

IS THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL RESISTANCE MOVEMENT STILL ALIVE?

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The article deals with insights into the present Palestinian political landscape which is going to be changed - if not these days then tomorrow. Leader of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) or simply Palestinian Authority/Autonomy (PA) or according to the Israeli version "the Former Autonomy" for the last 13 years the 82-years old Mahmoud Abbas together with his FATAH team is in the thick of behind-the-scenes struggle for power. This political activity hardly bears any relation to the people's aspiration of "Palestine's liberation from Zionist occupants". To the contrary this ritual agenda is being explored by ruling Palestinian clans in purpose of keeping or getting the power.

Palestinian resistance movement since 2007 is divided between FATAH, which governs in the West Bank Ramallah, and HAMAS in the Gaza Strip. Palestinian political institutions go on withering, never getting a chance to be properly formed since Oslo agreements [1993-1995]. Palestinian leaders are fading away day by day losing credibility among Palestinians because of their inability to deal with socio-economic challenges and political aspirations.

Inner Palestinian disagreements and related to them external pressure is the largest block on the road to a Palestinian state. One might jump to the conclusion that there could be the break through the impasse only when the new Palestinian generation reconsidered previous generations' agenda and aspirations. Unfortunately even in this case there would be hardly any peaceful solution because from all appearances with the situation going on like this the Israeli society will be radicalizing more and more. Until then the profound crisis of political perspectives in the Palestinian arena and rapidly changing political environment in the Middle East region as a whole are blackballing Palestinian national resistance movement.

Keywords: Palestinian resistance movement, Mahmud Abbas, Palestine Liberation Organization, FATAH, HAMAS, Dahlan, Rajoub, Israel, Middle East

It is not for the first time that the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), founded in 1964 in order to "liberate Palestine" from the Zionist occupants by means of armed struggle and recognized as the "sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people" by the world community including Israel, becomes aware that the road to a Palestinian state is more difficult than it has expected, and consequently some serious tactical modifications are necessary. It should be noted that under the cover of the PLO there is ten organizations of the resistance movement, political parties, and popular organizations while PLO itself is a main component of the Palestinian national resistance movement*. But first of all let us get definitions straightened out.

We should not be confused with such notions like Islamic resistance movement for which read Palestinian Islamic fundamentalist organization HAMAS and Palestinian national resistance/liberation movement as a whole which supposes activity of all Palestinian parties and organizations including HAMAS, different parties within PLO and another groups mentioned below.

The various parts of Palestine resistance like all revolutionary groups grew as a result of confrontations with an overwhelming enemy and underwent a whole series of "adjustments" following defeat in the Six-day war 1967 - dissolution, splintering, sectarianism, regroupments and

ideological debates which ranged from fundamental program questions to hairsplitting definitions of wording. One of the most militant of these movements was the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, which is perhaps the best known in the World for its attacks on Israeli El-Al planes in Athens, Rome, and Zurich [1].

On the whole a resistance movement is an organized effort by certain part of the civil population of any country to resist the legally established government or an occupying power and to disrupt civil order and stability. It may seek to achieve its objects through either the use of civil/nonviolent resistance or the use of armed force. In some cases, a

Victoria A. KOROCHKINA, PhD (Political Science), St. Petersburg University (victoria.korochkina@gmail.com)

* There are following members of the PLO: FATAH, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Palestinian People's Party, Palestine Liberation Front, Arab Liberation Front, As-Saiqa, Palestinian Democratic Union, Palestinian Popular Struggle Front, and Palestinian Arab Front (*author's note*).

resistance movement may use both non-violent and violent methods, usually operating under different organizations and acting in different phases or geographical areas within a country [2].

Generally the term itself is supposed to mean something legitimate and justified. How else it can be when some individuals or an organization opposes aggression or intervention? Nevertheless it can be otherwise depending on the particular subjective attitude. It is a would-be secret that concerning the same violent activity one can hear either about freedom fighters or about bloody terrorists.

TERRORIST OR NOT TERRORIST - THAT IS THE QUESTION

The problem is that today world leaders are announcing the war with international terrorism but there is no explicit definition of “terrorism” as such in international humanitarian law. Many states define terrorism in their national law in ways that draw to differing degrees on these elements [3].

According to Israeli law terrorism is first of all “an illegitimate means of achieving political, religious or ideological goals”. The new Israeli Counterterrorism Law (2016) nullifies previous Israeli legislation in the field of counter-terrorism and defines an “act of terrorism” in the following way [4].

