

# September Initiative: Palestinian National Rights are Point of Origin

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**The real meaning of the Palestinian September UN initiative is that it provides an opportunity for a return to the axioms that should guide Palestinian political choices: Palestinian national and social rights, with all their components. Nassar Ibrahim explains.**

The announcement by Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas that in September the PA will request from the United Nations full membership and recognition of a Palestinian state by international bodies, raises political controversies and legal issues in both the Palestinian and the international arenas. The more that Palestinian political and civil society organizations explore this issue, the more complex the questions to be faced become. This increasing complexity demonstrates how such a step failed to result from a reasoned national political strategy, which is what should lead the way for such a choice. The claim for state recognition could have been the culmination of a real reconciliation process on the ground between Hamas and Fatah, a restructuring of the Palestinian popular movements and a reformation of the relation with the Arab peoples, as well as with the international and Israeli anti-Zionist civil society movement, thus reframing a new position toward future peace initiatives. But it was not.

The first worrying element is that this choice came abruptly and not as a result of an evaluation process of the Palestinian political performance since Oslo until today. In other words, it seems to be an option chosen due to a crisis, rather than an intentional step toward a new national strategy. An analysis of its political and historical context, indissolubly tied with the Palestinian national struggle and its objectives, is fundamental for this initiative to mean more than a diplomatic maneuver under the ceiling of the so-called peace process (i.e. the negotiations), which was a dysfunctional process from its beginning in the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference right through to its death in 2011. This failure can be traced back to the fact that the peace process missed the necessary preconditions for success from the very beginning, being that all the negotiations were subject to the unequal relations of power with the Israeli - U.S. alliance, backed by the European Union and the Arab regimes, which were valid partners in this alliance.

Approaching this political choice and its various dimensions means identifying the reference and the starting points of this process, in order to prevent the debate from falling into the trap of tactical political use. A fact which allows us once again to go back to the core of the conflict between the colonial Israeli occupation and its objectives, and the Palestinian aspirations for national liberation. An evaluation - positive or negative - should happen beyond narrow approaches and commence from a strategic point of view. It is important to identify the principles and goals of the national liberation strategy, if the Palestinians will or won't go to the United Nations. The discussion here goes beyond the legal controversies and the public relations campaigns that aim to titillate the other side. The core issue is not if the UN motion is right or wrong as matter of principle. Does this choice mean a disengagement from the strategies and references of previous negotiation (the terms dictated by the imbalance of power) and does it represent a return to the UN resolutions and international law as a reference for any future peace process? This question and this question only should be the reference

for any discussion. If the answer is positive, the claim for state recognition would represent the first step of a new Palestinian strategy: Rebuilding the national Palestinian struggle based on the requirements of national unity and a reconsideration of resistance in all its forms and entitlements, as well as the rebuilding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, relying on a national consensus around the Palestinian national rights (the right of return, self-determination and the establishment of an independent sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and the dismantling of settlements). In light of this, the September initiative would become a part of the national political strategy and would not be the strategy itself. Going to the United Nations in September is not and should not be the end, as the reality on the ground will not change much as an outcome of this one step.

The experience of the Palestinian struggle over the past decades shows that guaranteeing a certain harmony between the requirements of the Palestinian national rights on the one hand and the political, social and cultural dynamics on the other has been the only element able to preserve the Palestinian struggle in its strategic framework. In each historical moment these principles have been violated for tactical reasons and the price to be paid by the Palestinians with regard to their rights was enormous. This is the lesson to be learned from the bitter harvest of the Oslo Accords, and the reason goes back to the fact that the peace process has not respected the basis and the objectives of this stage of national liberation. To abide by the agreement became the goal and not the means to serve the Palestinian national rights. Some have even suggested that the mere commencement of negotiations and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority means that the Palestinian people have overcome this stage, with all its national, political and organizational needs.

Instead of latching onto the September meeting, an internal debate within the Palestinian society must happen, aimed at presenting a review of the leadership's political attitude of the last two decades. The starting point is an internal restructuring of the internal balance of power among the political and social actors - social movements, the leftist parties and the multitude who see the interest in continuing the struggle for liberation with its international interconnections.

