and cultural identity and the perceived ideal of Palestinian unity still seem to resonate strongly, but the Palestinian people are dispersed both politically and geographically, complicating institutional renewal efforts.

- While the PLO is weak, Palestinian interlocutors consistently view the entity as vital, and many believe it is key to the rejuvenation of the Palestinian national project. The PA has been atrophying for the last decade and today struggles to provide public services and remain solvent. It has failed to cultivate a new generation of talent, and there are unmistakable signs of brain drain.
- Palestinian factions, too, face daunting challenges. Fatah has lost its historical sense of mission after decades in power and functions as a patronage network rather than a political party. Hamas faces even deeper problems: the absence of strategy, its weakness in the West Bank and inability to govern Gaza, its failure to provide a genuine resistance option, and its status as an international pariah.
- Fatah and Hamas have agreed, with Western support, to a de facto partition of Palestine, which has allowed each to become deeply entrenched in its respective territory. There is a strong view among Palestinians that this rivalry divides the Palestinian people and has contributed to the decline in their institutions.
- While Palestinian factions have lost their ability to appeal to younger generations, the undercurrents that led to their creation remain a powerful presence in society. The formal structures that embody the Palestinian national identity are declining, but the identity itself remains strong.
- Furthermore, there are signs of dynamism at the subnational level. Unions, student groups, and other civil society actors have exhibited vibrant internal politics and engaging younger leaders, who may be able to revitalize Palestinian politics amid a pending generational change in authority.



Israel's borders with Egypt and Jordan have been formalized through peace treaties, but its other borders – including with Palestine – remain in dispute. The designations employed on this map do not constitute endorsements by the Carnegie Endowment.

INTRODUCTION

A half century after Israel's astonishing 1967 victory established control over East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza, the Palestinian national project still faces considerable barriers to statehood. The Palestinian Authority (PA)—created in 1994 as a way station to full sovereignty—has been split in two since Hamas' 2007 takeover of Gaza.¹ The pace of Israeli construction in the West Bank has increased more during the PA's twenty-three-year lifespan than in the first twenty-seven years of Israeli occupation, with the number of West Bank settlers rising from 116,300 in 1993 to 382,900 in 2015.²

Since the 1993 Oslo Accord, most Palestinian institutions have evolved upon the premise that a sovereign state is achievable through a negotiated settlement to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But since 2000, successive efforts to negotiate a final status agreement have failed. With the pathways to statehood increasingly in doubt, the end goal no longer seems to guide political calculations. As a result, Palestinian political legitimacy continues to erode, and Palestinians increasingly view their national leadership as incapable of articulating a coherent strategic vision.

Hence, Palestinian nationalism seems to be at a critical juncture, with no clear way forward. The current trajectory likely leads to continued occupation, settlement expansion, social division, and institutional decay. And while grassroots discussions of new approaches have

begun to percolate, no consensus has emerged. These approaches, which mostly involve increased confrontation with Israel, would likely bring socioeconomic turbulence and the possible unraveling of some of the organizational, moral, and diplomatic achievements of Palestinian nationalism to date—and with no certainty of success. Based in part on an informal survey of fifty-eight Palestinian leaders in various fields and featuring a collection of commentaries on subjects including civil society engagement, youth political participation, reconciliation, and international law and Palestinian rights, this report attempts to explore the prospects for national renewal.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Earlier this year, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace conducted a survey of fifty-eight Palestinians on their views on social and political trends. The group included scholars, journalists, human rights lawyers, activists, student leaders, former senior officials, entrepreneurs, and others, representing Palestinian communities in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, Israel, and the diaspora. They were not randomly selected, so their views should not be seen as representative of Palestinian society as a whole. However, their answers collectively shed light on the shape and future direction of Palestinian nationalism. While the survey results are reflected throughout this report, below are some principal findings. Unless otherwise noted, the respondents were asked to describe the following in their own words; the answers were then categorized as part of the analysis.³

- “*What, in your view, are the three most important challenges facing Palestinian society?*” (open response). Large majorities of the respondents included both (1) some variant of the Israeli occupation and/or settlement activity and (2) some variant of internal political and/or social divisions in their three responses. About half described some variant of leadership or vision deficiencies, while fewer respondents cited other themes, including economic challenges, democracy and human rights, and final status issues, such as the creation of a Palestinian state or the right of return.
- “*What, in your view, are the three most significant challenges facing Palestinian youth?*” (open response). A large majority of the respondents cited some variant of unemployment and underemployment as one of their three responses. About

half cited the occupation or restrictions on movement, while fewer respondents cited other themes, including social alienation, challenges related to opportunities for political or social engagement, or a lack of political vision.

- “*What do you think is the mostly likely situation in Palestine in 10 years’ time?*” (open response). More than half of the responses were pessimistic in nature. About 20 percent were optimistic, and less than 10 percent were neither pessimistic nor optimistic.
- “*Do you believe a two-state outcome between Palestine and Israel is possible?*” (multiple choice). Thirty out of fifty-four respondents said “no,” while twenty-four said “yes.”
- “*What is your preferred political outcome for Palestine within 10 years?*” (open response). This question elicited a wide range of responses, with slightly more respondents describing some variant of a two-state solution than a one-state solution. (Most of the one-state variants were binational, democratic outcomes, though one West Bank student leader directly advocated the violent removal of Israelis.) However, more than half of the responses declined to outline a specific political end-state, focusing instead on a variety of tangible objectives such as settlement removal, liberation, or the right of return.
- “*In your opinion, what is the most important Palestinian institution?*” (open response). The fifty-six respondents named twenty different entities, with the Palestine Liberation Organization being the most cited (nine responses). More respondents named either a civil society or educational institution (six responses total) than named the PA (four responses). Seven respondents explicitly stated that there are no capable Palestinian institutions.
- “*Which of the following would you consider the most important component of your personal identity?*” (multiple choice). Thirty-two of fifty-six respondents cited nationality as the most important, followed by locality of origin (nine), religion (five), gender (two), and ethnicity (one). Seven respondents cited more than one answer; none cited family or clan.
- “*Who are the three most inspiring current Palestinian leaders?*” (open response). Thirty different names were offered by fifty-four respondents. After Abbas

(twenty-two), other top vote-getters were Mohammed Dahlan (fourteen), Khaled Mishal (thirteen), Ismael Haniyah (thirteen), and Marwan Barghouti (eleven). Eight respondents explicitly stated that there were no inspiring Palestinian leaders.

- “*Which foreign country is the most important to the future of Palestine?*” (open response). Fourteen of fifty respondents chose the United States, followed by Egypt (eight), Israel (six), and Jordan (four). Two respondents identified both Egypt and Jordan, while six named some other assortment of multiple countries and four said that no particular country is influential. One respondent each chose Iran, Norway, Palestine, Qatar, Syria, and Turkey.

THE VIABILITY OF THE TWO-STATE SOLUTION

In the early years after the Naksa (or Setback, the Palestinian and Arab description for what Israelis call the Six Day War), the vitality of Palestinian nationalism was far from assured. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was created in 1964 by the Arab League—then dominated by Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser—at least in part to contain Palestinian nationalism. After a generation in which the Palestinian national movement had been circumscribed by Arab nationalism, Egyptian control of Gaza, and Jordanian control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Palestinians in these areas found themselves in June 1967 suddenly under Israeli occupation.

Yet, after Yasser Arafat and an independent Fatah leadership emerged after 1967, Palestinians gained significant international support and made strides toward statehood and liberation. Their initial audacious guerilla action—often targeting not just military but also Israeli (and even non-Israeli) civilian targets—garnered international attention, while also associating the national movement's reputation indelibly with terrorism. However, Palestinians' willingness to use such violence did not preclude diplomacy—aimed first at the regional and then at the global level—nor did it prevent an eventual move toward political pragmatism, especially from the 1980s on.⁴

As Palestinian views were evolving toward the endorsement of a two-state solution in the 1970s and 1980s, international actors were defining the framework, in successive iterations, through which Palestinians aspirations would be fulfilled. Three examples are U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 242 in November 1967, the 1978 Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt, and the 2003 Quartet Roadmap for Peace—none of which Palestinians played a role in drafting.⁵ UNSCR 242 first articulated the concept of “land for peace,” which became the foundation for Israel’s treaties with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) and the Oslo Accords. The Camp David Accords contained an outline of an autonomous authority in the West Bank and Gaza, rejected by the PLO and never implemented but which became a model for the Oslo Accords fifteen years later. The Quartet Roadmap, drafted under former U.S. president George W. Bush and released by the

Quartet on the Middle East (United States, Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations) in April 2003, was a performance-based plan to end the conflict and became the basis for subsequent negotiations efforts.

A primary objective of the PLO, particularly in the precarious pre-Oslo period, was preserving the “independence of the Palestinian

decision.”⁶ While Palestinians have always defended their decisionmaking freedom, they also generally attempted to avoid estrangement from the Arab states. Periods of progress in the Palestinian project have generally corresponded with periods of independence, whereas periods of stagnation or decline have created openings for external interference.

Meanwhile, the United States and other international actors have resisted unilateral Palestinian efforts that operate outside the framework of bilateral negotiations, such as joining international organizations and working toward a reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas.⁷ Notwithstanding this resistance, the state of Palestine, though lacking borders or sovereignty, has received symbolic diplomatic recognition from more than 130 countries, representing about 80 percent of the world’s population; as well as observer status at the United Nations and other international organizations.⁸ But diplomatic recognition, in itself, carries little tangible benefit.

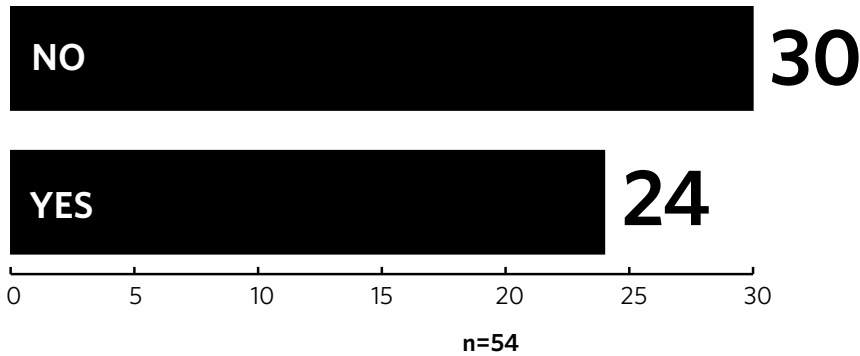
While the Ramallah-based leadership still operates within the contours of the Oslo two-state paradigm, outside this circle, faith in the possibility of a negotiated settlement has receded. Extensive public polling in the West Bank and Gaza going back two decades has found consistent support for a negotiated two-state solution⁹—at least in the abstract. But large majorities no longer see such a result as achievable: recent polls found that 65 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza do not consider the two-state solution

“Settlement expansion forms the very core of the occupation. Unless this is addressed, the rest is meaningless.”

—Mouin Rabbani, analyst and researcher

FIGURE 1.

Carnegie Survey: “Do you believe a two-state outcome between Palestine and Israel is possible?”



to be viable; only 3 percent in the West Bank and Gaza believe that President Mahmoud Abbas should prioritize peace negotiations; and only 16 percent of youth ages fifteen to twenty-nine believe that the Oslo Accords have served Palestinian interests.¹⁰ A majority of Carnegie survey respondents answered “no” when asked whether a two-state solution is still possible (see Figure 1).

ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES

With two-state solutions at a road block, what are the alternatives and how viable are they? Palestinians have long debated this question, with the most plausible being binationalism, rights-based approaches, and armed resistance. The first represents an alternative outcome, incompatible with traditional two-state diplomacy, and the latter two are alternative approaches not necessarily wedded to a particular end-state. Each has shown signs of percolation among grassroots Palestinian actors, but often at the fringes and none enjoys, nor is likely to enjoy, the full backing of the Ramallah-based leadership.