It is an act committed in political, ideological, religious or nationalistic purposes; with the aim of stirring fear or panic among the public or coercing a government or a governing authority, including the government or a governing authority of a foreign State, or a public international organization, to take action or to refrain from taking action. Herewith this act creates serious injury to a person or freedom; seriously disturbs public safety; damages property, religious artifacts (places of worship or burial and ceremonial objects), infrastructure, systems or services, or their severe disruption, or nation’s economy or environment [5].

Experts note that the Israeli definition of what is an “act of terrorism” is in conformity with the British one and implies speech-based conduct. It does not limit itself to civilian victims as well as acts or threats against military personnel could also constitute terrorism, provided that they satisfy the other elements of the definition [6].

The new Law holds definitions of what is “mass terrorism”, “terrorist organization” and “member of a terrorist organization”. An act which causes severe bodily injury to a large population is a mass terrorism and would be life imprisonment. Any group classified

as “terrorist organization” is exposed to numerous criminal and other sanctions. That is, a membership in a terrorist organization, even without participation in its activity, is a criminal offense that carries a sentence of up to 5 years in prison. Heads of terrorist organizations or others in senior positions will get 25 years’ imprisonment, and under certain circumstances, mandatory life imprisonment. Providing service or means to a terrorism organization, as well as providing means in order to commit an act of terrorism up to 5 years’ imprisonment. Moreover, the property of a terrorist organization can be administratively seized and confiscated. A senior police officer may ban specific activities of terrorist organizations, including rallies, protests and other activities deemed to support those organizations [5].

The new Counterterrorism Law as well as Israeli legislation in general does not apply in Judea and Samaria (the West Bank)*. However Israeli Criminal Law applies extraterritoriality, for instance, for offenses against “national security, the State’s foreign relations or its secrets and so on” [8]. The new Law provides non-application of the statute of limitations for serious acts of terrorism when the suspect is abroad and cannot be brought to Israel for trial [5].

This new Law expands Israeli Criminal Law on incitement to terrorism and creates the offense of “demonstrating solidarity with a terrorist organization or act of terrorism”. These provisions respond, in part, to online activities supporting, inciting, and enabling acts of terrorism against Israel and its citizens. According to this law any activity in cyberspace is considered to be terroristic and exposed to criminal law in case of public demonstration of solidarity with a terrorist organization; engagement in expressive acts likely to result in a terrorist act, enlistment of persons to a terrorist organization, or participation in training on behalf of a terrorist organization; publication of direct calls for commission of a terrorist act; of praise and support of a terrorist act [8].

Taking into account the above-mentioned Israeli legislation all kinds of activity of different Palestinian groups which use both violent and non-violent methods can be/is liable to criminal prosecution by law and ex post. It is not important any longer that in case of Palestinians and Israelis we are facing two opposing forces that is why we will never find here generally held views concerning what are “freedom fighters”, “martyrs”, “political prisoners” and “terrorists” especially basing on

* Judea and Samaria is so called Area C, without East Jerusalem. According to the Israeli government terminology it is the administrative area with majority of Jewish civilians and it is under control of Israel. The UN considers the area to be military occupied. In the Arab world the area is called West Bank (that is the territory west of the Jordan river) (*author’s note*).

historical co-existence experience of these conflicting parties. One can name them whatever he likes but Israelis liquidate or put in a jail those whom they consider to be liquidated or put in a jail.

WHAT PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS THINK ABOUT EACH OTHER?

Contemporary Palestinian resistance movement started in the mid-20th century within the Arab National Liberation Movement. From the beginning its leaders have been accusing Israelis of conducting a campaign to falsify the character and aims of the Palestinian resistance movement. Allegedly Israelis have presented their own version of Palestinian aims, based on misquotation and omission. Meanwhile Palestinian spokesmen popularized statement that Palestinian "revolution has been and will remain a humanitarian revolution that presents to the world the open Palestinian society as a substitute to the closed Zionist society". They called for an Arab Palestinian state with no traces of Zionist racism, with all its military, political and economic institutions and promise that "the Jew will find his place within this progressive democratic state irrespective of religion, color or nationality" [9].

