

## A FOREIGN POLICY FOR THE STATE OF PALESTINE

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An independent Palestinian state has just been declared. This proclamation of independence represents a decisive turning point in the history of the Palestinian people. With the creation of the state, the Palestinian people and their leadership face new challenges and new responsibilities. The foremost question at the top of the agenda is this: What should be the foreign policy of the State of Palestine?

This question may be divided into two parts: first, what should be the objectives of Palestinian foreign policy?; and second, what steps should be taken to achieve those objectives? Like all states, the State of Palestine will approach these questions within the givens of its geopolitical context.

### GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT

Although the declaration does not specify boundaries, the location of the State of Palestine is the West Bank and Gaza\*. It is only those territories which are presently not part of any existing state, nor claimed by any existing state. It is only in those territories that the population bestows law-giving authority upon the Palestinian governmental structure. And it is only in those territories that there is any possibility of the continued survival of a Palestinian state.

Understood as coextensive with the West Bank and Gaza, the country of Palestine is a small, densely populated area. Its two parts are separated by a hostile power. The larger segment of its territory, the West Bank, borders only two states, Jordan and Israel. Both are highly suspicious of Palestinian policy; both have a history of occupying Palestinian territory and both have strong expansionist tendencies with respect to that territory.

The smaller part of the State of Palestine, Gaza, is poorer and more densely populated. It is bordered on one side by Israel, on a second side by Egypt, and on a third by the sea. Thus, both parts of the State of Palestine are largely isolated both from each other and from potential outside support.

The State of Palestine comes into existence under conditions of military occupation by its most powerful neighbor, Israel. It also comes into existence as a de facto demilitarized state: it simply has no weaponry worth speaking of beyond the small arms level. Moreover, given its borders (not to speak of the condition of military occupation), there is little likelihood that this military situation can be significantly transformed within the indefinite future.

The population of the country of Palestine is roughly 1.7 million persons. This is less than one-half of the population of Israel and about half the size of that of Jordan. Economically, the country of Palestine will emerge relatively rich in human resources, poor in natural resources, and poor in physical capital and infrastructure. Its ability to develop economically will be strongly linked to its political and economic relations with Israel and Jordan. As an enclave bounded by Israel and Jordan, external capital flows and trade relations between Palestine and the rest of the world will be subject to a de facto Israeli-Jordanian veto into the indefinite future.

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\* In a final settlement, Jerusalem will emerge as the capital of both Israel and Palestine.

## OBJECTIVES

Within the context of these harsh geopolitical realities the foreign policy objectives of the State of Palestine may be identified as follows: preventing draconian Israeli measures including a mass expulsion of the Palestinian population from the West Bank; preventing annexation of its territory by Israel and preventing re-occupation of its territory by Jordan; bringing about Israeli troop withdrawal from both the West Bank and Gaza; achieving some satisfaction of the rights of Palestinians dispossessed of their homes and lands in 1948; establishing relations with Israel and Jordan that facilitate rapid economic development; and achieving long-term national security within recognized borders.

This set of objectives may be taken as relatively ultimate in the sense that they are “bottom-line” objectives which are desirable of themselves and not merely as a means to some other objective. In this respect they may be distinguished from many other possible objectives which take on importance only because they contribute to these more fundamental objectives.

The list of secondary objectives is long. It might include: admission to the United Nations; worldwide diplomatic recognition; representation at an international conference; Israeli recognition of the State of Palestine; U.S. recognition of the State of Palestine; and receiving significant foreign aid. Because these secondary objectives derive their importance from the primary objectives, and because there may be differences of opinion over whether they will really contribute to those objectives, there may be considerable disagreement over what the secondary objectives should be.

## THE KEY VARIABLES

The immediate objectives of overwhelming importance for the State of Palestine are: first, to prevent a mass expulsion and other vastly stepped-up assaults on the population; and, second, to secure Israeli troop withdrawal. Thus, Palestinian foreign policy requires an accurate understanding of the determinants of Israeli policy. Three variables are paramount: who holds power in Israel (and the extent of that power); how those in power assess benefits of alternative policies; and how those in power assess costs of alternative policies. Given this framework one can proceed to address the two main challenges to Palestinian foreign policy.