BINATIONALISM

Binational proposals, in which Palestinians and Israelis would share a single state, are not new. In the 1920s, the Jewish Brit Shalom organization—never amounting to more than perhaps a hundred or so members—promoted Arab-Jewish coexistence and a binational state in Mandatory Palestine at a time of intercommunal tensions.¹¹ In the late 1960s, before endorsing two-state outcomes and moving away from violence, the PLO proposed the establishment of a single “democratic secular state,” with equal protections for Palestinians and Jews.¹² In recent decades, certain segments of Palestinian society, such as intelligentsia and civil society activists, took a stand against the Oslo framework for failing to curtail settlement expansion and for compromising on Palestinian demands and thus began arguing for binational solutions.

However, public support for one-state outcomes, at least in the West Bank and Gaza, remains relatively low. One recent poll found that only 18 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza support a binational state, while another found that 43 percent of Palestinians disagree with remaining committed to a two-state solution.¹³ But large numbers of Palestinian youth—perhaps having less appreciation for the benefits of the limited self-determination of the PA—have declared the Oslo paradigm dead more forcefully than

their older contemporaries.¹⁴ In fact, some have argued that there is significant latent public support for one-state outcomes, which lack only advocacy by a dynamic leader to become legitimate and viable.¹⁵

“Achieving Palestinian statehood is necessary for full basic rights, unless a one-state solution is possible.”

-Hanan Hammoudeh, human rights advocate

Of course, many Palestinians consider movement toward one-state approaches to be disastrous to Palestinian nationalism, since Israelis would retain their institutional advantages.¹⁶ Such an approach, the thinking goes, could lead to the legitimization of Israeli settlements and put at risk the broad diplomatic recognition Palestinian nationalism has achieved.

The gradual turn of Palestinians toward binationalism may be correlated to the emerging Palestinian demographic majority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. There is a sense among many Palestinians that, political setbacks notwithstanding, time is on their side. According to a December 2015 projection by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of Palestinians and Jews living in Mandatory Palestine should reach parity in 2017 at approximately 6.4 million each.¹⁷ Another calculation found that Jews have been a minority in “Israel-Palestine” since 2012.¹⁸ Whatever the precise timing, the trend is clear: because Palestinian birthrates are significantly higher—4.1 per woman in the West Bank and Gaza compared to 3.1 in Israel¹⁹—Palestinians will eventually constitute a substantial majority in the combined area of Israel and Palestine. But if this faith in the power of a Palestinian demographic majority is misguided, it risks producing passivity and thus continued stagnation.

Even if the goal of a single democratic state is accepted as laudable, advocates of binationalism have yet to articulate a path to that vision. Notwithstanding the fear previous generations of Israeli leaders held at the prospects of losing Israel’s Jewish majority,²⁰ Palestinian demographic momentum has not resulted in a sense of urgency within Israel to resolve the conflict. The new Israeli right has apparently concluded that demographics alone are unlikely to force a resolution to the conflict. To leverage this majority, one Palestinian interlocutor told Carnegie, Israel must be forced to decide between one state or two—a choice Israel can avoid, so long as the West Bank and Gaza remain divided.²¹ Thus, while the weight of demographics is likely to change the contours of the conflict in the decades

ahead, possibly by making one-state outcomes appear more appealing, demography alone is unlikely to be determinative, at least in the near future.

RIGHTS-BASED APPROACHES

Implicit in the Oslo paradigm is the notion that Palestinian rights are best secured through a sovereign state. But in discussions convened by Carnegie, many Palestinians reiterate that their leaders should not accept simply any state conception that might be on offer. In other words, the substance of the state is seen as more significant than its form, thus casting doubt on the viability of an agreement that creates a state lacking attributes such as fixed boundaries, security independence, and border controls.²² There are signs of an evolution in the thinking of Palestinian activists and political theorists, including inside Israel, toward an approach that seeks greater legal protections based on instruments like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Such an approach could encompass a wide variety of measures and tactics both locally and internationally—from the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement to international legal and lawfare instruments to nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience.

A rights-based approach has the benefit of ambiguity in that it could be consistent with either a two-state outcome or binationalism—though it does raise the prospect of undermining fidelity to a two-state solution over time. If it is Palestinian civil and human rights that are of primary value, then the state becomes the means to an end rather than the end itself. And, of course, rights-based approaches could be used to demand increased rights from Palestinian governing bodies in the West Bank or Gaza, which could help explain their reluctance in fully embracing such approaches. Two specific applications of rights-based approaches are nonviolent resistance and BDS.

“Whether it is one, two, or fifty states, it doesn’t matter if there is a social contract based on principles of freedom, justice, and dignity for all, which Israel’s policies seek to prevent from materializing.”

-Fadi Quran, campaigner and community organizer

Nonviolent Resistance

A recent poll found that 62 percent of the population of the West Bank and Gaza would support nonviolent resistance in the absence of final status negotiations.²³ The theoretical appeal of such an approach to Palestinians is obvious, given the failure of either negotiations or violence to secure a state and the historical track record of nonviolent resistance movements in other contexts. But to be successful in practice would require a unified leadership, national consensus, and enormous organizational discipline—all of which

appear to be lacking.²⁴ A sustainable civil disobedience campaign would be difficult to organize and quite lengthy. And while it may conjure up idealistic images of peaceful marches, in practice, it is likely to be extraordinarily ugly—at least in the eyes of many

“There is not a single inspiring current Palestinian leader. Yet, the leadership model of the BDS movement is inspiring.”

-Alaa Tartir, researcher and policy analyst

who would oppose its goals. It would likely entail frequent confrontation between Israelis and Palestinians on the streets and via the media, international fora, and courtrooms. Many Israelis would see the campaign as an attempt to demonize and delegitimize their state, and it would likely result in considerable socioeconomic hardship for Palestinians.

Without a national consensus, leadership, and discipline, the likelihood that events would quickly spin out of control is high, creating openings for spoilers, such as Hamas, the Islamic Jihad, and other groups to push such confrontations toward violent conflict.

BDS

Launched in 2005 and supported by Palestinian civil society, the BDS movement is in some ways the international manifestation of nonviolent resistance. To this point, the accomplishments of BDS, which seeks to pressure Israel through international pressure and economic sanctions, have been more symbolic than real. Nonetheless, some Israeli leaders consider the movement a grave long-term threat, and the movement appears to enjoy widespread approval from Palestinians²⁵—even as many wonder how they can participate. Yet BDS presents its own set of challenges. The Palestinian economy’s deep dependence upon Israel for employment and consumer trade makes it difficult for Palestinians in the West Bank or Gaza to boycott Israel without incurring disproportionate economic hardship. Some Palestinian officials express private concern that were the economic damage caused by BDS to Israel to expand, Palestinians would also suffer given their economic vulnerability.²⁶ Although BDS does not take a position on final status issues—eager to preserve internal unity—its call for a full boycott on Israel (rather than simply on Israeli settlements) and its endorsement of a comprehensive right of return for Palestinian refugees goes beyond the positions of the PLO, contributing to a certain degree of ambivalence from Ramallah-based leaders. Regardless of its success going forward, the BDS movement—as a grassroots initiative that does not rely upon traditional factional structures—constitutes a potentially significant political development.

ARMED RESISTANCE

Armed resistance, which is seen in Israeli as synonymous with terrorism, is, of course, the most radical approach. While Israel maintains complete military dominance over any potential Palestinian adversary, given the three Gaza wars fought between Israel and Hamas in the last decade, the possibility of renewed Palestinian armed resistance cannot be discounted. Having lived through the devastation of the second intifada, which left approximately 960 Israelis and 3,250 Palestinians dead and was catastrophic to Palestinian aspirations,²⁷ elite Palestinians in Ramallah show little desire in moving back toward the renewal of violence.²⁸ Abbas himself does not condone violence and is criticized by Palestinians for being insufficiently supportive of popular resistance.²⁹ In discussions convened by Carnegie in December 2015 in the West Bank and in February 2017 in Amman, Palestinians made almost no reference to armed resistance. Little reference was made in Carnegie's survey either, with the exception of two students who advocated violence—though this is not necessarily reflective of broader public views.

However, there is evidence that militancy is gaining traction. Several recent polls found that Palestinians are almost evenly split between supporting negotiations and violence.³⁰ Indeed, the general state of political stagnation has created a vacuum for disillusioned individuals or fringe elements to fill with violence. In the fall of 2015, an extended wave of violence wore on for months, beginning with several days of clashes between Israelis and Palestinians at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, followed by a series of lone-wolf attacks. The series of events, which became known to Palestinians as the *habba* (outburst),³¹ initially centered in Jerusalem's Old City. From there, the bloodshed spread into the West Bank and Gaza, leading to the deaths of approximately thirty-four Israelis and 236 Palestinians through June 2016. The *habba* encompassed individual attacks perpetrated by unaffiliated but disillusioned Palestinian youth (of an average age of twenty-three),³² including some women, who were killed by Israeli security forces in significant numbers. The main factions—Fatah and Hamas—held back from direct participation. The sharp decline in the attacks in the spring of 2016 seems to demonstrate that the Palestinians inclined toward violence are insufficiently organized to carry out a third intifada.³³

But it is an open question as to whether future Palestinian leaders in Ramallah will maintain Abbas's fidelity to negotiations. Mohammed al-Aloul, Fatah's new deputy leader, is a veteran military commander who declared in 2012 that "no one has dropped the armed resistance

"Palestinian society is on the brink, internal inflict is brewing in Israel, and the occupation is getting more draconian as it swallows up more land and rights."

-Rula Jebreal, international relations professor

from his dictionary.”³⁴ In a private conversation a year earlier, he opined that uprisings are not decisions made by leaders but events that develop from below.³⁵ Meanwhile, Yahya Sinwar,

who was promoted in February 2017 to be the new Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, helped establish Hamas’s counterintelligence organization and spent twenty-two years in Israeli prison for killing Palestinian collaborators.³⁶ For the time being, Hamas appears uninterested in promoting a third public uprising, perhaps in part because such an uprising might jeopardize

“Without national unity, achieving any potential that might exist for national liberation is impossible.”

-Raja Khalidi, development economist

its own grip on power. But based on Hamas’s behavior in the past decade, it is not difficult to imagine scenarios in which their calculus changes, particularly in response to regional isolation, pressure from even more radical groups, or economic restrictions in Gaza.

INSTITUTIONAL REALITIES

Can any institution speak for Palestinians, develop (or even impose) a consensus on strategic direction, or coordinate their actions? Palestinians have access to numerous structures that were built to serve such purposes, but all are currently faltering. Can they be revived?