At the same time Israeli officials [i.e. former prime-minister Ehud Barak] consider that Palestinian leaders "see themselves as emissaries of a national movement for whom everything is permissible. There is no such thing for them as "the truth". They mean that in Palestinian society lie detector tests don't work because in such kind of societies lies do not create cognitive dissonance [on which the tests are based] [10].

Better we will put aside these competing accusations. In this context the remarkable thing is what pervades Palestinian political narrative - "the Jews are one thing, and Zionism embodied in the state of Israel, is another".

To a great extent it is up to the real life in this region. Many Palestinians would like to peacefully coexist with the Jews in one form or another especially those Arabs which hold Israeli ID's. Separation of such notions like Zionist and the Jew is a case in point. However peoples' on the ground needs and sentiments more often run counter to political agenda, personal and clans' interests of the Palestinian ruling elite.

The same to some extent can be told about the flip side. Substantial part of Israeli citizens would be glad to live peacefully with Palestinians side by side and even practice it in their every-day life. In political spectrum these citizens form Israeli left camp. The more active part of them regularly organizes protest actions against right-wing government's coercive violence towards Arab Jerusalemites, inhabitants of

the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Leftwing Jewish Israelis along with the extreme nationalist wing of Israel's Arabs demand "a state for all its citizens" [not for the Jews only].

THE PROBLEM IS FROM INSIDE

Demand for "a state for all its citizens" runs counter to the proposed in 2011 by Likud politician Ze'ev Elkin "Basic Law: Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People", passed by the Government and even was voted on in the Knesset [Parliament of Israel]. The incentives for the Law are legal. It is an attempt to avoid situation, when the creation of a Palestinian state would lead to increasing demands for national minority rights of Arab citizens in Israel and a demand for a "state of all its citizens" that Arab NGOs have been promoting for the last years. Thus the future Palestine would become a Palestinian nation state for Palestinians, while Israel must be recognized by them as a Jewish state [13]. Should it happen dreams about returning Palestinian refugees to their homes which are now in Israel, would remain just dreams.

More serious consideration is that the Palestinian national resistance movement is not united and is split from inside. It is widely considered to be that Palestinian nonviolent and violent [both political and armed] resistance consists of such ruling groups as FATAH and HAMAS. In fact, there are more - Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Palestine Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP - GC), Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, Popular Resistance Committees, Harakat al-Sabireen, The Abu Nidal organization [dissolved on death of its leader in 2002] [14, pp. 135-136]. But the most substantial problem is dissolution of the Palestine Authority in 2007 into two inimical to one another enclaves [in spite of several peace agreements] - the Gaza Strip under control of HAMAS and the FATAH-controlled West Bank.

HAMAS is regarded as a terrorist organization not only by Israel, but the US and EU. In contrast to HAMAS the PLO officially renounced terrorism in 1988. Its main party - FATAH - also denies its engagement in terrorism. However the FATAH-controlled Palestinian Authority transfers money to the families of Palestinians killed or arrested by Israelis while committing acts of terrorism via the Palestinian Authority Martyr's Fund. These payouts absorb 7% of the PA's annual budget. The Palestinians call these payments "salaries" or "social welfare benefits" but in Israel it is called "blood money". For instance, for a son, who is serving a 17-

year sentence for shooting at Israeli forces, his family gets "salary" almost 3,000 shekels a month, about \$870. Palestinian assailants sentenced to 30 years in Israeli jail get about \$3,000 a month. Families of Palestinians killed by Israeli forces get about \$800 or \$1,000 a month [13].

Family members insist that their sons and daughters committed violence not for the sake of money but on ideological grounds. The only way to get the rights of the case is to cut such kind of financing. The Israeli government insists on it on all levels. If they succeed and all other things being equal the Palestinian resistance movement stands a good chance to be immediately put in very constrained conditions or be open to question as a whole. The only problem is that in case of closing of finance channels by one side there will immediately appear the interested sponsor. Iranians do not get tired to declare that "Zionist plots to obliterate the Palestinian cause are doomed to failure" although "the occupying regime of Israel has violated all the obvious human and legal principles by continuously committing genocide, state terrorism and crimes against humanity and by openly scoffing at international peace and security" [14].

The only way out is not prohibition and cutting of financial floods but realization of Palestinian political aspirations [at least pointed out officially] to build an independent Palestinian state. Concerning Israeli demands to stop financial backing of "terrorists" families one of the Palestinian high-ranker Jibril Rajoub [15] was quoted saying that if there was peace and a Palestinian state, "we can close this file. We can say from now on, he who will commit these acts [of terror] has no support from either side" [13].