*Challenge One: How to prevent the expulsion of the population from the West Bank?*

Several factors might lead to an expulsion.

- *A spiral of violence in the West Bank.* Sharply increased Israeli casualties would create enormous pressures within Israel for decisive action. The junior officers in the military and the rank-and-file troops would be pressing for an opportunity to use full firepower. Politically, the emotions generated by escalating casualty figures would lead to a breakdown of constraints and a silencing of the liberal opposition.
- *A new Arab-Israeli war.* Similarly, the outbreak of war would create conditions favorable to expulsion or massive internal population transfers. It would shift international attention away from the West Bank and Gaza, permit the government to initiate an information black-out, and inflame passions.

- *A further rise in power of the Israeli right wing.* The pro-expulsion sentiment within Israel has grown sharply. It is stronger among the general public than among those in government. To the extent that the power of the right wing continues to grow in government, more serious attention will be given to “solutions” along these lines.
- *The absence of external constraints on Israel.* If Israel moves to expel Palestinians (or to take other extreme measures) it is not likely that any outside military force would physically intervene. If Israel acts, it will act quickly and no one will stop it. Thus, outside forces can play a role only before the fact. They act as constraints only insofar as they make clear to Israel that certain measures such as expulsion will incur severe penalties. In this situation, Egypt and the United States could play useful roles. Egypt could make clear that expulsion would result in the cancellation of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, and the U.S. could make clear that expulsion would mean a cut-off of aid. But neither country is today prepared to make commitments of this sort.
- *Israeli annexation of the West Bank.* A Palestinian declaration of independence will contribute to a call within Israel for annexation. It will be argued that if the Palestinians can take a unilateral step of claiming sovereignty over the territory, so can Israel. If Israel should annex the territories, then expulsion would be more likely. Annexation without expulsion would confront Israel with the permanent question of the status of non-citizen Palestinians within its borders. Over the long term, Israel cannot allow itself to be perceived in the United States as an apartheid state. Thus, annexation will give rise to pressures for expulsion. Israel could find “creative” ways of proceeding. It could annex the West Bank, turn Gaza over to the UN, and then transfer large numbers of West Bank Palestinians to Gaza. It could also provoke a war as a cover for the expulsion and cite national security imperatives.

However, there is also a range of factors that work in the opposite direction, making expulsion less likely: clear progress toward a resolution of the conflict; strengthened external constraints on Israeli behavior; low levels of violence within the West Bank; the absence of any attacks within the Green Line; any on-going negotiations or dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians; expanded links between Palestinian and Israeli peace groups; and a clear Palestinian readiness to resist expulsion.

*Challenge Two: How to bring about Israeli troop withdrawal?*

There are two false notions which should be dismissed. The first is the notion that Israeli withdrawal will be forced upon it by the superpowers. Anyone who believes that the U.S. will attempt to force an Israeli withdrawal simply does not understand the U.S. Even if there is broad popular support for Israeli troop withdrawal, this will not translate into a U.S. policy of forcing Israeli withdrawal. Furthermore, even if the U.S. were to attempt to force an Israeli withdrawal (by threatening to cut off foreign aid, for example), it is unlikely that this would have the intended effect. Instead it would backfire. It would confirm Israeli fears of being abandoned by the U.S. Israeli politics would lurch sharply to the right and expulsion would be made more likely.

The second false notion of how to achieve Israeli troop withdrawal is that it can be achieved through guerrilla struggle. It is sometimes correctly observed that Israeli casualties played an important role in motivating Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon and the Sinai. However, these are false analogies because neither territory was the object of religious/ideological attachment. Israel

withdrew from the Sinai only in the context of its peace treaty with Egypt. As for Lebanon, Israel still has troops there and regularly carries out incursions. Further, to withdraw from the West Bank under conditions of guerrilla warfare would be viewed throughout Israel as a demonstration of weakness and thus as highly dangerous to its future security. Finally, it must be remembered that, for all the harsh measures Israel has used against the intifadah, it has been unable to employ its heavy-duty military might. Conditions of guerrilla warfare would legitimate a full-scale Israeli military response which would bring tens of thousands of Palestinian deaths, and would likely crush any guerrilla movement.