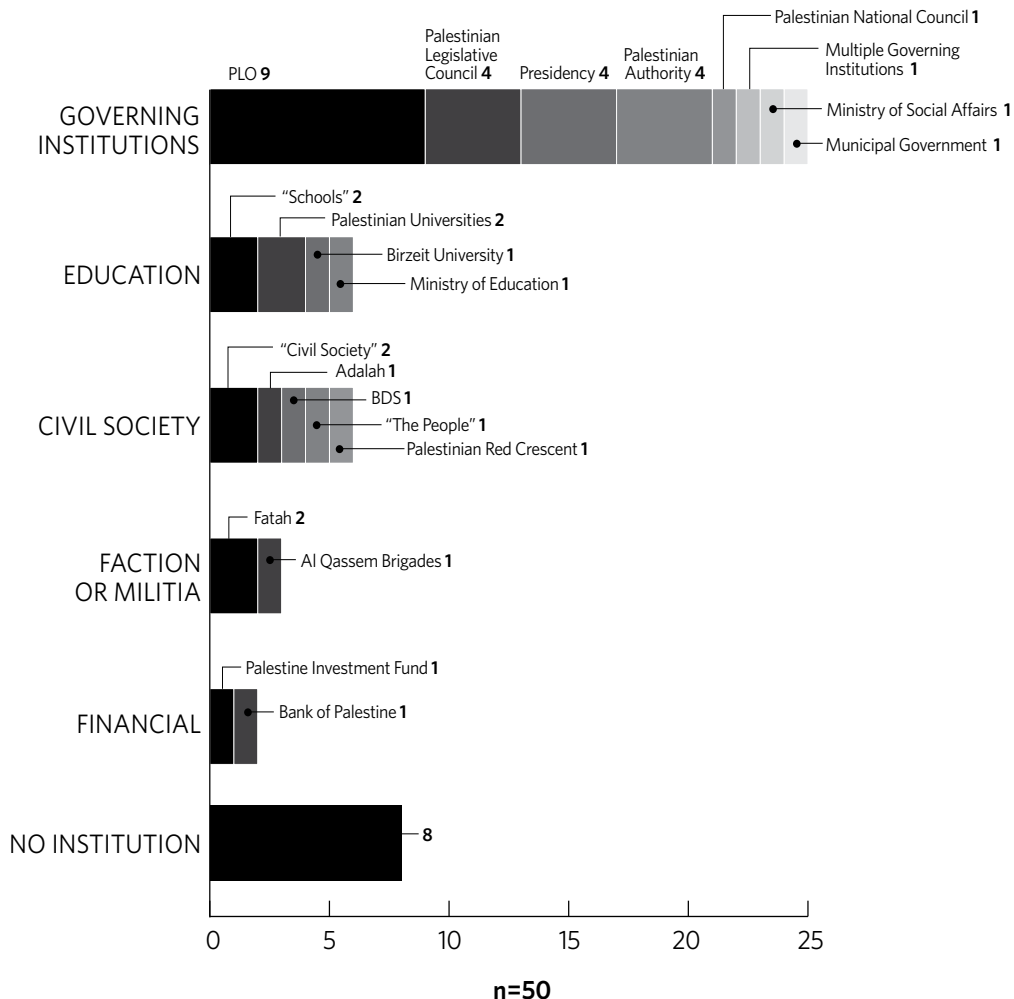
THE CHALLENGE OF GEOGRAPHY

While Palestinian political and cultural identity and the ideal of Palestinian unity resonate strongly in theory, for a national movement at a precarious crossroads, the differing priorities of its constituent parts complicate institutional renewal efforts. The West Bank risks deeper cantonization, with the total Israeli settlement population in East Jerusalem and the West Bank having reached approximately 600,000.³⁷ Ongoing Israeli and Egyptian restrictions on human and economic movement in Gaza has left the territory in a state of deep geographical and socioeconomic isolation.³⁸ East Jerusalem, the epicenter of Palestinian nationalism and cultural life for most of the twentieth century, is increasingly becoming culturally and politically marginalized amid demographic pressures, physical separation by Israel from Ramallah and Bethlehem, and institutional inertia.³⁹

The 1.7 million Palestinians in Israel constitute nearly 21 percent of Israel’s population.⁴⁰ While possessing greater democratic rights than Palestinian diaspora communities elsewhere in the Middle East, they remain culturally, economically, and politically isolated. Of the roughly 12 million Palestinians worldwide, about half live outside of historical Palestine and many face worsening conditions.⁴¹ The Yarmouk refugee camp in the suburbs of the Syrian capital of Damascus is an extreme case. Formerly home to 160,000 Palestinians, it was subjected to a brutal two-year siege that reportedly displaced an estimated 85 percent or more of its inhabitants.⁴²

The diversity of these communities has undoubtedly contributed to Palestinian cultural and social resiliency over the past half century. Their varied political and socioeconomic priorities might have been masked, though not always successfully, in the name of unity in the 1970s and 1980s when Palestinian nationalism was making progress and again after 1995 when statehood seemed within reach. Since then, however, Palestinian institutions have largely lost the ability to speak to the broader Palestinian population or to mediate their differences, and there are few opportunities for personal intercommunal interactions across geographic constituencies. While there are incipient social media efforts to bridge these gaps, such efforts have occurred almost entirely outside traditional Palestinian structures.⁴³ Carnegie survey respondents offered a wide range of responses when asked to name the most important Palestinian institution, including eight who said there was no such institution (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2.
Carnegie Survey: “In your opinion, what is the most important Palestinian institution and why?”



THE PLO, THE PA, AND THE COMING SUCCESSION

PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION

Founded in 1964 with a mandate to liberate Palestine, the PLO has been the diplomatic face of Palestinian nationalism. After assuming leadership of the PLO in 1969, Arafat gained recognition for the body—first in the Arab world, then from the United Nations General Assembly in 1974,⁴⁴ and then from the United States and Israel in 1993⁴⁵—as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. But even when it was a robust organization, the PLO was an umbrella for factions and their politics under Fatah domination.

In recent years, the PLO has been supplanted by the Palestinian Authority and particularly by the patronage that the PA brings. In Palestinian eyes, the Palestine Liberation Organization gave birth to the PA, but the organization survives today as an appendage to its own

“Government corruption is at the heart of the lack of trust between the government and the citizen.”

-Khalil Tafakji, head of maps department

creation. It no longer has a strong presence among diaspora communities and seems to have lost some capacity to speak for the full range of Palestinian concerns.

While the PLO is weak, it retains important symbolic capital. Palestinian interlocutors consistently view the entity as vital, if only as a

vessel to be reconstituted at a later date. Given the deficiencies of the PA, some Palestinians believe that the PLO is key to the rejuvenation of the Palestinian national project.⁴⁶ If there is to be a structural reconsideration of the relationship between Palestinian communities and institutions, the PLO is a logical instrument for this to happen. But the deep-rooted fissures between Fatah and Hamas may be, for the time being, an insurmountable obstacle. A revival of the PLO will occur either through the existing factions or around them. If the former, the PLO will remain subordinate to their interests; if the latter, it will be through a grassroots movement that has yet to emerge.

PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY

During his tenure from 2007 to 2013, former prime minister Salam Fayyad invested significant energy into professionalizing the PA and cultivating a talented cadre of technocrats. Such efforts won plaudits in Western capitals and increased the PA's governance capacity, but the effort created resentment among Fatah elite—not all of whom were fully appreciative of efforts to increase transparency and accountability—and among those who viewed enhanced security cooperation with Israel as collaboration.⁴⁷

In the absence of progress toward a sovereign Palestine, technocratic efforts have enjoyed limited public support and proven to be unsustainable. For the last decade, the PA has been atrophying—today, it struggles to provide public services and remain solvent. Even in Ramallah, some Palestinians are beginning to contemplate the end of the PA; a recent poll found that 48 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza support the Palestinian Authority’s dissolution.⁴⁸ Perhaps most troubling, the PA has failed to cultivate a new generation of talent, and there are unmistakable signs of brain drain.⁴⁹ Absent a rejuvenation of political leadership or unexpected progress toward statehood, it seems likely that the PA’s slow decline will continue.

As part of the generation responsible for building the instruments of Palestinian nationalism, Abbas serves simultaneously as the president of the PA, chairman of the PLO,

and head of the Fatah movement. Yet, a recent poll of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza found that 64 percent want Abbas to resign as the PA’s president.⁵⁰ Abbas’s successor (or successors) will likely lack his authority—and certainly that of Arafat. Carnegie survey respondents offered thirty different names when asked to name the three most inspiring Palestinian leaders, including eight who said there were no inspiring leaders (see Figure 3).

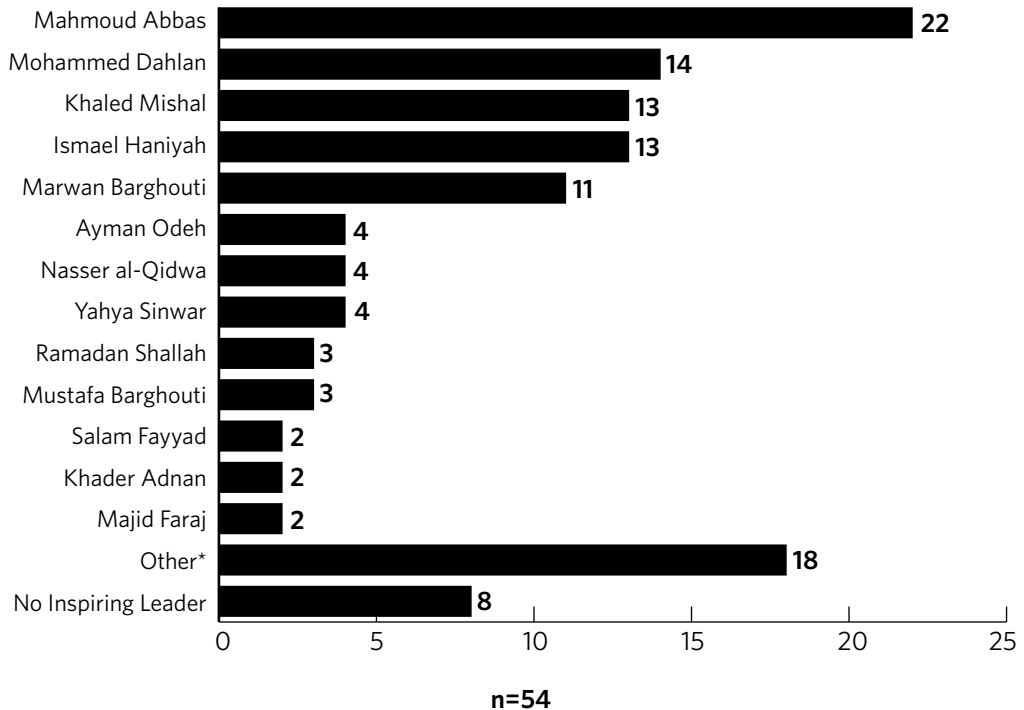
There are questions about the next generation of Palestinian leaders’ ability to maintain hard-won independence from Arab patrimony. There are already indications of Arab attempts to influence Palestinian succession dynamics, evidenced by, for example, Egyptian and Emirati support for Mohammed Dahlan, a former Gaza security chief and Abbas protégé now in exile in Abu Dhabi after an acrimonious falling out with his one-time mentor. So long as the Palestinian movement remains fractured and adrift, Arab capitals are likely to see openings to exert influence on Palestinian politics. Meanwhile, mediation efforts to regionalize the Arab-Israeli conflict—in seeking to capitalize on the convergence of security interests between Israel and a number of Arab states—could increase the influence of outside actors on Palestinian politics.

“The internal failures of the Palestinian Authority undermined the interests and well-being of the Palestinian people and are the reason why we have Hamas in control of Gaza.”

-Ahmed Fouad Alkhatib, humanitarian activist

FIGURE 3.

Carnegie Survey: “Who are the three most inspiring current Palestinian leaders and why?”



* The following names were each cited once: Yasser Arafat, Saeb Erakat, Hanan Hroub, Aida Touma, Omar Barghouti, Mohammed Shtayyeh, Haneen Zoabi, Jamal Juma, Husam Zomlot, Mohammed Mustafa, many young leaders, Ahmed Saadat, Jibril Rajoub, Mohammed Deif, Mahmoud Al-Zihar, Azmi Bishara, Mohammed Baraka, “BDS”

FATAH, HAMAS, AND THE PROSPECT OF RECONCILIATION

FATAH

Created in 1959, Fatah has dominated Palestinian politics since Yasser Arafat’s emergence as the de facto Palestinian leader after the 1967 war. Today, Fatah’s principal internal division pits Abbas against Dahlan. While Fatah’s seventh general conference in late 2016 was ostensibly an effort to reinvigorate the movement, the end result was to consolidate power around Abbas loyalists and prevent Dahlan’s readmittance.⁵¹ Although a recent poll found that only 33 percent of the Palestinian public support the renewal of Abbas’s mandate to lead Fatah for five more years,⁵² the appointment of Mohammed al-Aloul, an Abbas loyalist, as Fatah’s first-ever deputy leader has been interpreted as evidence that Abbas is not looking to give up power soon.⁵³ But Fatah’s problems go deeper than leadership squabbles, which, in any case, offer little ideological or policy distinction. Functioning as a patronage network rather than a political party, Fatah lacks a clear sense of mission. Like the PLO

and PA, it has failed, except in some specific localities, to refresh its ranks with younger voices. It is all but underground in Gaza and has lost much of its diaspora organization.