There always were and still are conditions for finding common ground in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But it seems that its solution on a give-and-take basis is not in interest of the ruling elites from both sides. It will just suffice to mention the most promising [in comparison with preceding periods since 1967] for purposes of the Palestinian state the Camp David talks which failed in 2000 [16].

Then Yasser Arafat refused to compromise on beneficial for him territorial matters insisting on receiving 100 percent of the West Bank including East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. He was only willing to concede land in these territories if he received equivalent compensation, in terms of a land swap, from unpopulated territories inside of pre-1967 Israel, like the Halutza area of the Negev [27]. Instead the Al-Aqsa Intifada broke out in September 2000.

However all violent activity against Israel always returned in the guise of the double throw-down of the Palestinian case. The upshot is a kind of vicious

cycle because Palestinian peaceful initiatives are not being so recognized and violence yields but poor returns. Betweenwhiles some Palestinians wonder whether civil protest is any better than its violent alternative and another - whether their violence towards Israel is violent enough.

In the mid-2000s Islamist fundamentalist organization HAMAS embarked on putting greater emphasis on the political and social activity whereby strengthened its popularity amongst Palestinians and got the real power based on the results of democratic elections. Nevertheless Israel refused to have any deal with democratically chosen Palestinian power. In the end FATAH held power only in the West Bank and HAMAS governed in the Gaza Strip while its authority over the whole PA was not an interest of Israel. Palestinian power dissolution appeared to be an excellent pretext for Israelis to declare the absence of the legitimate negotiator on the part of the Palestinians. No partner - no negotiations.

In those times believe that Palestinian popular resistance can bring about an end to the occupation has long turned into a feeling of disappointment and frustration among Palestinians, and specifically the activist community. "We came alive in the First Intifada. Then we died in the second. Maybe now we are being reborn" [18]. It was the spirit of hope among large segments of the Palestinian population in the wake of popular unarmed resistance to the separation wall and the settlements following the Second Intifada [19].

There was not another variant for disunited Palestinians but to apply to external actors for shaming the Israelis for oppression. As a result the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement started its activity in 2005. Palestinian unarmed resistance, international solidarity, financial institutions and governments were supposed to participate in leveling up the price of Israeli occupation by all means available.

TO UNIFY DOES NOT EQUAL TO GO ON

In October 2017 another shot was taken to reunite the Palestinian policy space. Following Egyptian-mediated reconciliation talks with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Western-backed FATAH faction, HAMAS leaders settled for dissolving its "administrative committee" to enable Abbas' administration to retake control in the Gaza Strip. In return Islamists expected from Abbas ending his sanctions on the Strip. HAMAS governing in the impoverished enclave have nothing to do but to improve its relationship with Egypt and to lift the blockade of Gaza. In fulfilling the Egyptian demand not to provoke Israel, Yahya Sinwar -

famous HAMAS hardliner and the one who pledged never to disarm and wipe out Israel - personally was persuading Gaza-based extremist groups not to do it*. Any way you slice it Egyptians can practically use their excellent experience in peace with Israel for longer than 40 years [20].

If the Palestinian Government of National unity succeeded and elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip took place now with Abbas as an acting PA President, the Israelis would have lost the opportunity to avoid peace negotiations due to lack of the legitimate counterpart. However the decisive factor for Israelis is not the unification process but the personality of the next Palestinian leader.

So in the period when in October 2017 Palestinian unification process had officially started with an active participation of Mohammed Dahlan and pacification of Islamist extremist groups had been successfully underway, Trump made his "decision on Jerusalem" at first sight as a free-lunch present for Hanukah, that was without practical consequences but infuriating for the Arab street. It came like a bolt from the blue.

Hours after the world community and the Middle East region was already standing on its ears following the news from Washington, Y.Sinwar was left nothing but to forget his yesterday's peacemaking efforts and lead the protest rally in Gaza shouting anti-Israeli slogans in lockstep with the outraged crowd. Israel got dozens rockets into its southern area. It was the most intensive attacks since a seven-week-long Gaza war in 2014. Israeli Air Forces strike HAMAS targets in Gaza for old time's sake [21].

This poses the question in a similar way to the Russian political figure Pavel Milukov which in Russian State Duma in 1916 on the threshold of Revolution in his famous speech addressing Tsar government policy asked the audience several times - "is it stupidity or treachery?" [22]. Most probably it was a subterfuge that was addressing several important issues one of which was the prevention of restoring Abbas's power over the Gaza Strip.

