

Policy Meeting
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"Organizing the Relationship between the West Bank and Gaza Strip"

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The current phase facing the Palestinians is considered the harshest in the relationship between the West Bank and Gaza. It is characterized by division after " Hamas" coupe and its determination to control the authority and administrate all vital sectors in the Strip; this was accompanied by the retraction of the central government's control, whose role became limited to paying the salaries of most of the civil servants in Gaza.

The Nature of Relationship between the Two Parts

The relationship between the West Bank and Gaza has many differences on three levels: political, social, and economic, due to the historical eras both areas went through, where Gaza Strip has been connected - before the Israeli occupation- to Egypt and its laws, while the West bank was connected to Jordan and its laws. And although the geographic and political gap has been tightened, under the Israeli Occupation, the social and economic gaps remained.

10 years of the Palestinian National Authority's administration since 1994, have failed to tighten the gap or unify the two systems, since there has been more focus on Gaza Strip, especially in the social arena, trying to solve the problem of high unemployment rates.

The differences have been further embodied in the absence of a smooth, sustainable, and unified relationship between the ministries in the West Bank and Gaza. Consequently, there existed an imbalance in employment between the two parts, where most of the civil servants of the various ministries-except for the Ministry of Education and Higher Education- were employed in Gaza Strip. Also, there are 60,000 security officers in Gaza compared to 30,000 in the West Bank, and the number of employees in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Gaza highly exceeds those working in the West Bank.

The different realities in both parts was also enhanced by the separation of economic and land management laws and variation in the economic, social, and cultural fields.

The Separation is Originally an Israeli Project

It is worth mentioning that the separation between the West Bank and Gaza is originally an Israeli project. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon planned to divide the Palestinian land into clusters administrated by local leaders.

The Scenario of Enforcing the Current Status:

In order to resolve the current crisis, there are people who believe that the solution lies in the establishment of two local governments, one in Gaza, and another in the West Bank, to work as local autonomous governments with a range of wide authorities, under the supervision of a central government responsible for administrating political issues related to sovereignty. At the same time, work should be done to establish and develop an equal political relationship between the two administrations that may reach a confederal state, knowing that many people in the Palestinian society advocate this proposal.

Advantages of this Proposal:

According to its advocates, advantages of this proposal would appear, in the event the conflict continues in the West Bank without Gaza, and Israel decides to fully abandon its occupation of Gaza and decided to open the borders and crossings. In this case, this proposal would conserve the national project from completely falling apart, since it allows Gaza to administrate itself all the way through.

This choice also gives the Palestinian people the opportunity to examine Hamas' capability to fully administrate the Strip and shoulder the responsibility of paying the civil servants there.

Disadvantages of this proposal:

This proposal would deepen the separation between the Palestinian people, and it contradicts the efforts of the Palestine Liberation Organization during the past 40 years, by which it succeeded to unify the goals, visions, and aspirations of the Palestinian people, and worked to tighten the gaps among the various clusters of the Palestinian people.

Agreement with this proposal would set the people in contradiction with its goals and denigrates the huge sacrifices of the Palestinian people. It would seem that the people are working in the opposite path. Consent of this proposal would contribute to enforcing the occupation approaches of geographic separation between various Palestinian cities and areas in the West Bank.

The occupation may also think of restricting the Palestinian State to Gaza only, and continue to confiscate more Palestinian land in the West Bank, so as to establish local administrations and destroy any authority that might arise among them. This can be concluded from exercises of the Occupation on the ground. For example, Israeli politicians refuse to allow the Palestinian Authority to implement its security plans in Ramallah, Nablus or Jericho.

Resolving the Crisis

Before scrutinizing solutions to organize the relationship between the West bank and Gaza Strip, one should answer the following questions:

1. How can we overcome the division? And would this compromise the specifications of a Palestinian democratic society?
2. Should there be consensus on Hamas' control and system?
3. What should be done to preserve diversity and what should be done to preserve the national project after the division made?
4. Can a local government in Gaza survive away from the international community?
5. What is the price of giving precedence to the local legitimacy over national legitimacy?

After discussion, the participants recommended the following:

1. Holding to the National Project

As long as the Palestinian people are living the phase of national liberation characterized by:

1. Political and demographic division, even if the division is temporary.
2. The existence of an American atmosphere to divide the area, as reflected in the congress decision about Iraq, and so is the case in Lebanon and Syria, which paves the way for dividing Palestine.

Therefore, the people should hold tight to common factors that unify all Palestinian everywhere, since its unification within a political framework has not been reached yet. There should also be a great determination to hold to a Palestinian independent state within the borders of 1967, and the reaffirmation of the national project by emphasizing its specifications, and refusing any division, since it reflects the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

The Palestinian political system has been clearly drawn according to two very important documents: the Declaration of Independence issued by the Palestinian National Council in 1988, and the Palestinian Basic Law. Under occupation, the nature of the Palestinian political system should be determined in consensus among the Palestinian people and not by military action.

This can be reached by enforcing national unity and reference to the people, law, and the legislative institutions to resolve any disputes, and adherence to the previously-signed agreements enforcing Palestinian unity such as Cairo Agreement and Mecca Agreement, trying to give precedence to the national interest rather than the party's interest, and preserving the regularity of elections.

2. Reference to Democratic Dialogue:

Most participants supported serious and honest dialogue to retrieve national unity on democratic and political basis, wherein any other choices might not guarantee political unity, and may destroy the national project, and crush the political and geographic unity of Palestinians. It should be emphasized that democracy is the only mean of resolving any disputes, and that going to elections would contribute to re-unifying the people.

3. Refusing Foreign Intervention:

Palestinians are demanded to protect themselves against foreign interference in its internal affairs.

4. Overcoming the Gap between the Country's Two Wings:

Work should be done to overcome the gap between the West Bank and Gaza Strip through the planning and implementation of a parallel development plan that includes upgrading the administration techniques.

5. Dialogue with Gaza:

Participants recommended initiating dialogue with the national leaders and civil society leaders in Gaza through the video conference system.

Conclusion

Participants concluded that Hamas is requested to give precedence to national interests over any other, and save itself from the Israeli project in Gaza, by announcing its retraction of its action in Gaza, so as to pave the way to sit on the table of dialogue which gathers all the parties who signed the national agreement document.

It is of Hamas' interest to quickly work on ending the current situation in Gaza. Knowing that the authority in Gaza is at the hands of a few military groups who think they own the decision in the Palestinian cause.

Others call upon continuing work within peaceful and democratic means to convince Hamas of its seclusion, by carrying out several well-prepared activities on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank. Work should be done in Gaza to create a positive model in face of the negative model Hamas is creating in the Strip.