HAMAS

Founded in 1987 during the first intifada as a branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood—and designated as a terrorist organization by Israel, the United States, and the European Union—Hamis has generally kept its internal divisions in check. In some ways, Hamas has shown an impressive resiliency in sustaining itself, even as individuals come and go (or are killed). But Hamas faces even deeper problems than does Fatah: the absence of strategy, its weakness in the West Bank and inability to govern Gaza, its failure to provide a genuine resistance option, and its status as an international pariah, exacerbated by the Saudi and Emirati move against Qatar in June 2017.⁵⁴ In May 2017, the movement released a new document of principles that seemed to offer something for all of its elements. It accepted a state on the 1967 lines but repudiated Israel; it emphasized both national and religious aspects of the conflict.⁵⁵ Some critics believe the document was designed to fool foreign observers, but it is just as likely that it was written to mask internal differences, strongly hinting at ideological and programmatic evolution but committing to none of it.⁵⁶

Carnegie's survey participants collectively identified West Bank-Gaza divisions as the most important challenge facing Palestinian society. This is not surprising, since the Fatah-Hamas rivalry divides the Palestinian nation and contributes to the confidence deficit in Palestinian institutions. Essentially, the two factions have agreed, with Western support, to a de facto partition of Palestine, which has allowed each to become deeply entrenched in its respective territory. Thus, despite the obvious benefits of power sharing to the Palestinian national movement—including the possibility of revitalizing both the PLO and PA—repeated negotiations to reunify Palestine's two halves have failed, with neither side demonstrating a genuine willingness to compromise.

It is unlikely that future Fatah and Hamas reconciliation efforts will be more successful, especially if the factions are left to their own devices. Even when domestic pressure has swelled, such as the 2011 public demonstrations in both the West Bank and Gaza demanding PA reunification,⁵⁷ the parties have consistently managed to channel this discontent into political processes that allow them to reestablish control and placate public opinion. However, there are circumstances in which reconciliation could be wrestled out of the factions' hands: for example, a sustained

"All institutions have lost legitimacy in the eyes of most Palestinians."

-Mohammed Samhouri, economist

national public outcry or an internal crisis for one of the factions. Or it could happen as a result of regional pressure, changing international sentiment, or, more ominously, in the aftermath of another war in Gaza.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Amid this institutional atrophy, there are some signs of dynamism at the subnational level. Unions, student groups, and other civil society actors have exhibited vibrant internal politics, creating linkages between constituencies and engaging younger leaders who are otherwise being generally boxed out from organizations like the PA, the PLO, and Fatah. To the extent that alternative national approaches are being contemplated at all, such as BDS and nonviolent resistance movements, they are percolating from Palestinian civil society, including in Israel, rather than from traditional power centers. Indeed, some Palestinians expect civil society—rather than political party machinery—to be the proving ground for the next

generation of leaders.⁵⁸ Notably, more than 20 percent of Carnegie survey respondents cited an educational or civil society institution as the most important Palestinian institution.

On the other hand, Palestinian civil society has been unable to transcend the geographic and political divisions between the West Bank and Gaza, let alone among the broader Palestinian population. The social polarization in both the West Bank and Gaza has resulted in a narrow-

“Beyond the occupation itself, the absence of a representative political leadership that is able to make strategic decisions is the biggest challenge facing the Palestinians.”

-Tareq Baconi, researcher

ing of space for Palestinian civil society, including for journalists and activists. A recent report by the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms concluded that internal divisions between Hamas and Fatah “continue to be one of the key reasons behind the Palestinian violations against media freedoms” in both the West Bank and Gaza.⁵⁹

There is a generational divide between West Bank leaders and the rising generation of civil society leaders, but even activists in their twenties and early thirties note the distinctive outlook of their even younger compatriots, representatives of the half of Palestinian society who make up the so-called Oslo generation.⁶⁰ Too young to have direct memories predating the second intifada and generally lacking affinity to either Hamas or Fatah, polls suggest that youth between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two are the most supportive of an armed intifada and stabbings and the least supportive of the two-state solution, with 70 percent believing that armed resistance would advance Palestinian nationalism.⁶¹ Although there is a disconcerting level of nihilism among Palestinian youth under twenty-five in the

West Bank and East Jerusalem, as evidenced by the *habba* attacks of 2015–2016, there are also signs of activism among this generation, rooted in social media and opposition to the politics of the status quo.⁶²

These emerging civil society leaders have run up against entrenched interests in both the West Bank and Gaza. Given the stagnation at the top, it remains to be seen how these voices can achieve meaningful political influence. But, at some point, there will be a generational change in authority; and an important dynamic in the Palestinian intergenerational transmission will revolve around the extent to which existing institutions can find ways to incorporate the energies, attitudes, and experiences of this next generation.

What is remarkable about the comments of many younger Palestinians is their focus on long-term social and demographic trends rather than national structures, goals, and history, which are more frequently discussed by older Palestinians. The story of the Palestinian national movement—what some Palestinians call their “revolution”—over the second half of the twentieth century has little echo in youth discussions; some veteran Palestinian actors (themselves barely considered an older generation) express doubts as to whether the rising generation knows much of this history.⁶³ But, although youth may not be unified around any authority or narrative, many students and youth activists seem to believe in a different tomorrow, citing the effects of birth rates, strong (if vague) national identity, and the unsustainability of Israeli security practices. In that sense, they seem to place their bets on long-term trends rather than organized decisionmaking.

Meanwhile, there are also signs of political dynamism among Palestinians in Israel, which could impact the direction of Palestinian nationalism in the years to come. Ahead of the 2015 Knesset elections, the Palestinian factions in Israel (some of which include Jewish members) unified for the first time to form a single electoral bloc under the leadership of Ayman Odeh.⁶⁴ The coalition, known as the Joint List, won thirteen of 120 Knesset seats to become the third-largest bloc in the Knesset. The Joint List still represents disparate and fractious interests, but Odeh has demonstrated some political acumen. It is possible that the bloc could evolve into a more coherent movement, though it faces an uphill climb in a contentious environment. Four Carnegie survey respondents cited Odeh as one of the

“Given the challenges facing Palestinian society, academic institutions are critically important—they work to provide young Palestinians with intellectual freedom and help produce a new generation of educated leaders.”

-Hani Albasoos, policy analyst
and associate professor

three most inspiring Palestinian leaders, including one each from the West Bank and Gaza. However, with a growing political maturity may also come a profound dilemma—do the Palestinians in Israel, as their primary objective, seek to unify with the broader Palestinian movement or to consolidate and expand their rights within Israel? While the West Bank is likely to remain the center of gravity for Palestinian politics for the foreseeable future, the relationship between Palestinians in Israel with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza bears watching.

CONCLUSION

The state of Palestinian politics has appeared static for some time: the West Bank and Gaza were largely bypassed by the Arab Spring and the tumult that has followed; Abbas is in the thirteenth year of what was originally a four-year term as president; and a decade has passed since a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian settlement seemed plausibly within sight. With the Palestinian national movement seemingly unable to achieve its goal of sovereignty—because of Israeli intransigence, most Palestinians would argue—many Palestinians believe that putting their own house in order has become the most urgent priority for their national movement.⁶⁵ A recent poll found that only 3 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza believe that Abbas should focus on the peace process, compared with 40 percent who want elections and 24 percent who want reconciliation.⁶⁶

Carnegie survey participants were asked to look beyond the current impasse to describe what they thought the situation in Palestine would be in a decade's time. Here is a sampling of some of the unfiltered responses:

- “Israel has its political project vis-a-vis the Palestinian land and the Palestinian people. As long as the Palestinians remain fragmented and weak, they will not be able to face it. The world is, and likely to remain for the foreseeable future, too busy and too engaged in other BIG problems to play a meaningful role.”

- “The optimal solution would be through the creation of a Palestinian state, but this solution is not achievable in the foreseeable future and I think it will fade with the passage of time. In the long run, a single democratic state where Israelis and Palestinians live will be the inevitable option.”
- “The demise of PA and the emergence of new movements and structures with a radically different vision than the current leadership and political parties. The annexation of the WB [West Bank] and expanded colonial order. New forms of struggle.”
- “The disintegration of the Palestinian Authority (I hope), the end of the two-state solution, and the thriving of religious extremism—UNLESS major steps are taken to reverse those trends ESPECIALLY in Gaza.”
- “No political solution. Continued occupation. More West Bank colonies. Continued Gaza blockade. Continued internal Palestinian split. Frequent episodes of violence and wars. Aggressive Israeli response.”

Any attempt to project current trends into the future is likely to elicit to pessimism and despair. But these trends may not be as steady going forward as they have been for the past decade. The formal structures that embody the Palestinian national identity are declining, but the identity itself remains strong among Palestinians. While Palestinian factions have lost their sense of mission and their ability to appeal to younger generations, the powerful undercurrents that led to their creation remain a powerful presence in Palestinian society. As the next generation of the Palestinian national movement prepares to take the reins, might new leadership inject vigor and vitality into atrophied institutions? Might an upswell of popular desire for Palestinian unity force factions to address their geographic and political ruptures? Might a political crisis—or, more ominously, renewed conflict with Israel—create possibilities for institutional renewal that hitherto are not apparent? Could an “outside-in” approach to the conflict, in which Arab states are also involved in negotiations, breathe new life into the moribund peace process? Can a new generation of student leaders, civil society activists, and others rejuvenate Palestinian nationalism?

The answers—unknown to both observers and to the people who may ultimately determine them—likely hold the key to the future of the Palestinian national movement.

COMMENTARY

THE POLITICAL ALIENATION OF PALESTINIAN YOUTH

NUR ARAFEH

Carnegie does not take institutional positions on public policy issues and the views represented in the commentaries that follow do not necessarily reflect those of Carnegie, its staff, or its trustees.

The Palestinian leadership today is divided and paralyzed. Consequently, many young Palestinians are disengaged from formal politics.¹ However, political alienation is not the same as political apathy. Some young Palestinians are seeking new political spaces in which to express themselves and a new and authentic leadership better able to represent them.

THE ROOTS OF POLITICAL ALIENATION

The participation of young Palestinians in formal politics is declining in the occupied Palestinian territories. According to a Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics survey conducted in 2015, only 1.4 percent of young Palestinians (15–29 years old) were affiliated with a political party or movement (2.6 percent for males and 0.3 percent for females).² Although one should be wary of survey results, these figures provide a rough picture of the political estrangement of young Palestinians.

Several factors have led to this state of alienation. Amid Israel's prolonged military occupation and expansion of settlements, the Palestinian national movement has become weak and ineffective, leading to a disintegration of the Palestinian political arena. The split between the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and the Hamas-led government in the Gaza Strip has compounded the crisis by depriving Palestinians of a unified leadership.

Palestinian officials also suffer from a lack of legitimacy. The mandate of President Mahmoud Abbas ended eight years ago and his popularity has been severely eroded, especially amid the current political impasse and the absence of a clear national vision and path toward liberation. The Palestinian National Council, the legislative body of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), has not fully represented Palestinians for decades. Elections for the president and parliament of the PA have been held only twice since 1993. New and meaningful national elections are unlikely to be held in the foreseeable future. Municipal elections, which were scheduled for October 2016, were held in May 2017, but only in the West Bank, exacerbating political polarization.