The 82-years old Mahmoud Abbas [known by the kunya** Abu Mazen] sooner or later is going to leave office that is why the successor issue is urgent during the last years. Israel is in contact with Abbas's [and Turkey's concurrently] arch-enemy Mohammed Dahlan. Actually Abbas himself collaborates openly with Israel. Not to put too fine a point on it, HAMAS, created by the Muslim Brotherhood under the auspices of the Israeli secret services in order to weaken FATAH, also has experience of cooperation

not only with Al-Qaida but with Mossad [i.e. in 2012 in order to extirpate the leaders of the PFLP in Palestinian refugee camp Yarmouk in Syria] [23].

Israel has real chances to deal the final blow on the Palestinian resistance, which is up to the moment remains to be divided between "FATAHland" in the West Bank and "HAMASland" in the Gaza Strip. In this situation what Tel-Aviv needs is Palestinian reunification, ousting of old-timer M.Abbas, recognition of a puppet Palestinian state, and installation as its leader 57-years old M.Dahlan.

General M.Dahlan is an experienced in cooperation with Israelis person, who fought against HAMAS and allegedly poisoned Yasser Arafat. In FATAH owing to his claims to power he is considered to be the enemy No.1 not only to the political faction but to the West Bank as a whole. For the last few years, he has been living in the United Arab Emirates, being advisor to the royal prince of Abu Dabi Mohammed Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, and reportedly enjoying a fortune of 120 million dollars misappropriated from the Palestinian Autonomy. It is an ambitious and quite avaricious person for this reason he is easy to deal with. Whether the deal will meet the interests of the Palestinian people or not is the last question. At the same time he has invested in the Gaza Strip considerably, brought into the region intereseants from Persian Gulf countries complicating the political process here. Apart from his popularity amongst Gazans, a warm welcome in the enclave by his historical enemies from HAMAS is guaranteed by the new Gazan leader Yahya Sinwar, who is one of his childhood friends. Realization of this road map would bring an end to the 70 years struggle of the Palestinian resistance movement.

There is another potential leader in "post-Abbas" Palestine - 61 y.o. Jibril Rajoub, FATAH member, former Head of the Preventive Security Force in the West Bank and therefore a colleague to M.Dahlan who was the Head of the Preventive Security Force in the Gaza Strip. The two of them have been deadly competitors for power with Arafat at the helm and until now get in each other's way. J.Rajoub has better chances in case of elections in the West Bank. Opposite results could be get in potential elections held allover Palestine territories under the terms of the Cairo agreement signed in October 2017.

Evidently that despite separate strides [both political and violent] unarmed and armed resistance by Palestinians failed to develop into a popular mass movement of civil resistance to Israel's military occupation. The most important question now is how

* Yahya al-Sinwar replaced Ismail Haniyeh as HAMAS political leader in the Gaza Strip subsequent to the results of the February 2017 elections (*author's note*).

** Kunya is a given name, teknonym in the Arab world. Kunya consists of word "father" (Abu) or "mother" (Umm) and reference to the person's eldest son or daughter. For example - first son of Mahmoud Abbas is Mazen. So his kunya is Abu Mazen (that is "father of Mazen") (*author's note*).

to move from a perception of failure toward another strategic comprehension of their role in bringing the end to the Israeli occupation. It is extremely difficult if not impossible in situation of bewilderment and disappointment amongst Palestinians which is deepening by means of corruptive leadership in all levels and lack of people's trust in it at a time when socio-economic situation in both Palestinian enclaves is only worsening and more deeply descending into dependence on Israel power. Political fracture between Palestinian parties and within movements is not worn down. There is not any coherent strategy and effective coordination between competing networks of Palestinian activists.

Only after generation that experienced the catastrophe of 1948 at first hand will have died the Palestinians could be historically ready for a compromise. Moreover, for better moving forward in negotiating Israeli-Palestinian land deal there must be change of generations from both sides. However hardly will it be possible to say the same about Israeli society. The only way for Palestinians to avoid the long and natural history of events with an unforeseen result is to get ideologically rather than financially charged-up national leader. Unfortunately, there is not any on the Palestinian horizon. That is why Palestinians are bound to content themselves with ruling elite they have, while history as before knows no "if".

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