If Israel is not likely to be forced to withdraw by outside powers or through armed conflict, how can the State of Palestine bring about withdrawal? The answer lies in a combination of tactics which ultimately create a willingness and even a desire to withdraw. First, Israeli security concerns have to be seen as unthreatened by withdrawal. Second, the Israeli troop presence has to give rise to a continued burden on Israel (economically, morally, and internationally). The occupation also has to continue to be viewed as detrimental to the morale and self-esteem of the armed forces. At the same time, the peace forces within Israel have to be reinforced. And, finally, Israel must perceive that it has a good deal to gain from withdrawal (e.g. peace, security, stability, friendship, end of isolation).

When these conditions obtain, Israeli withdrawal may be arranged through a formal mechanism, such as negotiations. But negotiations themselves do not cause a withdrawal; they pave the way for it. It is also possible that Israel may undertake withdrawal unilaterally and in phases. It is to the advantage of the State of Palestine to be involved in negotiations that lead to withdrawal and deal with many of the other aspects of the Israel-Palestine relationship. But negotiations are not absolutely necessary; the key issue is the development of conditions conducive to an Israeli willingness to withdraw.

## POLICY ISSUES FOR THE STATE OF PALESTINE

### *Negotiations with Israel*

Ultimately there are certain Palestinian objectives that can be reached only through negotiations. One example is the satisfaction of the rights of Palestinians who lost their homes and land in the 1948 War. Another example is formal Israeli recognition of the State of Palestine.

An Israeli government headed by Peres would probably seek to take Israel into negotiations with genuine Palestinian representatives; a Shamir government, however, may be expected to oppose such negotiations. Once negotiations begin they may transform political attitudes within Israel to make possible Israeli concessions that appear unlikely at the moment.

On the other hand, it is very possible that negotiations may not produce a settlement. The Israelis would be seeking from the Palestinians a final and total end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Palestinians would, at a minimum, be seeking full Israeli troop withdrawal, full recognition of the State of Palestine, and some satisfaction of the rights of the 1948 refugees. There is no reason to believe that Israel is ready to take these steps.

In Palestinian thinking there is a long-standing dichotomy between unilateral concessions and mutual (negotiated) concessions. Palestinians have resisted unilateral concessions as unfair and potentially detrimental to their negotiating position at some later point. Because Israel and the United States have demanded some unilateral Palestinian concessions as a precondition to

negotiations, it has been difficult even to begin negotiations.

The strategy of unilaterally declaring independence and unilaterally proclaiming the state are ways of rejecting the concessions vs. negotiations dichotomy. They are means of seizing the diplomatic initiative and controlling the agenda. At the same time they strengthen the Palestinian hand.

Once launched down this road of unilateral creation of the Palestinian state, it is essential that the Palestinians not return to the former way of thinking which treats all unilateral moves as concessions. For this way of thinking leads to a situation in which the Palestinians say: "We will take no unilateral steps toward conflict resolution." From this stance it follows that if there are no negotiations or if negotiations produce no agreements, Palestinian policy is paralyzed.

The broad strategy of unilateral imposition of Palestinian statehood must be accompanied by a unilateralism on the tactical level. Thus, Palestinian stances on a wide variety of issues must be determined by an assessment of whether or not each specific step will advance fundamental Palestinian objectives. The issues of mutuality, fairness, or parity are inappropriate questions within the larger Palestinian strategy of imposition of statehood. Palestinians should not constrain their ability to protect the state or promote Israeli withdrawal with concerns over mutuality. Such concerns are still a residue of the old paradigm that assumed Palestinian statehood required prior Israeli permission. And to dwell on whether or not the Israelis are making mutual concessions is to allow Israeli hardliners to paralyze Palestinian tactics.

