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From Uprising to Independent State—How To Do It

The uprising in the occupied territories is the most important event in the last twenty years of Palestinian history. The most fundamental meaning of the uprising consists in the transformation it is bringing to virtually the entire Palestinian population of the territories. For the first time they have fully entered history as agents of their own destiny.

The successes of the uprising have been significant. These include, the mobilization and unification of the population, the attainment of considerable worldwide sympathy, the widening of divisions within the Jewish community both in Israel and in the United States, the re-activation of American diplomacy, and the achievement of limited European economic measures against Israel.

Yet for all that, it is not obvious that the uprising has moved the Palestinian people any closer to attaining an independent state. It appears that Prime Minister Shamir has successfully blocked American efforts to initiate an international conference, and public opinion polls suggest that, if anything, the Israeli public has moved a bit to the right.

Moreover, the uprising contains tremendous dangers for the people in the occupied territories. There are a variety of scenarios, ranging from settler provocation, to frustration, to simple rage which may result in the breakdown of the internal discipline which has kept matters to largely non-lethal stone throwing. Were this to change, it is likely that the Israeli response would result in vastly more Palestinian deaths and injuries. And if matters moved towards full scale armed conflict, the stage would be set for mass population transfers and the concentration of civilian populations in special camps.

Were such events to occur, it would mean tragedy not only for the Palestinians but for Israel and for Judaism itself. Inside Israel there are those that say that if no settlement is reached soon, there will be another war with the Arab countries, yet there are no Israeli leaders acting decisively for the self-interest of their own country. Inside the United States, the American Jewish community is unable to find a strong moral voice, and within the Palestinian world there seems to be a shortage of ideas as to how to move from the present situation to statehood.

It is time to rethink some of the basic premises. Up to now, Palestinians have placed tremendous import on an international conference, negotiations, and PLO representation at such negotiations. Not much is heard about what happens if such negotiations begin and then deadlock. Perhaps it is believed that the price of failure would be so great that once started, it would necessitate a comprehensive solution. Yet this is wishful thinking. It is perfectly likely that negotiations will simply be unable to generate a solution acceptable to both Israelis and Palestinians, and it is also likely that the superpowers will lack the will to impose a solution.

If we probe a bit deeper, we see that the present strategy for attaining an independent Palestinian state embodies a model which needs to be challenged. That model is that statehood emerges from negotiations and agreements. In short, it assumes that no Palestinian state can come into existence unless there is prior Israeli approval.

Yet consider how Israel itself came into existence. Following the United Nations Partition Resolution of 1947, the Israelis simply declared the existence of the state of Israel. Indeed, they made that declaration contrary to the urging of the U.S. Department of State. They did not get Arab or Palestinian advance approval. They did not negotiate with the Palestinians. They proceeded unilaterally, and gradually secured international

recognition, admission to the United Nations, and effective control of territory.

There are important analogies and disanalogies here for the Palestinians. Today's military and political realities totally preclude achieving statehood through force of arms. But on the other hand, today's political, moral, economic and psychological realities offer new alternatives within the same basic concept: The Palestinians do not need advance Israeli approval to bring a state into existence, and there is no reason why they should cede such power to Israel. Indeed, to do so is inconsistent with the underlying spirit of the uprising.

An alternative strategy is possible. One which will overnight transform the political agenda, and place the two-state solution in center stage as the only peace option. Here is how the Palestinians might proceed.

- 1. The PLO issues a Declaration of Independence and Statehood, announcing the existence of the State of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza. Simultaneously the Declaration of Independence and Statehood is announced throughout the occupied territories.*

- 2. The PLO proclaims, as its final act, its transformation into the Provisional Government of the state of Palestine. The Palestine National Council (PNC) is transformed into the legislative body of the Provisional Government. All government positions are declared provisional pending the possibility of free election by the Palestinian people.*

- 3. The new government issues Law One (or a constitution) which proclaims:*

- The State of Palestine declares itself at peace with the state of Israel.*

- *The State of Palestine (like Costa Rica) will by its constitution, not maintain an army.*

4. *The new government offers Israel the exchange of Ambassadors and mutual recognition.*

5. *Law Two is issued, forbidding all acts of terrorism and announcing penalties for any violations.*

6. *Worldwide Recognition:*

- *A worldwide diplomatic offensive is declared seeking:*

a. *Recognition of the new state*

b. *Admission to the United Nations*

7. *Boundaries*

- *The provisional Government calls for direct negotiations to set boundaries with Israel and to establish a permanent Israel-Palestine peace treaty.*

8. *Israeli Withdrawal*

- *Withdrawal becomes the central demand, internationally and within the territories. All the energy presently expended on peripheral matters is now concentrated on this single demand. Whereas, previously Israel was occupying a territory, it is now occupying a foreign country which has declared that it is at peace.*

- *To promote withdrawal and to eliminate any excuses for a continued military presence, the Provisional Government announces a ban on all lethally violent attacks on Israeli soldiers. No violence is allowed against settlers except in clear self-defense.*

- *The Palestinian people are called to enter into only symbolic activity directed against Israeli soldiers in the territories. Stone throwing is permitted, but only insofar as it*

is undertaken symbolically, (i.e. with no lethal intent). Use of gasoline bombs is forbidden.

- If diplomatic efforts fail to secure either negotiations or withdrawal, an intensified campaign of international economic pressure is undertaken.

9. Building the Fabric of Statehood

- In some parts of the territories, the soldiers will be totally ignored; treated as if invisible.

