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Policy Meeting

"Future political options, locally and internationally"

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Introduction:

The Palestinian scene continues to be extremely complicated as a result of the continued internal division and the dead-end prospects for a peaceful solution through fruitful and serious negotiations. This is coupled with the stance of the American administration, which retreated from its past promises of moving forward with negotiations, pressuring Israel to halt settlements and achieving peace. Furthermore, democratic life has come to a halt in the absence of any possibility of holding presidential and legislative elections on their specified constitutional date. This is especially after the PLO Central Council - in its last meeting - linked the elections with reconciling with Hamas, something which requires a strong political will.

Additionally, there have been international diplomatic maneuvers, namely the European position towards the Palestinian cause and its recent lean towards declaring east Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state.

The tendencies to bridge the internal Palestinian rift still exist, a rift whose end has become a political demand for all Palestinian and regional political parties. This demand is represented in the efforts to push for national conciliation, including Arab and especially Egyptian efforts so that energies can be refocused on gaining international public opinion on Palestinian rights and ending the occupation; an occupation which should be pursued and held legally and judicially accountable for its crimes against the Palestinian people, especially those perpetrated in Gaza a year ago.

In light of this situation, it is inevitable to adopt innovative public policies instead of mere reactions, to extract ourselves from this waiting game and confront the extremist Israeli policies and measures against the Palestinians, all of which are aimed at evading the increasing international pressure on Israel to fulfill its obligations towards the peace process. In the meantime, Israel is escalating its aggressions and refusal to halt settlements and land confiscation especially in Jerusalem, which is under the burden of an scheme of ethnic cleansing. In Jerusalem, Israel is evicting the city's Palestinian

residents from their homes, expelling them and confiscating their ID cards in addition to returning to the policy of assassinations and invasions.

Many other issues have also been subject for discussion such as the prisoner exchange deal with Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit and the building of our future state, which are all interconnected and have local, regional and international dimensions.

Future political options in light of the Palestinian reality

- In tandem with Palestinian and Arab efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation between the two sectors of the homeland, it has become necessary to focus on the Palestinian political position. The most critical issues include ending the occupation, the right of return and self-determination and the establishment of an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. Having said that, it is important to determine the political goals, especially in terms of negotiations and the peace process without linking them to the achievement of national unity.

- After admitting to the failure of 18 years of negotiations, there must be a clear and precise position taken on this issue; the next stage must be one of decisions given the futility of past negotiations, which have completely exhausted themselves. In this regard, the Palestinian stance must be strong so as not to buckle under Arab and international pressures to return to negotiations without specific goals and clear references for moving forward with the peace process. The leadership should also not accept transitional stages or any obligations under such solutions. There have been growing calls from Palestinian, Arab and even international parties to end the split, both so we can confront Israel's policies and continuous violations and also deal with the obligations of presidential and legislative elections. These elections cannot be carried out without including Gaza as long as we Palestinians want to achieve internal Palestinian democracy and as long as we want unity, regardless of President Mahmoud Abbas' decision not to run in the upcoming elections, which has only created more confusion in the Palestinian political arena.

Future Scenarios

Future scenarios are scarce given the current chaotic Palestinian situation coupled with the intransigence of the right-wing Israeli government under Benjamin Netanyahu, which has remained unresponsive to all international pressures to halt settlement construction. This is in addition to the retreat of the US position and its weakness in the face of Israel's arrogance, whether in terms of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict or at the regional level regarding its threats of a military strike against Iran.

Locally: There is an urgent need to adopt new ideas and methods in order not to repeat the mistakes of the past in terms of our political decisions. Hence, there must be an adoption of a positive and interactive political program to achieve our national goals at the various levels. If this is not accomplished, one of the expected scenarios in terms of national reconciliation is a continuation of the dialogue without reaching any tangible agreements on the ground. This will shift the crisis from moving to end the split to one of managing it whereby the situation on the ground remains the same – that is, two authorities in the West Bank and Gaza respectively.

At the popular level: At this level, there should be support for popular resistance and steadfastness and a revival of the people's energies and national and democratic forces in confronting the measures of the Israeli occupation including attacks, land confiscation, continued settlement expansion and the separation wall. A broad-based popular movement needs to be created to fight and resist peacefully rather than through armed confrontations, which Israel would rather drag us into to deprive us of achieving our independent state. In any case, we cannot cancel out the Palestinian Authority completely with all of its institutions because cancelling this and unilaterally declaring a state will lead us to a temporary entity.

This confusion at the internal level represented in discussions on a bilateral state in one instance and on unilaterally declaring a state in the other, has created a perfect excuse for Israel to fight off international pressures to reach a peaceful, comprehensive solution. With our own lack of consistency, Israel continues to claim it has no Palestinian partner and thus evades any political obligations on it. In the meantime, Netanyahu has moved full force with achieving Israel's ultimate goal of claiming a "Jewish state" through its strategy of transforming the West Bank into isolated cantons, isolating Jerusalem, confiscating Palestinian land for the separation wall in addition to multiplying the number and size of settlements and keeping the Gaza Strip besieged. In effect, this sabotages any chance of establishing a fully sovereign, independent and contiguous state on all Palestinian territories.