In many cases, Palestinians no longer appear to be active and meaningful political actors. Security collaboration between the PA and Israel has thwarted Palestinian acts of resistance against Israel's colonial policies. In addition, Palestinian officials do not consult with their own constituencies and are not being held accountable by them.

In 2015, a mere 4.5 percent of the population of the occupied territories was over sixty years old.³ Yet that age group comprises much of the Palestinian political and economic elite, while youths (ages 15–29), who represent 30 percent of the population, are largely absent from the political decisionmaking process. As such, the two-state solution, negotiated by an older

generation of Palestinian officials, remains the only strategy promoted by the PLO and the PA—though it is no longer regarded as viable or relevant by many young Palestinians.⁴

These factors, as well as anger over corruption in the PA and the policies that encourage normalization with Israel,⁵ have created a situation in which an increasing number of Palestinians, especially youths, do not consider PA officials as legitimate representatives of their political aspirations. According to the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, in the aftermath of the Fatah movement's seventh conference at the end of 2016, almost two-thirds of Palestinians wanted Abbas to resign, with only a third expressing their confidence in the recently elected Fatah leadership.⁶

The organizational powerlessness of Palestinian political parties and their failure to provide a framework for national leaders, whether within the PLO or outside it, represent other factors reinforcing the political alienation of young Palestinians.⁷ Neither Fatah nor Hamas have a clear strategy for liberation today, and other political parties have failed to fill the vacuum.

The weakness of political factions and Palestinian youths' mistrust of them explain why the latest youth revolt, which erupted in October 2015, was leaderless and disorganized. These young Palestinians (who ranged in age from fifteen to mid-twenties) were the driving force behind the uprising. However, they led the protests without being affiliated with any political faction and without the support of any organization or political party.⁸

Deteriorating socioeconomic conditions and a lack of trust in the ability of the current leadership to improve such conditions are other factors behind the political estrangement of young Palestinians. Unemployment is particularly high among Palestinian youth, especially in Gaza, where youth unemployment was estimated at 58 percent in 2016.⁹ Moreover, the poverty rate among Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem reached almost 82 percent in 2014.¹⁰ However, though the disenchantment with these circumstances may be drawing some young Palestinians away from political participation, it may also be driving others toward more engagement—especially in the armed branches of political parties.

A NEW TYPE OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

During the latest youth revolt, Palestinians expressed their opposition to the “peace process” that has been in place since the Oslo Accords of 1993.¹¹ The so-called Oslo generation has decided to challenge the PA's political monopoly by redefining political participation so that it is not limited to participation in elections or membership in political parties. The youth response has been a renewed form of political engagement that, at its core, involves collective resistance to Israeli occupation—a political act that has been severely restricted after Oslo and by the security coordination between the PA and Israel.

At the same time, youths' thirst for a new leadership with revolutionary thinking and a liberation strategy was, notably, expressed on social media after the March 6, 2017, killing of Palestinian activist Basil al-Araj in an Israeli raid in the West Bank.¹²

The sorrow expressed by Palestinian youths suggested that al-Araj's grassroots ideology, his identity as an engaged intellectual, and his commitment to the path of resistance with

While many young Palestinians are seeking to redefine the Palestinian struggle...a clear vision and operational strategy have not yet emerged.

regard to the liberation of Palestine inspired many of them. Protests in the occupied territories and among Arab communities inside Israel took place in reaction to his death. Protesters took particular issue with the security collaboration between the PA and Israel that had led to al-Araj's assassination.¹³

However, while social media provided an alternative space in which young Palestinians could express themselves with regard to al-Araj's assassination, can it be used to mobilize Palestinians for effective political engagement?

The search for new thinking and strategies has also been reflected in several initiatives undertaken by young Palestinians in the occupied territories.¹⁴ These initiatives include studying the Zionist project and local and international historical experiences of resistance. They also raise critical awareness about the Oslo Accords and the current fragmentation of Palestinians. However, while many young Palestinians are seeking to redefine the Palestinian struggle as an anticolonial struggle that should not be limited to a nation-state project, a clear vision and operational strategy have not yet emerged.

Overall, there is an urgent need for a new political system with a new leadership that represents *all* Palestinians and that does not limit its focus solely to the West Bank or the Gaza Strip. This will require breaking away from the Oslo framework and rethinking the Palestinian political vision and strategy, as well as the role of national institutions, so that Palestinians become organized and effective political actors, resisting the Zionist colonial project.

Nur Arafeh is the policy fellow of Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network and will start her doctoral studies as a Rhodes Scholar at the University of Oxford in October 2017.

NOTES

- 1 This commentary only focuses on youth in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and does not cover Palestinian youth in Israel or those in the diaspora. It should also be noted that “youth” is not a homogeneous entity. Indeed, young Palestinians encounter different political, economic, social, and cultural realities as a result of the fragmentation of the Palestinian people.
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- 13 Hisham Abdallah, “Palestinians Protest Over PA-Israel Security Ties,” Al Jazeera, March 14, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/03/palestinians-denounce-pa-israel-security-coordination-170313103710942.html>.
- 14 Multaqa Nabd al-Shababai and Suleiman Al-Halabi Circle for Colonial Studies are examples of such initiatives.

COMMENTARY

**WHAT PALESTINIAN CIVIL SOCIETY'S
PAST SAYS ABOUT ITS FUTURE**

TARIQ DANA AND ALI JARBAWI

Palestinian civil society emerged against the backdrop of the Israeli occupation—a peculiar circumstance that has shaped its very existence and functions. Despite its diversity, civil society quickly underwent extreme politicization and thus became an institutional extension of the national movement. Its development was further impacted by the Oslo process and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994. In this context, civil society was forced to take on a dual mandate: to resist the Israeli occupation and to pressure the PA on political and socioeconomic demands. It has done neither effectively to date.

In effect, Palestinian civil society was developed with significant top-down intervention. Its diverse actors were first created and oriented by different political factions to promote their political and ideological programs. Then, during the Oslo process, civil society also became a distributive agent of resources to wide segments of Palestinian society and a conduit for foreign-funded nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).¹ As a result, civil society has been in a persistent state of stagnation, failing to challenge the political status quo or bring about meaningful social change.

TOP-DOWN DEVELOPMENT

Pre-Oslo civil society's efforts to mobilize constituents and influence political dynamics were shaped and frequently directed by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Following the 1967 occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, traditional charitable associations loyal to the Kingdom of Jordan were still active in the West Bank and Jerusalem. The 1970s saw the formation of multiple modern grassroots organizations, trade unions, voluntary committees, and student and women's movements. This process was accompanied by, and conducive to, the evolution of *Sumud* (steadfastness), a strategy that signified the adherence to Palestinian national identity as a source of collective steadfastness on the land.

By the late 1980s, the promotion of civil society reflected the widening rift between two competing groups within the national movement. On one hand, Fatah, which focused on statehood, established various organizations and professional committees to serve as the basis for a future Palestinian state. On the other hand, the left, which focused on liberation, set up civil society organizations to play a vital role in political mobilization aimed at encouraging popular engagement in the struggle.²

The first intifada (1987–1993) exemplified the most transformative period of civil society development. New representative structures emerged to mobilize popular participation in the intifada, most notably the grassroots popular committees that existed in almost every locality and neighborhood. Meanwhile, the mobilization of mass-based organizations, women's groups, student movements, labor unions, and professional committees decisively transformed the spontaneous uprising into organized action.

The Oslo process generated a combination of political, economic, ideological, and financial pressures that profoundly affected the structures and functions of local civil society. The political polarization of supporters and opponents of the Oslo framework was strongly reflected within civil society. Whereas Fatah organizations sought to lay the foundations for the nascent PA, leftist and Islamic organizations sought to express their opposition to the Oslo process through mobilizing civil society constituents.

After Oslo, the top-down development of civil society was reinforced by the entry of international donors. The left, suffering from an ideological crisis following the collapse of the Soviet Union, found refuge in civil society as a counterweight to the Fatah-dominated PA project. Most leftist organizations became recipients of international aid, conditioned by donors' desire to establish a vibrant civil society in service of "postconflict" state building—thus resulting in an elitist NGO sector characterized by increasing depoliticization and detachment from political affiliation and grassroots linkages.³ While Palestinian NGOs are ostensibly grounded in the promotion of democracy, good governance, and human rights, evidence suggests that these projects are more symbolic than substantial because most NGOs appear to lack an internal democratic structure. This has created a negative public image of NGOs, which are often accused of promoting self-interests and implementing foreign agendas.

Conversely, Islamic civil society actors continued to receive financial support from external Islamic sources. Hamas's sophisticated network of grassroots charitable, educational, medical, and social associations constituted an influential instrument for self-promotion as a credible alternative to the PLO and the PA.⁴ This aided the movement's legitimacy, which may partly explain the rising popularity of the movement in the 1990s and 2000s. However, this influence was cut off in the West Bank after the PA cracked down on Hamas-affiliated organizations following the intra-Palestinian split in 2007.

Throughout the Oslo years, a few short-lived disorganized movements made a ripple in otherwise stagnant waters: the March 15 Youth Movement that demanded the end of Fatah-Hamas political division, various sectoral struggles for better socioeconomic rights, and ephemeral popular resistance movements in peripheries. None have left a substantial imprint. Perhaps the most resounding achievement by some civil society segments has been the growth of global solidarity networks, including those led by the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions movement and Palestinian rights groups.

STAGNATION OR RESURGENCE?

The growing conviction that the Oslo-framed, two-state solution is no longer applicable may push many Palestinian groups to reorganize along new political lines. Whether seeking

a one-state formula, a binational state, federalism, or a different two-state formula, national consensus will be the decisive factor. If the Palestinian national movement rebuilds itself under a unified organizational umbrella with well-defined political objectives, this will certainly reinvigorate civil society to function as the locus for political orientation and mobilization. While the weaknesses and division of the national movement will continue to polarize civil society, new actors could emerge with alternative visions of a national struggle, bypassing factional and mainstream NGO politics.

The Israeli occupation remains the driving factor of, and fundamental obstacle to, Palestinian civil society development.

The bipolar political division between the West Bank and Gaza has not only damaged the Palestinian body politic but has also consolidated Hamas-and-Fatah-exclusionary politics, the monopoly over institutions, and the suppression of dissent. The perpetual failure of civil society actors to challenge the

status quo may pave the way for new actors with heightened demands and radical modes of action to focus on internal reforms, including national unity and democratic changes in the structures of the national movement.

International aid to the Palestinians has been significantly reduced in recent years,⁵ partly because some donors prefer to invest in the regional crises and partly because of frustrations with the failures of Oslo as well as other political considerations. The uncertainties surrounding regional and global trends, coupled with the unpredictability of political and economic crises, have the potential to significantly diminish the financial resources, capacities, and functions of local NGOs. Civil society organizations need to create alternative financial models to avoid these potential effects.

The Israeli occupation remains the driving factor of, and fundamental obstacle to, Palestinian civil society development. An active civil society flourished in the occupied territories with the explicit goal of resisting the occupation. However, Israeli occupation authorities will continue to use consensual and coercive techniques to infiltrate the civil society fabric and co-opt its national mandate. The occupation's recently declared policy that aims to establish contacts with Palestinian civil society figures without the PA's mediation is a case in point.⁶ The objective is to co-opt the most moderate actors within civil society to further weaken the PA or perhaps to prepare for an alternative to the PA in case it will be dissolved.

Despite the current stagnation, Palestinian civil society has the foundations to become a resistance force in the face of Israeli policies. Overall, the ability and willingness of civil society to free itself from the restrictions of rentierism and the politics of donors will determine its future functions and agendas. Most importantly, it will need to revive linkages among popular bases to successfully counter hegemonic power and the status quo.

Tariq Dana is the director of the Center for Development Studies at Birzeit University.

Ali Jarbawi is a professor of political science at Birzeit University.