Thus, once the state is proclaimed Palestinian foreign policy should look toward negotiations, but it must not be dependent upon negotiations. It must develop unilateral means of affecting Israeli behavior, and thus of promoting its basic objectives. Successful negotiations will ultimately occur, but the immediate Palestinian task is to create conditions conducive to successful negotiations by transforming the environment internationally, within Israel, and within Palestine.

### *Demilitarization of the Palestinian State*

The demilitarization question is a perfect example of the tactical side of the strategy of unilateral imposition. The State of Palestine begins life as a demilitarized state. And as a matter of self-defense policy, the intifadah has imposed a rule of no guns. Furthermore, everyone knows that some degree of demilitarization will be the reality of the Palestinian state for the indefinite future.

For instance, is there any possibility that Israel will permit the creation of a Palestinian air force? Will it permit the existence of a Palestinian nuclear weapons program? Will it permit the existence of sophisticated Palestinian missiles? Obviously it will not. Nor is this a short-term matter. It is quite clear that even if Israel recognized a Palestinian state, even after twenty years, Israel would not allow it serious militarization. Moreover, it is clear that any effort to so militarize would result in an Israeli pre-emptive strike. Therefore, either de facto or by explicit treaty the Palestinians will have to accept demilitarization. They may not like it. And they may say that they do not accept it. But in fact they will have to accept it, because there can be no Palestinian state any other way.

It is tremendously important to be clear about this, because it means that the issue is not whether or not to be demilitarized. The Palestinian state will be demilitarized or it will not be at all. This may be unfair. This may be a lack of parity. But it is reality.

The issue involved, however, is a very different one. It is: should the Palestinians explicitly accept demilitarization and, if so, at what point? As was suggested above, the answer to this question should not be based on issues of parity. The answer should instead be based on Palestinian

national interest. What does Palestine gain by explicitly accepting demilitarization?

By explicitly accepting demilitarization, Palestine accomplishes the following: it destroys the argument that the State of Palestine could threaten Israeli security; it wins support for the two-state solution within Israel, and strengthens the peace movement; it deepens the split within the American Jewish community, giving the two-state solution wide appeal; and it wins new friends to the Palestinian cause within the U.S. and around the world. In short, by explicitly accepting a reality that it cannot change, Palestine can significantly advance its basic objectives of insuring its own security and promoting Israeli withdrawal.

What we are talking about is the question of timing. At what point does it make sense to play the demilitarization card? The traditional answer is that it makes sense to hold onto it. To hold it not only until negotiations begin, but to hold it until the final stages of negotiations. But that view, at best, made sense when Palestinians were trying to negotiate for Israeli permission to have a state. Once the strategy of unilateral imposition is adopted, the tactical significance of the demilitarization card is radically different. It is not something done in an exchange with the Israeli government. It is something done in order to limit the range of options of the Israeli military; it is done in order to alter the balance of political forces within Israel; and it is done in order to strengthen the Palestinian position internationally.

The value of such a move is greatest if it occurs at the very beginning of Palestinian statehood. That is the unique moment when all the world will be looking, trying to make up its mind about this new entity. At that early point millions of people will be looking for clues as to the sincerity of Palestinian willingness to live in permanent peace with Israel. Israeli hard-liners will be counter-claiming that the Palestinians are committed to a doctrine of phases and are permanently committed to Israel's destruction. Their claims will not be credible if the Palestinians accept demilitarization.

There are two ways of playing the demilitarization card. The strongest step the State of Palestine can take is to build demilitarization into its founding structure. Thus, like Costa Rica, it can adopt a constitution which will prohibit the establishment of an army. A step of this sort would in the most fundamental way define Palestine as a peace-loving state. It would win respect around the world and it would make Palestine an *avant-garde* state in relation to the worldwide challenge of disarmament. In short, it would provide long-lasting moral authority to the new state in ways that transcend the specifics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The second approach is more cautious, but still quite powerful in its implications. The new government could simply announce that it seeks permanent peace with Israel, that it realizes that Israel has deep security anxieties, and that it stands prepared to negotiate various security guarantees with Israel, including demilitarization issues. This approach commits the new state to what it knows it will have to do anyway: work out a *modus vivendi* with the Israelis with respect to its armament levels. By making an offer to negotiate on demilitarization, the Palestinians seize the diplomatic and psychological initiative.

