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Historic Process



Palestinian leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Mahmoud Abbas (archive photo)
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The return of unilateralism

Diplomatic approach proposed by Rice will lead to dead-end in negotiations

Gidi Grinstein

The US errs and misleads. Again. The political process that Rice is proposing will not yield progress. The Mecca Agreement and the establishment of the Palestinian national unity government bring the political process to a deadlock. The tenures of Olmert, Bush and Abbas are ending. Israeli unilateralism is a much more solid basis for a political process in the remaining time.

The Palestinian national unity government has two opposing consequences. On one hand, the Palestinian Authority may consolidate into an address, which enjoys popularity, hesitant international support and relative political stability. It may be able to make decisions and implement them.

On the other hand, there is no address on the Palestinian side for agreements with [Israel](#). The new government's platform determines that every agreement with Israel will be brought for approval of the PLO after Hamas is incorporated within it. Until then, agreements will be brought to a referendum in the West Bank and Gaza, and in the Palestinian Diaspora: in Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. In other words, the old PLO is dead, the new PLO has not been ushered in, and a referendum is impossible.

Diving into empty pool

Moreover, the Palestinian side is in the midst of a political deadlock. Hamas opposes a permanent status agreement and end of conflict, is devoted to the ethos of the Palestinian struggle and sees the establishment of a Palestinian state as a milestone in the struggle against Israel. At the same time, Fatah rejects interim arrangements. Into this empty pool, the US insists on diving holding Israel's hand.

The political process has existential significance for us. Trends, which undermine our right to exist, grow more powerful in the context of our control over the Palestinian population. Together they represent a challenge to the identity and existence of the State of Israel, which is no less severe than military threats.

The Palestinian leadership understands that ending control over the Palestinian population is an Israeli existential interest. Therefore, it leads Israel to an all-or-nothing option. Hamas views the dismantling of the PA and renewal of occupation as a threat for Israel more than for the Palestinians. On the other hand, Abbas is willing for the occupation to continue until a permanent status agreement is achieved. He opposes a state with provisional borders and rejects interim arrangements.

Two solutions exist for this deadlock. One is inviting "moderate" Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan or Egypt to the negotiation table. The second is unilaterally upgrading the status of the PA to statehood.

Zionism in midst of historic process

The US is opting for the first option and building on the Arab League's

initiative. This is a mistake. Moderate Arab countries will not bring about a breakthrough. First, remember August 2000 when moderate Arab countries refused to endorse an Israeli-Palestinian deal. It was not a contextual rejection but a structural one.

Arab countries have a legacy of moderation before they sit at the table and hardened positions at the table. One shouldn't expect them to put pressure on the Palestinians to give up the right of return or control over the holy sites in Jerusalem. Second, the bigger the number of participants, the more difficult it is to get a deal. Finally, one can expect that Abbas' all-or-nothing policy will become the leverage of the Arab countries.

It is more realistic that the end of control over the Palestinians will emerge via unilateral moves. The principle will be similar to the Gaza disengagement but the implementation will be different. Israel will transfer powers, responsibilities and territory to the Palestinian Authority that will bring it closer to the status of a state.

For example, if Hamas ministers call for economic separation from Israel, let them have it. Let them collect their taxes and at the same time issue currency. Indeed, the customs envelope that was designed in 1994 has lost the logic for its existence.

Zionism is in the midst of a historic process to reestablish equilibrium among its democratic values and its Jewishness by relinquishing control over parts of the cradle of our civilization. Nonetheless, since Camp David 1979 we have been consistently progressing toward ending control over the Palestinian population. This process will be completed irreversibly only via establishment of a Palestinian state.

The physical infrastructure for establishment of a Palestinian state exists. Israel is out of Gaza and a decisive majority of Palestinians will be east of the separation fence while most of the settlers will be to its west. Without a solution to the structural problems of negotiations, they can be expected to fail. It is more reasonable to assume that a Palestinian state with provisional borders will be founded based on Israeli unilateral steps after the current negotiation process wanes.

The US insists on banging its head against the wall instead of seeking a door. Expect the return of unilateralism.

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