The real focus of energies will be on building the inner sinews of national life and statehood:

a. Secret local elections are held.

b. Economic self-reliance is advanced.

c. Schools are re-opened or classes held in secret.

d. Social services are expanded on a village level.

e. A national anthem is proclaimed. The anthem should emphasize peace.

10. Currency

- With the assistance of the Arab states the Provisional Government should issue a new Palestinian currency.

- To ensure its use and value even during the period of occupation, its conversion into dollars should be guaranteed. Within the territories a small gold coin should be introduced. The inherent value of the coin will ensure that it will be taken seriously even by Israelis. Every time a transaction is paid using this coin, Palestinian statehood will be affirmed.

11. Passports

- The new government, to symbolize the end to statelessness, should promptly issue passports. These should be made available to any Palestinian in the world who desires one.

- An announcement should be made that the State of Palestine will allow dual citizenship. Palestinians who are citizens

of other states should be encouraged to apply for and travel on Palestinian passports.

12. Democracy

-The Provisional Government and the new Constitution should proclaim that Palestine shall be a democracy with an independent judiciary and a Bill of Rights to protect individual liberties.

-The United Nations will be asked to supervise the first possible national elections.

The underlying concept behind the strategy is that the existence of a nation state is just as much a matter of the accepted identities, allegiances, and practices of a population as it is a matter of the control of territory. It is possible to start first with the de jure aspects of statehood and move gradually to de facto territorial control.

The great merits of this approach is that the two-state solution, which continues to be viewed as a "non-starter" in Israel and the United States, will simply start itself. In doing so, it will follow the spirit of the uprising: that the Palestinian People on the ground will decide their own destiny.

Politically and psychologically this approach will liberate us all from many the artificial issues which have served as impediments to bringing peace and justice to the region. Specifically, we will rid ourselves of the baggage of words and obstacles:

- Resolution 242*
- International Conference*
- PLO Covenant*
- Terrorism*
- Joint delegations*
- Superpower peace plans*

There is no way to predict how long it will take to secure full Israeli withdrawal. No doubt it will take several years. However, it should be realized that to function as a state, even full Israeli withdrawal is not 100% necessary. If Israeli non-interference is achieved, it would be possible to rapidly carry out the tasks of political and economic development necessary for statehood.

Let us consider a variety of possible objections that may be made to the strategy:

- *"If the Palestinians move in this direction the Israelis will counter by annexing the territories."*

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There is not much to fear from this possibility. It will have no more meaning than did the prior annexation by Jordan. The Israelis will fail to receive any international recognition from such a move; it will not be treated seriously by anyone living within the territories, and as the uprising has demonstrated, the Israeli government has already lost effective control of the territory.

- *"You will never be able to get the Israelis to withdraw."*

Never is a long time. Israeli withdrawal will be a matter of the costs and benefits it perceives relative to other options. At bottom a two state solution will be achieved because it does serve Israel's national interest. It is the only basis for stable peace. Once peace is declared unilaterally by the State of Palestine, this will become ever more obvious. Deprived of any excuses for continued occupation, the international, political, and economic costs of occupation will continue to mount for Israel.

- *"Only armed struggle will force Israeli withdrawal."*

This is doubly wrong. Armed struggle is not necessary so long as other forms of struggle are utilized. And secondly, armed struggle runs the great risk that it will result in just the opposite. It may open the door to the transfer or concentration

of populations; it will clearly unite American Jews in support of any Israeli government policy; and it will mean tremendous suffering for a population which has suffered more than enough. To those that are not convinced, let me merely say "give peace a chance." There is plenty of time to die.

- "The Israelis will prevent the implementation of the strategy through provocations and brutal repression designed to create a war situation within which transfer and annexation can occur."

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This, I agree, is a danger. It must be faced and countered by all peace forces. For the Palestinian mass population it means ever-increased discipline. And it also means that there is a need for creative tactics which can cushion the damage caused by isolated incidents. Thus any linkages with Israeli peace groups should be expanded. The Israeli public should be challenged to come and talk one-on-one to Palestinians. Palestinian youth should challenge their Israeli counterparts to debate the issues.*

For Israeli and American peace forces, combating this danger means finding ways of getting the Israeli army to moderate its behavior and to exercise control over the settlers. The United States government can be helpful in this regard. A major effort should be made to educate Americans, in particular American Jews, to both the reality of the present brutality and to the seriousness of the Palestinian willingness to live at peace with Israel.

"If this strategy is tried and fails it will be a devastating blow to the Palestinian cause."

Quite the contrary. First of all, the strategy is designed to utilize and expand the tactics of the uprising. Stone throwing will continue: economic and social self-reliance will deepen: international pressure will grow. What the strategy does is to place these tactics within an overall context leading towards an

independent state. By doing so it will help prevent the onset of frustration and despair which will be inevitable when present tactics produce no further gains. Secondly, the strategy will further the transformation of Palestinian consciousness and pride which the uprising has begun. People will no longer see themselves as struggling to bring about negotiations to settle the fate of an occupied territory. Instead, they will be a people with a country, simply struggling to force Israeli withdrawal. What is required is daring to bring one's country into existence.

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"If it seems odd that a Jew should offer his thoughts on how Palestinians can be a successful in their struggle, let me only add that the struggle for an independent Palestinian state is also the struggle for a humane and safe Israel, and that there can be no Judaism without a commitment to Justice."