NOTES

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INTERVIEW

**INTEGRATIVE APPROACHES TO
THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT**

BASHIR BASHIR, CONDUCTED BY PERRY CAMMACK

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What are “integrative approaches”?

Bashir Bashir: The classical two-state approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, based on territorial separation and segregation, has led to unacceptable compromises with regard to certain central Palestinian claims and rights. Integrative approaches posit that more equitable results might be achieved through egalitarian and inclusive institutional arrangements for Palestinians and Israelis, such as a federation or confederation. By moving beyond conventional notions of sovereign borders, integrative approaches open the door to new concepts of shared, overlapping, and partial sovereignty.

Why do you think there is increasing attention being paid to integrative approaches?

BB: Historically, going back to the British Mandate and also during the 1960s and 1970s, such approaches were proposed. But over time and for various reasons, they were almost entirely marginalized in favor of what became known as the two-state solution. When Palestinian thinkers first began to articulate two-state outcomes, there was little colonial Israeli settlement presence in the West Bank and Jerusalem, so issues related to resources and Jerusalem could be dealt with bilaterally.

But the expansion of the settlements and the further colonization of the West Bank and East Jerusalem amount to a return of what we might call the settler-colonial paradigm. As the realities on the ground have shifted, there are increasing indications that Palestinians and Israelis are becoming inseparable. With the peace process hostage to American dishonesty and the collapse of the Green Line as a marker of sovereign boundaries and political solutions, some activists, intellectuals, and even former officials have concluded that the question of Palestine/Israel is not about the borders of 1967, it’s about the Nakba and its persisting consequences.¹ Briefly, it is about the entire land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River as a single entity.

Broadly speaking, what are the different types of integrative approaches?

BB: I describe the three broad approaches as liberal, binational, and shared-sovereignty. It’s important to note that this taxonomy is purely analytical, since there is an intersection between the three strands and each strand encompasses a wide range of possibilities.

Central to the liberal approach is the notion of one person, one vote. The outcome is a state that measures belonging based on citizenship. Collective communities or national groups don’t matter much because politics are orchestrated at the level of individuals. Of

course, it is very hard to convince the Palestinians and Israelis to abandon and transcend their national identities, and some might even argue that efforts to do so could be a recipe for worse than what we have now.

Perhaps more promising than this liberalism and its claim to neutrality is the binational approach, which explicitly states that there are two distinct national identities, Israeli and Palestinian, both of which are entitled to national self-determination. Regardless of your position on Zionism, Israeli Jewish nationalism in Palestine has become an established fact. Politics doesn't stop with individual rights—there need to be collective rights, which means an ethnic frame for binational politics. Binational institutions can range from those established through a system of rigid federalism to regional autonomy to power-sharing arrangements as in consociational democracies, such as the ones in Belgium or Bosnia. However, binationalism also requires decolonization, which means dismantling Jewish symbolic and structural privileges and supremacy.

The shared-sovereignty approach imagines a hybrid, multilayered institutional setting, where sovereignty is not understood as absolute and indivisible but rather as partial, shared, and interlinked. You could imagine a form of confederation of parallel state structures, in which the land is divided into two states with Palestinians exercising sovereignty over themselves and Israelis over themselves. Others have spoken of two states for one homeland, without strictly fixed internal borders. Another possibility is two states with institutions that are separate but overlapping to varying degrees.

One of the most important things is not to give up the huge gains that Palestinians have achieved in the past fifty years.

Is there a price to be paid for Palestinians in moving toward integrative approaches in terms of Palestinian nationalism and institutions?

BB: Absolutely. One of the most important things is not to give up the huge gains that Palestinians have achieved in the past fifty years—the tremendous political, symbolic, and diplomatic advances that comes with their recognition as a nation. That would be suicidal.

In practice, integrative approaches require Palestinians to make profound shifts from the language of conventional statehood to nation-building based on inalienable rights. Of course, Palestinian leaders, rightly, will continue to speak about statehood because the nation-state continues to be the main player of the international order. But at some point, there might be a shift of focus from pursuing statehood to consolidating nationhood. This

will likely happen if such a shift does not require that Palestinians surrender their national achievements, so that self-determination can be realized within the confines of a binational state, a confederation, or some other institutional arrangement.

It is unimaginable that Israel would embrace such an outcome. Aren't these integrative solutions even less likely to be successful than the two-state outcomes?

BB: Who says that these paradigms need to be realized in the full sense of the word? What is useful in these elaborations is that they are destinations, even if they are unlikely to be reached, based on deeper concepts of historical reconciliation. Historical injustices occurred, and the Nakba and its consequences are continuously felt by the majority of Palestinians. This requires a political process that is substantively different from the Oslo process. This new political process needs to come to terms with the dire realities and conditions of dispossession, occupation, and oppression that most Palestinians experience and endure. There are enormous consequences of deciding, in the context of traditional two-state negotiations, to defer such questions to a later stage. One reason the Oslo process failed was because—while Palestinians recognized Israel and Israel recognized the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization]—the historical injustices of the Nakba were not acknowledged from the very beginning. In South Africa, on the other hand, the framework was clear. It included the bill of rights, the freedom charter, and an accounting of the historical record of apartheid.

To what extent are advocates of one-state or integrative outcomes actually trying to create leverage, based for example on demographics trends, for a two-state outcome?

BB: Some have said we should use one-state language because this will push the Israelis or their international friends toward a two-state outcome. Using the language of one state without really believing in it surely doesn't constitute a credible threat. The Israelis already understand very clearly that the two-state solution is dying with the expansion of the settlements.

You find Palestinians who say that a state itself is their ultimate aim—but, in reality, a state is simply one possible tool through which Palestinians can realize their rights. What's been on offer in the Oslo process might nominally be called a state, but it's actually deprived of the features of a fully sovereign state. So when politicians like Benjamin Netanyahu or Avigdor Lieberman talk of a two-state solution, it is actually a smokescreen for continued Israeli hegemony and domination.

*Bashir Bashir is a senior lecturer in the Department of Sociology, Political Science, and Communication at the Open University of Israel. He has written about alternative strategies to the traditional two-state approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which he calls “integrative approaches.”*²

NOTES

- 1 Editor’s note: Named after the color of its ink on a map, the Green Line refers to the 1949 Armistice Line between Israel and its Arab neighbors following the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, which had constituted a de facto boundary until the June 1967 war. The Nakba (catastrophe) refers to the uprooting of hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arab residents during the 1948 war. A core Palestinian demand has been redress for these refugees, defined as those who were displaced in 1948 and their descendants, who are now estimated to number roughly 7 million persons.
- 2 Bashir Bashir, “The Strengths and Weaknesses of Integrative Solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Middle East Journal* 70, no. 4 (Autumn 2016): 560–78.

COMMENTARY

**THE SYMBOLIC YET VITAL ROLE OF THE
PALESTINE LIBERATION ORGANIZATION**

NADIA HIJAB

After a remarkable history that placed the Palestinian cause high on the international agenda, with strong support from within the Arab world and the developing world, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) suffered a series of major setbacks. In 1979, Egypt and Israel signed the Camp David Accords, effectively neutralizing Egypt in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In 1982, the PLO and other Palestinian groups were forced out of Lebanon by Israel. And in 1987, the PLO was unable to capitalize on the first intifada and, instead, embarked on the Oslo process with Israel in 1993 in a desperate search for statehood.

With the failure of the Oslo process to secure statehood, sovereignty, and rights, the PLO as an institution is left to address years of stagnation. The organization has not renewed the membership of its key bodies nor has it sought accountability with regard to the Palestinian people. In addition, the PLO now functions in a gray area between the State of Palestine

it declared in 1988, which has had nonmember observer status at the United Nations since 2012, and the Palestinian Authority (PA), which actually holds the purse strings.

The PLO is an institution the Palestinian people cannot do without.

And yet the PLO is an institution the Palestinian people cannot do without. Symbolically, it represents a *people* rather than a fragmented population geographically divided and dispossessed by Israel—a geographical separation within and beyond the area which constituted pre-1948 Mandatory Palestine that has exacerbated its political rifts.

In considering how the PLO might evolve, it is useful to examine recent attempts to reform the institution by political parties as well as civil society. It is also worth looking at groups that have used other strategies to fulfill Palestinian aspirations.

At the political level, there have been meetings—facilitated by Egypt, Qatar, and the think tank Masarat—to heal the now decade-long split between Fatah, which controls the PLO, and Hamas, which is as yet excluded from that body.¹ However, agreements reached between them over elections, power sharing, and other key areas have unraveled.

There was optimism in December 2016 and January 2017. Following a workshop in Switzerland that included civil society figures—but more importantly Fatah and Hamas representatives—and that was slammed by the Israeli media,² the two sides held a meeting in Lebanon to discuss the Palestinian National Council (PNC, the Palestinians' parliament in exile).³ Russian-sponsored Fatah-Hamas talks continued in Moscow, after which the parties announced that a national unity government would be formed and there would be elections to the PNC to include Palestinians in exile.⁴ However, no action ensued. Instead, the PA announced the May date for municipal elections, which was immediately rejected by

Hamas on the grounds that PNC elections had to come first.⁵ In short, efforts to reform the PLO from within are unlikely to move forward in the near term.

Civil society groups have attempted different approaches to revive the representative nature of the PNC—for example, a civil society initiative to hold worldwide elections to the PNC wherever Palestinian communities are present. This initiative won the support of leading Palestinian figures, as well as the PLO leadership and several communities in the diaspora. However, the support was insufficient to build up momentum for such elections and has diminished as a result of the civil war in Syria.

Earlier this year, there was another attempt to challenge the prevailing stagnation through establishing a “Palestinians Abroad Conference.”⁶ The initiators of the conference, held on February 25, 2017, in Istanbul, are close to or part of Hamas and Palestinian Islamist movements. However, many other non-Islamists and secular personalities signed off on the conference’s founding document and attended the gathering, which brought together more than 4,000 people.

The stated intention of the conference was to reactivate the role of Palestinians abroad in Palestinian decisionmaking and national institutions—including in the PLO—and to rebuild these institutions. The organizers insisted that their efforts were not designed to challenge the PLO. However, the PLO Executive Committee’s Department of Émigré Affairs issued a statement that was more sorrowful than angry in tone, warning against challenging the foundational principles and the representative status of the PLO. Without mentioning Hamas by name, the statement accused the organizers of conflating their differences with the leadership of the PLO and their position toward the PLO itself.⁷

Beyond the diverse efforts described above, two groups of Palestinians are pursuing Palestinian national interests in ways that engage the Palestinian people. The first group is the Palestinian citizens of Israel, which, given its level of political maturity and organization, serves as an important model for other Palestinians. However, the fact that they are Palestinian citizens of Israel precludes them from playing a leadership role in the Palestinian national movement: Israel would quickly exploit such an attempt and crack down on the community.

The second group comprises those Palestinians that founded and lead the global Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement. Its goals of freedom from occupation, justice for refugees, and equality for the Palestinian citizens of Israel encompass all segments of the Palestinian people. However, the BDS movement’s limitation is that it is deliberately focused on Palestinian rights, without claiming political representation or influence over political outcomes. Within its framework, however, it provides effective leadership for many Palestinians and for the Palestine solidarity movement.

The PLO's stagnation is likely to continue. All the official Palestinian levers of power are effectively held by one man, President Mahmoud Abbas. He reasserted his control over Fatah after its conference in November 2016.⁸ A theme he used to defend his position as leader for life was protecting the independence of Palestinian decisionmaking from Arab interference, an independence the PLO leadership has jealously guarded since the 1960s. It is no secret that Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates have tried to manage the Palestinian problem and put their man Mohammad Dahlan, a former Fatah official, in power.⁹

Things could move very quickly on the Palestinian front if Abbas and his supporters are willing, or driven, to engage in a peace process led or managed by U.S. President Donald Trump. We could see a situation where the PLO is weakened even further in favor of the State of Palestine, however truncated and powerless it might be. Ironically, the strongest force that could prevent this is Israel's far right, which does not want to see a Palestinian state of any shape or form.