Internationally: The French proposal to hold a Paris and Mediterranean peace conference and the similar Russian proposal in light of the failure of bilateral talks can be an opportunity for the Palestinians, but only if the purpose for going to any such a conference is clear. That is, there must be a specific agenda and timetable or else there is no need to go.

Available plans and mechanisms:

The available plans and mechanisms are still limited in light of the Palestinians' adoption of previous strategies and policies, all of which have not produced results. This is despite various positive indications such as the European initiatives. Nonetheless, it is clear that the developments on the Palestinian internal front are inevitably effected by the push and pull and the agendas of regional and Arab parties.

Locally: there must be the start of a popular movement to put pressure on Hamas to sign the Egyptian document, which caters to all of Hamas' demands. They should not be allowed to evade or avoid signing. Hamas should be isolated and exposed before the public. Additionally, achieving this reconciliation necessitates pressure, perhaps from Egypt or other Arab parties and internally through popular movements supported by political forces.

- Institutional work must also be developed. A mechanism for monitoring the performance of authorities should be found in light of the defunct Palestinian Legislative Council; importance needs to be put on the popular movement to put an end to the split given that the current conditions on the ground do not guarantee this happening because of the overall frustration of the people.

- **Politically:** In spite of the retreat of the US administration's position on the Palestinian issue and its pressure on Israel, the leadership should still take advantage of having Barack Obama as president. This is so we do not allow any party to accuse us of being rejectionists in terms of the proposed solutions to end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. We should be able to deal with the Obama administration, which is considered moderate among the international community. Having said this, the leadership must also be careful not to offer any service towards the failure or success of American policy at the expense of our national interests.
- **Internationally:** As for our battle before the international community, even though we face an impasse in negotiations, we should continue to work towards issuing a Security Council Resolution on the basis of establishing a Palestinian state on the June 4, 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital. This is imperative in order to stop the erosion of Palestinian land by Israel's increasing takeover, especially in Jerusalem. Additionally, we should put forth the Swedish proposal to the Quartet Committee regardless of the US opposition to it; there should be follow up on the Goldstone Report and a continued pursuit of Israel judicially and legally for its crimes committed in its war on the Gaza Strip last year.

Recommendations:

1. In light of the current indicators, there must be a reconsideration of the strategy in effect since 1988. It cannot achieve the national goals in light of the requirements and challenges of this stage if it is not radically modified. If not, there should be efforts to create a completely new strategy which can bring us to the aspired goals.
2. Reconstruction and reconsideration of the political system on real democratic bases; addressing the dysfunction in political decision making mechanisms and following this up locally and internationally. Further, reinforcing the premise of partnership in the PLO so as to take practical decisions and create a new leadership framework.
3. Finding alternative ways to influence our reality and to forfeit the policy of playing the waiting game; addressing international arenas to generate pressure on Israel to adhere to international resolutions; benefiting from the positive European positions towards the Palestinian cause.
4. Working towards creating an international and regional framework to restore the international dimension to the Palestinian problem; bringing in all those with a role in creating a different kind of atmosphere to impose a new negotiating context and bring us out of the current state of inaction. This should all be done while adhering to our national conditions for resuming negotiations in the framework of a clear reference point, time ceiling and a halt to settlements.
5. Prioritizing the goal of ending the internal split and achieving reconciliation on the basis of partnership in the leadership. Hence, there is a possibility that Hamas may be given a certain percentage in the Central Council as part of a national front so that no one party has the majority. The Central Council will then appoint a new executive committee in which Fateh, Hamas and other national forces are a part of after which efforts will be pooled towards holding presidential and legislative elections, given that they are also a priority.
6. There needs to be an understanding over joint administration through a unified government aimed at achieving a state of calm. This should be preceded by a conciliatory framework between Hamas and the PA in the area of security given that this is a priority over political action.

7. Reconsidering security coordination with Israel and contemplating a new approach, especially after the recent Israeli assault on Nablus.
8. In the framework of the PLO, there should be a call to the preparatory committee to convene the PNC, prepare for the election of a new PNC and call for the convening of an ordinary session in July. There should also be a renewal of all PLO commissions, councils and institutions; the PLO must restore its status as a unifying element of the Palestinian people in the West Bank, Gaza, inside Israel and abroad because Fateh and the national movement cannot be seriously considered without serious reconsideration of the PLO.
9. Creating a popular movement that would greatly contribute to exerting pressure on the parties involved, namely Hamas, to sign the Egyptian document along with exerting the necessary pressure on the other national forces and civil society in this direction. Additionally, there should be a resurgence of the popular forces in peacefully resisting the occupation inside the homeland and abroad including a boycott of Israeli products, which also necessitates sound components for such resurgence such as offering a serious political position, supporting affected areas and reinforcing the steadfastness of the people.
10. Giving more attention to the national cause by focusing discussions on ways within the national project to end the occupation and achieve self-determination along with reviewing the process of reaching a settlement in its current form. Formulating plans and policies must also be carried out, which are capable of confronting the right-wing Israeli government.
11. Continuing the mobilization of international pressure on Israel and its current government and benefiting from the positive European and international indications towards the political process; coordination on the Arab and international levels in this regard.
12. Following up on the Goldstone Report and continuing to pursue Israel legally and judicially for its crimes of war in the Gaza Strip last year.