

Articles



Photo by Bara Al-Wihidi.

Endless Tracks in Palestine

By Dr. Mahdi Abdul-Hadi

The Palestinian situation is divided into three components: the geographic, the political, and the socio-economic.

Geographically, in the past years, there has existed a painful separation between the three parts of the territories occupied in 1967, i.e., the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Jerusalem. People notice a political-cultural separation as well, in addition to the severe economic downturn in the three aforementioned areas.

The West Bank

Very recently, in spite of the sustained reluctance of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) to resume negotiations with the Israeli government, most media sources have reported (quoting PA/PLO officials) that President Abbas is willing to meet Israeli Deputy Prime Minister General Mofaz or Prime Minister Netanyahu in Amman or Ramallah. This is based on the guarantee that the Israelis will deliver three things: one, the military equipment donated by Russia over the past few years (now waiting in Amman) to the Palestinian Authority, which has been maintaining security for Israel in the post-Arafat era (2004-present); two, the release of all Palestinians detained from 1994 onwards, as well as a significant number of those serving even longer, taking into consideration the hunger strike of over 1,600 Palestinian prisoners in the past two months; and three, the agreement to delegitimise the settler outposts.

Looking to the economic front, the PLO/PA is running dry and is unable to meet the financial needs of its 160,000 civil servants, not to mention repay the billions in loans it has received from local banks. In spite of the continuous promises of various donors, as well as the United States, to maintain “the five-star occupation hotel” of the West Bank, it is worthwhile to note that even the expenses of the Palestinian prisoners in the Israeli jails are covered directly by donors.

Internal divorce in Palestine

On the political stage there has been a split, if not a divorce, between President Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The crisis began with Fayyad’s refusal to “obey” the instructions of the president to present in person Abbas’ letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu.

Building on this crisis, the Fatah Central Committee and the Revolutionary Council demanded the removal of Fayyad from the Finance Ministry, and succeeded in doing so in the recent reshuffle of the government by appointing or picking an independent minister for finance. The crisis continued when President Abbas moved towards “reconciliation” with Hamas by focusing on the issue of forming a technocratic and independent government, headed by Abbas, a process dependent on elections in the West Bank and Gaza. The final stage of this divorce was Salam Fayyad giving statements to the *Washington Post* and *Herald Tribune* hinting at his possible candidacy for future president of the PA.

Gaza

In regards to the Gaza Strip, recently the Hamas leadership as well as other Islamist factions have announced themselves on four levels. First, through firing around 130 small rockets into south Israel and exposing (according to Israeli General Matan Vilnai) the failure of the “Iron Dome” missile defence system. Second were the euphoric celebrations of the Muslim Brotherhood’s recent electoral victory in Egypt of President Mohammad Morsi. Third, they invited “the Egyptian Horse” to work with them for direct and indirect negotiations with Israel for a truce and security arrangements. Finally, they challenged Fatah by empowering the Hamas political bureau headquarters in Cairo, headed by Khaled Mishal and Mousa Abu Marzook, to become an alternative political address for Palestinians.

Jerusalem

On the question of Jerusalem, the “Israelisation” and the “Judaisation” of the city have been proceeding under each Israeli government, and, in particular, under Netanyahu’s right-wing coalition government. In addition to confiscating lands, restricting Palestinian development, and increasing the provision of housing for Israeli settlers, the Israelis also continue in their efforts to transform the conflict in the Holy City into “a religious conflict.” They are trying to implement “the Hebron Model,” in which they forced shared use of the Hebron Mosque (Al-Ibrahimi Mosque), and divided the city, limiting the movement of people and goods. In Jerusalem, we find numerous religious schools, which are already planted in and around the Old City, in addition to endless excavations. Meanwhile, Israeli forces and laws restrict any Palestinian civilian activities and prevent any PA/PLO presence in the city.

Palestinians in Jerusalem feel that there exists an attitude of disengagement between the PA/PLO and Jerusalem. This is reflected in the position of ordinary people. Jerusalem is no longer in their consciousness or daily concerns. The only exception is the coming holy month of Ramadan, in which Jerusalem will witness “a festive

culture of Ramadan,” and the Israelis will keep this small window open, while crippling and aborting any possibility to enhance the Arab city of Jerusalem.

The Palestinian youth

Demographics in the occupied Palestinian territories are characterised by a very high proportion of young people. Sixty percent of these young people are not affiliated with either faction (Hamas or Fatah) and are floating in search of a vision to get out of the political impasse, as well as a mission in which they can play an active part in the stages of its implementation. They no longer see the point in wasting energy on small battles, e.g., demonstrations against the lack of reconciliation, or fighting for socio-economic needs. The youth movement in occupied Palestine today is not searching for a leader but for an independent political forum. Many young people see the infiltration of the PA security or the hijacking of the Islamists as factors that will block the route to transparent, fair, and free elections for the president, the legislative council, the PLO national council, and the Palestinian Legislative Council, as well as for the local candidates. This demand for fair and free elections seems impossible at present, given the dual governance of Hamas and the PA and the apartheid system maintained by half a million settlers in the West Bank.

In conclusion, the PLO/PA in the West Bank is sinking into an internal crisis. It is running short on political will to move firmly forward and accomplish one of the various open, endless tracks, i.e., state- building, reconciliation, negotiations, UN bid for statehood, elections, non-violent resistance, or, finally, to freeze security cooperation and boycott Israeli goods and services.

Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi, a political scientist, historian, author, founder and member of various Palestinian, Arab, and international institutions, is the chairman of the Jerusalem-based Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs (PASSIA), an independent, non-profit think-tank, which he founded in 1987 and which seeks to present the Palestinian Question in its national, Arab, and international contexts through academic research, dialogue, and publication.