It is difficult to imagine a positive evolution of the PLO in the near future—one that truly represents Palestinian aspirations. On the other hand, Palestinians have shown tenacity and creativity in promoting their aspirations and leveraging opportunities when possible. The experiences of the Palestinian citizens of Israel and the BDS movement are two such examples, as is the effective and creative use of art, culture, and media to project and safeguard the Palestinian narrative. One can expect this Palestinian spirit to continue and grow stronger despite the political disarray. While it may not revive the PLO to the strength it enjoyed in the 1970s and 1980s, this spirit will continue to nurture the Palestinian body until a new form of broadly accepted political representation emerges.

COMMENTARY
**PROSPECTS FOR RECONCILIATION
BETWEEN FATAH AND HAMAS**

ADNAN ABU AMER

As the split between Fatah and Hamas approaches its tenth year, opportunities for resolving the dispute continue to dissipate. Due to multiple entrenched obstacles, occasional domestic and regional attempts to reunite the West Bank and Gaza Strip have had little effect, making the Fatah-Hamas rift seem like a permanent nightmare for Palestinians. Several key factors are governing the prospects for reconciliation. These include the worsening humanitarian crises in Gaza; Hamas's control over the territory; what happens to the weapons of Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzeddine al-Qassam Brigades; and the rise of military hard-liners in recent Hamas elections.

GAZA'S ONGOING HUMANITARIAN CRISES

Gaza's humanitarian crises, which have been exacerbated in recent months, include an ongoing electricity supply crisis; severe restrictions on movements in and out of Gaza, including for medical treatment abroad; deteriorating education and health care sectors; and environmental problems, including with drinking water and sewage treatment.¹ Hamas and the unity government have traded accusations over who is responsible for the repeated crises.

At the heart of Gaza's severe humanitarian situation is the Palestinian Authority's (PA) demand that Hamas place the governing apparatus in Gaza under a Palestinian unity government. Discord over this demand has prevented both sides from focusing on humanitarian issues. Hamas, which accuses the PA of not being serious about ending Gaza's woes, has said it is prepared to hand over ministries and government offices to a unity government,

but only if the latter fulfills its responsibilities in the territory, which includes addressing its urgent humanitarian needs.²

Instead of focusing on Gaza's humanitarian crises, Hamas and the PA have been arguing over the handover of the territory.

Many issues need to be resolved before Hamas will hand over ministries in Gaza. In particular, both sides must come to terms with the Fatah-Hamas clashes in 2007 in Gaza,

which led to Hamas's takeover of the territory. Dozens of people were killed and hundreds were wounded.³ Reconciliation must also address the nature of mutual relations between Hamas's armed resistance and the Palestinian government, as well as the future of public employees in Gaza, whose salaries were cut by the PA in April 2017.⁴

The PA and Hamas negotiated a reconciliation deal in 2014; however, Gaza effectively remains under the political, administrative, and security sway of Hamas. While the Hamas-led government resigned under the 2014 deal, the Islamist movement retains day-to-day

decisionmaking authority through its representatives in ministries. The legal government in Ramallah has no effective presence in Gaza.

Instead of focusing on Gaza's humanitarian crises, therefore, Hamas and the PA have been arguing over the handover of the territory. Some Fatah decisionmakers have unequivocally ruled out any reconciliation with Hamas until Gaza has been transferred back to the PA. Hamas, in turn, points out that, in 2014, it gave up its right to lead the government in order to end the political rift. It fears that the PA is aiming to sideline Hamas in Gaza's political system, even though election results and a legitimate resistance, Hamas argues, entitle it to govern.

CONTINUING HAMAS CONTROL OF GAZA

Since it took control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, Hamas has faced serious questions about the value and legitimacy of its continued rule there. Has the movement been living up to its humanitarian responsibilities, despite the vast financial costs of its rule, the blockade of the territory, and Hamas's own difficult financial situation?

For Hamas, such questions are uncomfortable, because it fears that surrendering Gaza to the Palestinian Authority would ultimately lead to its disarmament. This seems unlikely, as the PA does not have the means to confiscate Hamas's vast arsenal of weapons. Yet Hamas is still worried that it would obtain a negligible reward for a major concession. Amid such disagreements, the political stalemate has prevented any amelioration in Gaza's humanitarian situation.

THE FUTURE OF AL-QASSAM'S WEAPONS

None of the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation agreements has addressed the biggest bone of contention between the two sides, namely what is to happen to the weapons of Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzeddine al-Qassam Brigades. That is because neither side wants to turn the issue into an obstacle to reconciliation.

Nevertheless, President Mahmoud Abbas has insisted that Hamas hand over its arsenal to the PA, whose government alone, he claims, should have a monopoly over the use of force.⁵ Hamas, in turn, considers its disarmament a red line and has underlined that reconciliation does not mean al-Qassam fighters will submit to Abbas's authority. Reconciliation cannot come at the expense of its military wing, which Hamas considers the "national army of the State of Palestine."⁶ If the movement were forced to choose between reconciliation and keeping its arsenal, the latter would likely win.

THE RISE OF MILITARY HARD-LINERS IN RECENT HAMAS ELECTIONS

The rise of Hamas's military wing in recent internal elections has only sharpened the dispute over weapons. This is because hard-liners may now have veto power over any concession that would aim to disarm the group. Moreover, many Hamas members recall the Ezzeddine al-Qassam Brigades' harsh experience with the PA in the 1990s, when hundreds of members were detained.⁷

As a result of this, Hamas and Fatah have been examining mutually acceptable formulas, such as the one used in Lebanon that allows Hezbollah and the Lebanese Army to coexist. This would not require Hamas to give up its weapons or integrate into the security apparatus. Indeed, Hamas's leadership is making major efforts to reassure Ezzeddine al-Qassam's leaders that the preservation of their weapons will be a top priority.

All the aforementioned issues are enduring obstacles to the long-awaited reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. Unless the current discourse changes, Fatah and Hamas will be compelled to simply continue managing their differences rather than overcome them.

Adnan Abu Amer is the dean of the Faculty of Arts and a professor of political science at Al Ummah University in Gaza.

NOTES

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COMMENTARY

**THE PALESTINIAN ECONOMY SINCE PARIS 2007:
WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?**

OUSSAMA KANAAN

In the fall of 2007, then prime minister Salam Fayyad launched the “Palestinian Reconstruction and Development Program,” which set out the Palestinian Authority’s (PA) longer-term economic, political, and social vision. The international conference convened in Paris in December of that year—attended by more than ninety international delegations—endorsed the program politically and financially, with an average of \$2.6 billion in annual aid (about 50 percent of 2007 GDP) for the years 2008, 2009, and 2010.¹

In essence, the program was designed to set in motion a political-economic virtuous cycle whereby reforms by the PA, removal of restrictions by Israel, and generous donor aid would lead to inclusive growth in the form of higher living standards and reduced unemployment and inequality. The latter would in turn reduce sociopolitical tensions, which would further boost private investor confidence and investment, thus reinforcing growth. The phasing out of Israeli restrictions was expected to give the PA the economic space needed to enable core structural reforms. The PA would establish a strong track record of good governance and institution building, demonstrating its capacity to govern an independent state.

The virtuous cycle that the international community strived for appeared to bear some fruit during its initial years, particularly between 2008 and 2010. During that period, people’s expectations were raised by a recovery in economic growth, the prospect of self-determination, and an easing of Israeli restrictions. The improvement of living and security conditions also temporarily revived growth in the West Bank’s urban centers. Hopes were also raised by improved PA governance, reflected in stronger economic institutions and prudent fiscal measures.

However, the policies failed to generate broad-based, inclusive development beyond 2010, as high unemployment and income disparities (notably between Gaza and the West Bank) have persisted. While real GDP grew during 2008 to 2010 by an average of 7 percent per year, the rate has dipped to an average of 2 to 3 percent since then, implying a stagnation of real incomes in per capita terms.² Furthermore, unemployment has remained very high, at about one fifth of the labor force in the West Bank and more than one third in Gaza.³ The budget deficit, a key indicator of the PA’s macroeconomic performance given the lack of a domestic currency, declined from 21 percent of GDP in 2008 to 14 percent of GDP in 2010 but has broadly been in the 10 to 12 percent range during 2011 to 2015 and is still heavily reliant on external financing.⁴ Moreover, there was very little shift in the composition of recurrent spending away from wages and security spending and toward the health and education sectors.

Palestine’s overall growth performance over the past decade was driven largely by the extent to which the Israeli military yielded economic space to the PA and the Palestinian private

sector. During 2008 to 2010, the Israeli military removed most restrictions on the internal movement of goods and people within the West Bank and eased restrictions on imports from Israel, which resulted in a surge of output through better utilization of capacity, reduced transportation costs, and increased availability of critical capital inputs and raw materials. However, there was virtually no further easing of restrictions after late 2010. In particular, the military maintained controls on exports and on access to Area C,⁵ while Gaza remained largely under embargo apart from specific categories of imports, mostly of consumer goods.

While a core objective of the program was the reduction of the PA's budget deficit, the aid disbursed fell increasingly short of the amounts needed to finance the PA's basic budgetary spending. The financing shortfall was particularly severe for public capital investment, reflected in a fall of the share of capital investment in total public expenditure from 12 percent in 2008 to 5 percent in 2015 (equivalent to only 2 percent of GDP), seriously undermining longer-run growth prospects.⁶ The persistence of Israeli restrictions—by limiting private sector expansion—led to anemic economic growth largely dependent on PA social and wage spending, and seriously stifled domestic budgetary revenue.

The PA's success in strengthening its public finance management, fiscal transparency, and accountability during 2008 to 2010 led to its recognition in 2011 by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank as a government able to implement the sound economic policies expected of a future Palestinian state. However, the PA's economic reforms have waned since then, as the government has found it increasingly difficult, with a stalled and hopeless peace process, to build the domestic support needed to reform the civil service, enhance tax administration, and develop the legislative and judiciary framework to attract private investment.

At the 2017 Conference for Peace in the Middle East in Paris, the Palestinian economy appeared to have gone full circle since Paris 2007. After an initial boost in growth and impressive state-building strides up to 2011, these were followed by years of relapse manifest in Palestinians' eroded living standards and disappointed hopes for self-determination. It is time to revive international efforts through a donor-backed development program, such as the one launched at Paris 2007 and for which there has been no effective follow-up since its completion in 2011. Such a program needs to take on board crucial lessons from the past decade's experience.

Future reform agendas and aid conditionality should explicitly integrate the occupation policies of Israel as key determinants of Palestine's economic transformation.

First, it is important from the outset to set realistic expectations regarding the magnitude and likelihood of aid disbursements and to establish adequate aid monitoring and coordination mechanisms. Aid prospects look dim, especially in view of the regional economic slowdown as a result of intensified conflict and depressed oil. Also, aid from countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is likely to be increasingly diverted toward other vulnerable or postconflict countries in the region, while aid from the United States could be more rigidly tied to its perception of progress in the peace process and an overall more restrained foreign aid budget. These factors will require not only continual and close follow-up with donors of aid commitments but also a careful assessment of the extent to which aid arrangements are tied to donors' evolving internal constraints. The aid shortfalls since Paris 2007 often resulted from the ad hoc nature of aid disbursements, including quid pro quo expectations and conditions that the PA could not meet.

Second, future reform agendas and aid conditionality should explicitly integrate the occupation policies of Israel as key determinants of Palestine's economic transformation, with well-defined reform targets. Indeed, the Palestinian economy's path over the past decade makes it clear that the effectiveness of the PA's economic policies is dependent on Israel's complementary actions, in particular the lifting of its controls on cross-border flows of goods and people, opening Area C to Palestinian investments, and enabling the operation of a seaport and airport. These measures are essential to sustaining private sector growth in Palestine, especially given its small size and long-standing dependence on the Israeli market.