Finally, even if Israel were not opposed to a well-armed Palestinian state, demilitarization holds major advantages for the new country. An armed Palestine is a Palestine that may someday find itself in a war with Israel. Second, the pursuit of a serious military capability will be extraordinarily expensive. It will drain limited Palestinian resources away from the development challenge ahead. Third, through the build up of a military infrastructure the State of Palestine would be opening itself the internal dangers of military coups and dictatorships. The long-term hope for Palestinian democracy has its best chance in a Palestine without heavy weapons, and without a standing army.

### *The Status of the PLO Covenant*

The State of Palestine can survive only if it is at peace with the State of Israel. This is true of both the short- and the long-run. Thus the top national security priority for the State of Palestine is to achieve a *modus vivendi* with its neighbor. However, the PLO Covenant, with its call for armed struggle, insofar as it might have bearing on State of Palestine foreign policy is a call for war between the two states. Therefore, the PLO Covenant is antithetical to the national security requirements of the State of Palestine.

For the purposes of building support both within Israel and around the world for Israeli troop withdrawal from the occupied territories, the best course of action would be some deliberate formal procedure which effectively renders the covenant irrelevant. This will prove a difficult step for Palestinians to take prior to a formal settlement with Israel involving Israeli acceptance and recognition of the Palestinian state. But if the covenant is left unattended to, its existence will constantly be cited by Israeli hardliners as proof of Palestinian lack of commitment to living at peace with Israel, or at the very least, as proof of the weakness of the PLO leadership.

If the PLO Covenant is left intact, one approach that the State of Palestine can take is to adopt a constitution. As such, the constitution would be the fundamental law of the Palestinian state. Thus, so far as the state is concerned the constitution will have superseded the PLO Covenant. But this then raises questions of the relationship between the PLO and the State of Palestine.

### *The Various Commando Groups*

Here we have a serious problem. It is hard to see how the government of Palestine can successfully carry out its foreign policy if it has to contend with a multiplicity of autonomous armed groups, each claiming to act for the Palestinian people. On the other hand, it is hard to see how the government of Palestine can effectively exercise authority over such groups. For instance, if Syria does not accept the general authority of the Palestinian government and arms various factions, what is the government of Palestine to do? There is very little it can do.

In order to minimize the damage this may inflict upon an effective foreign policy, the Palestinian government needs to accomplish at least two objectives. Within the West Bank and Gaza, it has to achieve Palestinian sovereignty. It must be accepted by the vast bulk of the Palestinian population as the only law-giving authority, and thus as having the ultimate say over the struggle to motivate Israeli troop withdrawal. This means that it must impose its discipline upon all matters relating to confrontation with the Israeli troops or settlers

Second, with respect to what it cannot control, it must totally divorce. It must so position itself that it will not be implicated in the actions of Palestinian groups operating without its authorization. It should be unsparing in its condemnation of any acts of terrorism. Similarly it must totally condemn any attacks on Israel. If it does not, Israelis will assume that such actions have the sanction and cooperation of the Palestinian government.

### *Palestinian Policy with Respect to the Right to Return*

As the voice of the Palestinian people, the State of Palestine must represent not merely the rights of those Palestinians within the West Bank and Gaza, but of all stateless Palestinians. One of those

rights is the right to return to lands that were lost in the 1948 War.

Once the State of Palestine comes into existence, this issue will be a major bone of contention between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine. Relations between the two states will remain strained until issues surrounding the right to return are resolved. The Palestinians living in refugee encampments deserve as rapid and as complete fulfillment of their rights as is possible.