Finally, fundamental economic and structural reforms by the PA are bound to lose momentum without realistic prospects for Palestinians to exercise their basic human rights. Such prospects are essential for the PA's ability to garner crucial grassroots support for an internationally backed development program culminating in an economically viable Palestinian state.

Oussama Kanaan is the director of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Middle East Center for Economics and Finance. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the IMF or IMF policy.

NOTES

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COMMENTARY
INTERNATIONAL LAW AS A MEANS OF RESISTANCE

HALLA SHOABI

During the past few years, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has increasingly taken a more international approach to the conflict and its resistance strategy. In 2012, seeking refuge in international law and the support of international organizations, the PA upgraded its status at the General Assembly of the United Nations and ratified several treaties, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). However, international law, like any other tool of resistance, may collide with other tools, creating the need to assess the

To be effective, international law needs to be part of a broader resistance strategy, with strong national institutional leadership to guide decisionmaking.

benefits and costs of each. Relatedly, there are different mechanisms within international law that Palestinians should weigh and consider.

Essentially, to be effective, international law needs to be part of a broader resistance strategy, with strong national institutional leadership to guide decisionmaking. Questions about what is at stake and what is the best

way forward to achieve Palestinian rights will have to be answered. Several recent incidents illustrate how various resistance tools can come into conflict. For example, when a couple of Jordanian music groups on Israeli visas announced their upcoming visits to Palestinian cultural venues in Haifa and Nazareth (on different occasions in 2012, 2014, and 2015), debates erupted and two means of resistance came into conflict. On the one hand, some people argued that the band must adhere to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) guidelines against normalizing relations between Arab countries and Israel, which includes not playing in Palestinian-owned places within the 1948 borders.¹ On the other hand, others argued that such a form of cultural exchange could bridge the long-standing cultural and political gaps between Palestinians and Arabs and thus become a means of resistance. In this case, there was a need for one tool of resistance to overtake the other; however, without a clear, formal Palestinian strategy and a full understanding of the importance of each tool, the Palestinian community remained bitterly divided, with some groups boycotting the concerts of the one band that was eventually granted a visa.

Similarly, the use of international law as a tool will sometimes collide with other Palestinian tools of resistance. However, in some instances, choosing one tool over another might not be necessary; international law could be used to enhance other means of resistance—and as a beneficial tool rather than an oppressive one.² In particular, several aspects of international law could help to gain or assure Palestinian rights:

1. Terminology: Palestinians could alter the terms used to describe the Palestinian context to “capture the historical experience of the entire Palestinian people” beyond those living in the West Bank and Gaza and beyond the 1967 borders.³ While the term occupation does not refer to an illegal act under international law,

other more precise terms—such as colonialism, apartheid, and forced population transfer—do refer to acts that are illegal. Both apartheid and forced population transfers are crimes under the Rome Statute of the ICC.⁴

2. Boycotting: Paragraph five of United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 “calls upon all States, bearing in mind paragraph 1 of this resolution, to distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.”⁵ This paragraph could be used in future resolutions to demand the boycotting of products and services and even Israeli football teams in illegal Israeli settlements. The International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) is currently discussing the future of Israeli football teams in settlements. Palestinians could also pressure states to vote in favor of suspending the Israeli Football Association from FIFA.⁶ This technique could be employed in the future with other international organizations. At the same time, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the legal consequences of the construction of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory could be used in future resolutions to strengthen states’ demands to the United Nations.⁷
3. Land protection: In 2012 and 2014, respectively, Palestinians successfully placed the Church of the Nativity and the Pilgrimage Route in Bethlehem and the village of Battir near Jerusalem on the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s (UNESCO) List of World Heritage in Danger.⁸ This list includes cultural and natural property threatened by serious and specific dangers, including those related to urbanization, changes in land use or ownership, and armed conflict.⁹

Fourteen Palestinian sites are on a tentative list that each state party will consider for nomination to the World Heritage List.¹⁰ The PA must prioritize sites currently under Israeli threat and in danger of confiscation or settlement building/expansion. Notably, in 1982, Jordan nominated the Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls to UNESCO, and it was subsequently placed on the list. Palestinians should study the possibility of expanding this protected site to include other areas in East Jerusalem.¹¹

4. Universal jurisdiction: Palestinians could utilize national courts in foreign countries for their benefit in two ways. First, it may be possible to invoke universal jurisdiction in countries that allow it. Universal jurisdiction is “the authority of domestic courts and international tribunals to prosecute certain crimes, regardless of where the offense occurred, the nationality of the perpetrator or the nationality of the victim.”¹² Previous attempts to invoke universal jurisdiction have achieved little, likely due to the ability of states to grant diplomatic immunity.¹³ However,

at the very least, such litigation might create hardships for Israeli officials freely traveling to different countries. Second, Palestinians with dual citizenships could try to bring cases against Israel in the national courts of the countries in which they hold citizenship (for crimes such as land confiscation, extrajudicial killings, and torture).

Before pursuing the above, however, potential conflicts with other tools of resistance should be fully considered and mitigated. Although there appears to be little risk in these above cases, one possible conflict is between the strategy to boycott only Israeli settlements' services and products through international resolutions and the BDS movement that calls for the boycott of all Israeli services and products. Resolutions focusing on settlements may weaken the BDS call, putting less pressure on Israel to (1) end its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands, (2) recognize the fundamental right of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality, and (3) respect and protect the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties.¹⁴ Most UN resolutions are not tied directly to upholding all the Palestinian rights mentioned but rather focus on the request of ending the occupation of 1967 lands. However, Palestinians may mitigate the negative effect of such resolutions by indicating that any resolution against settlements is without prejudice to all Palestinian rights and the general BDS call.

When conflicts are identified, Palestinian leadership should first seek a change in strategy that would enable one to enhance the other, but if this proves impossible, they must decisively choose one over the other for maximum benefit.

NOTES

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COMMENTARY

**SHIFTS IN THE ARAB WORLD AND
THE IMPACT ON PALESTINIAN STRUGGLES**

GHASSAN KHATIB

Since the early part of the twentieth century, the fate of the Palestinians has been linked to their Arab surroundings. These relations with the wider Arab world have had a major impact on domestic Palestinian politics and the Palestinians' ability to resist Zionist plans.

The Arab public—and in many cases, Arab governments—have been key supporters of the Palestinian struggle at its most crucial stages. Palestine figured heavily in communications between Arab and Western governments in the interwar period. Several Arab states took part in the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, and Arab envoys were involved in negotiations over a partition plan the same year. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) itself was founded with the support of Arab regimes opposed to Israel. Guerilla operations by Palestinians in the years after the 1967 war were launched from the territories of Arab states.

The Palestinians' main diplomatic achievements were won with Arab support. The Arab states introduced the PLO to great global powers, including the Soviet Union and China in the 1970s. The PLO appointed envoys to European and other Western capitals through the offices of the Arab League. Arab states were essential in pushing through United Nations resolutions and entered the peace process with Israel on the basis of a joint Arab decision and a shared Jordanian-Palestinian delegation to the 1991 Madrid peace conference.

It is therefore not surprising that the ongoing upheaval in the Middle East since 2011 has negatively impacted the Palestinian cause in two ways: first, by marginalizing the Palestinians and weakening the Arabs' capacity to support them and, second, by improving Israel's

clout in regional security issues and degrading Palestinian and Arab clout on the international stage.

The magnitude of recent events in the Arab world—the intensity of the conflicts, the scale of human and material losses, and the geopolitical shifts—has detracted from the region's

Palestine is no longer the primary Arab cause, though it produces the same emotions among Arab publics that it always did.

other traditional issues, including the fate of the Palestinians. Palestine is no longer the primary Arab cause, though it produces the same emotions among Arab publics that it always did. This reality has manifested itself in several ways. The first is political. Regional fragmentation and conflicts no longer allow the Arab states to devote the time and political effort that a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict requires. This is reflected in the fact that Palestine no longer tops the agenda of talks among Arab leaders. Many Arab decisionmakers believe that other dangers—such as Iranian hegemony, the Sunni-Shia conflict, the potential partition or collapse of certain Arab states, and the growing threat posed by terrorist groups—are more urgent than Israel's policies or the suffering of the Palestinian people.

UN Security Council Resolution 2334 of December 2016, condemning Israeli settlements, is a case in point. Egypt was forced to withdraw a draft resolution tabled by a group of Arab states due to pressure from the newly elected administration of U.S. President Donald Trump (although the Palestinians were later able to get the resolution passed when a group of non-Arab states pushed through the same draft).¹

The second manifestation of the decline in attention is the notable drop in the level of Arab and international financial support for the Palestinian people. This is due to the growing needs of others in the region, which in some cases are as great as that of the Palestinians. World Bank figures presented at a donor's summit in the summer of 2016 illustrated this trend. They showed that aid to the Palestinians from donor countries that year fell by as much as 50 percent when compared to the previous year (the figures included both Arab and non-Arab aid).²

The third manifestation is that the divisions and fragmentation that have plagued inter-Arab relations have extended into Palestinian politics. Previously, regional divisions were carried over into Palestinian politics much less frequently. The “axis of resistance”—made up of Iran, Syria, and Hezbollah, along with Hamas—has opposed the “axis of moderation,” with its ties to the leadership of the PLO and Fatah. This contest has only exacerbated Palestinian divisions.

And these divisions have, in turn, had a major impact on Egyptian policy toward Palestine, altering the significant role Cairo once played in Palestinian affairs. This is because Hamas was close to Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which the current regime in Cairo strongly opposes. Such hostility has triggered a decline in Egypt's efforts to promote rapprochement and heal political rifts among the Palestinians.

Just as the Palestinian cause has attracted less attention, perceptions of Israel have also changed. Major powers had long sought to preserve a balance in their relations with both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, events in the Arab world during the past five years—including a collapse in regional security due to civil wars that followed democratic uprisings in several countries—have increased Israel's strategic importance to outsiders. That is especially true of the United States and Europe, which consider Israel their most stable ally in the Middle East. While these states are uncomfortable about Israeli policies such as settlement building, they have refrained from exerting pressure on Israel because of its importance at a time of regional turmoil.

The Western states' reliance on Israel has grown in parallel with their concerns about global security and their need for allies in the fight against international terrorism. Israel has also been able to portray itself as the world's expert on counterterrorism. This new situation has

prompted a notable change in Israel's strategy. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has focused in recent years on sidelining the Palestinian issue in light of the new strategic realities resulting from the region's conflicts. Netanyahu's speech to the United Nations in September 2012 marked the start of this approach. He devoted most of it to the threat posed by Iran, largely ignoring the Palestinians.³ The Israeli prime minister has effectively exploited Arab fears of Iran to pursue Israel's political objectives.

Most importantly, Netanyahu's new approach departs from the notion that peace with the Palestinians is the path to peace with the Arab states. On the contrary, he views peace with the Palestinians as only being possible through the nurturing of Israel's relations with Arab states, which is based on a perception of the "shared Iranian threat."⁴ This approach, labeled the "regional track," has been discussed in recent months by the U.S. and Israel as a possible alternative to bilateral negotiations.⁵ While there is minimal evidence that this is acceptable to Arab states, it does give Israel's right wing a wider latitude to maneuver.

How the conflicts rocking the Arab region ultimately affect the Palestinians' fate will depend on how they conclude, which is hard to predict. Based on their trajectories so far, they will allow Israel to avoid its duties toward the peace process and international law. They will also provide it with the cover needed to accelerate its domination over what remains of historical Palestine. This could result in new outcomes of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, with two principal victims: Palestinian moderates and the achievement of a two-state solution.

Ghassan Khatib is the founder of the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre, a former minister of the Palestinian Authority, and a lecturer at Birzeit University.

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