What this means is that the right to return must be transformed from a matter of formal moral principle, to the level of practical compromise. It would be useful if the new state were to put forward a realistic plan for solving the problem. The starting point of such realism is that the literal return to within the Green Line of all or even most of those (and their descendants) who lost their lands is simply not possible. The full and literal implementation of the right to return means the undoing of Israel as a Jewish state and thus is incompatible with the Israeli perception of Israel's deepest interests. To be unwilling to seek a practical compromise is to set the State of Palestine on the permanent course of hostility with Israel.

A practical compromise could involve the following components: the actual return of some significant number of Palestinians (e.g., 100,000) compensation for all, to be financed through an international fund; settlement and development assistance for those coming to the country of Palestine; offers of citizenship and assistance for those seeking a new life in a variety of countries including the Arab states, the European states, and the United States.

From a foreign policy point of view, the value of a State of Palestine proposal for settling the right to return issues goes beyond the issues themselves. By showing good faith in seeking a realistic resolution of this problem, the new state would be making clear to all that it is serious about seeking final and deep resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### *The Relationship between the State of Palestine and the PLO*

Judged from the point of view of the national interest of the Palestinian state, the best step would be for the PLO to simply go out of existence. In its last act it would establish the Provisional Government of Palestine. The PNC would be transformed into the legislature, or one chamber of the legislature (the other to be constituted inside the West Bank and Gaza). And the executive committee would be transformed, with some possible modification, into the cabinet of the executive branch of the new state.

If this route is taken, no special step needs to be taken about the PLO covenant. It simply enters history along with the PLO it becomes an artifact. The State of Palestine would emerge with a clean slate, able to pursue Palestinian national interests unencumbered by the past.

If the PLO continues to exist, it poses a variety of thorny problems:

- Is the PLO still the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people? It would seem not. For clearly the government of the State of Palestine is a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.
- If the PLO is, then, one of two representatives of the Palestinian people, how are they to share authority? Can the PLO and the PNC, make a decision that conflicts with the decisions of the Palestinian government? Is the Palestinian government to take orders from the PLO?

It is unlikely that the PLO will soon go out of existence. If the Palestinian state had been established through the conclusion of negotiations with Israel and if its existence were secure, then

there would not be great difficulty in giving up the PLO. But under present conditions of occupation, the existence of the State of Palestine will have, to many, a chimerical character. There will thus be a strong desire to hold onto the PLO in some fashion, perhaps as a political party.

What is crucial, however, is that there not develop any competition between the PLO and the provisional government, and that retention of the PLO not be done in such a way as to impede the rapid international legitimization of the Palestinian state and its government. Thus, for instance, there is no need and it would be harmful for there to exist two parallel bureaucracies. PLO offices worldwide should simply be transformed into embassies and consulates of the State of Palestine. In general, the problem of competition can be resolved by allowing the key players in the PLO to emerge as figures in the government, with relative power similar to that within the PLO structure.

## CONCLUSION

Governments are not the same as movements. Movements dwell in the realm of moral absolutism. To the extent that participants in a movement compromise on moral fundamentals, their legitimacy is challenged by other participants in the movement. Governments are different. They have overriding responsibilities. They must preserve the lives and welfare of their citizens as well as the existence of their state.

If they are to meet these responsibilities, governments must seek practical solutions to practical problems. They must make decisions in the here and now, and they must base those decisions on the world as it is, not on the world as they would like it to be.

The Palestinian people have taken a bold step in proclaiming the existence of the State of Palestine under conditions of Israeli occupation. They now face the challenge of bringing that state into being, and the even greater challenge of guiding that state through treacherous waters which will endanger its very existence for years to come.

The leadership of the new state must develop a defense policy, a national security policy. Of necessity, the elements of this policy will be political, not military. The stakes are high and the margin for error narrow.

Through its unilateral proclamation of statehood, the Palestinian people have seized control of the international agenda. It is crucial that they continue to initiate change and not simply react. With a creative and decisive foreign policy, the State of Palestine has a fighting chance to master the central problems that it will face in its crucial first years of life.