In any case, the Palestinian leadership has to remember that the failure of all the "peace initiatives" can be explained by the simple fact that they tried to jump over the fundamentals of Palestinian national rights and unity of the Palestinian people, aiming to build a peace under the Israeli occupation criteria. The concessions given by the Palestinian leadership have deeply shaken the foundations of those rights and consequently destroyed any potential legitimacy of the peace process, which has become, in the eyes of the majority of the Palestinians, just a choice of a narrow political elite that contradicts with the rights and the interests of the majority, while the counterpart of the negotiations (Israel) holds on to its colonial policies, including the settlement of Palestinian land.

The above mentioned argument is not a contrived dispute but is, in essence, a return to the assets that got lost in the sneaky policies that still continue to adapt to the requirements to end the conflict of, sometimes a result of realism and at other times of the balance of power. Any successful political move must be based on the determinants and requirements of the national liberation stage and its objectives and strategies, from which its legitimacy and morality derives. Commitment and adherence to the Palestinian national rights and their just struggle for freedom, independence and self-determination on the basis of international law and the UN resolutions. This is the determinant of any Palestinian choice.

In light of this fact and of the aforementioned practical experiences, the most important challenge facing the political, social and cultural elites regarding the September initiative lies in their ability to navigate the maze of the past two decades with the aim of developing and improving the political, social, economic and cultural performance to meet the requirements of Palestinian national

liberation and to end the occupation, and not to regard it simply as a legal and diplomatic debate.

To verify this equation, the meaning of September depends on two key conditions. First: The restoration of the Palestinian national strategy in accordance with national priorities at all levels, starting from the fact that the Palestinian people are still living under the stage of national liberation, including the interaction between the different forms of resistance and of national unity as a prerequisite. In this context, the task is in the first place to evaluate the political performance after Oslo, recognizing the imbalances and drawing back from wrong bets in order to regain the initiative in accordance with the Palestinian national interest. Already far before the September initiative was on the horizon, the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish warned us of the dramatic consequences of the Oslo process, writing that "(Israel) did not understand the implementation of the false peace but to accomplish what it could not reach through war: regional hegemony and dealing with the Palestinian people under siege as an isolated entity ...Meanwhile the Palestinians depleted all their flexibility to finally pay a higher price for a mediation aimed not more than the recognition of the right to establish an independent state on the twenty percent of the land of our historic homeland deserved and Israel on the other side refuses to withdraw even one meter from the space its legend has to be realized in, and still looks to our historical existence in our country as a foreign occupation of "the eternal Jewish homeland," to be freed from us and our history" (Al-dustour newspaper, Jordan, 2002).

Second: Fulfill the requirement of rebuilding the Palestinian political bodies (P.L.O., and the Palestinian Authority), according to the overly-referenced new national strategy. The first goal of this institutional reorganization is to determine clear boundaries between the tasks of "the Revolution and the (Palestinian) Authority", especially in light of the horrific political and cultural consequences of the mixing process between them. It was exactly this intentional mistake that pushed the two biggest political movements in the contemporary history of Palestine (Fatah and Hamas) to their current crisis, dumping first the Fatah movement and later Hamas to make them both serve the PA and not the liberation strategy. This led to a fundamental shift in the structure of the two movements, such that the PA successfully tied their roles with the borders of the PA based on the Oslo Accords, while they should keep their roles as agents to control and guide performance to serve the political liberation strategy, without denying, of course, the role of the PA at the civil and social levels, in order to meet the social needs of the Palestinian people and promote the practice of democracy in Palestinian society.

Here the contradiction between the national struggle and the PA was born and quickly spun out of control. If the political forces had maintained a safe distance from the PA, the conflict would not have reached the point that threatens the unity of the Palestinian people and their aspirations for freedom and independence. The inability of the Palestinian political elite to deal with this equation led to the division in the Palestinian society and the political crisis the Palestinians are trying in vain to find a solution for outside the context of Palestine is contributing in making the Palestinian reality porous to external interference.

Out of this, a democratic basis for political and social action must be established to ensure participation of all political and social forces according to their role in the Palestinian reality. Maintaining the balance between national liberation goals on the one side, and social and development tasks on the other - such that the latter can be in harmony with the first without being a constraint-would rescue Palestinians from the trap of foreign aid, which has turned into a means of political blackmailing and pressure. To be considered in this framework is the meaning of the changes in the Arab world (the Arab revolution), which have to be seen as a new opportunity to promote the Palestinian liberation struggle.

This potential process of internal, regional and strategic restructuring is what the Israeli state is

afraid of: To lose the achievements it gained cheaply through the Oslo process and face growing internal contradictions which threaten the cohesion of Israeli society. This is so particularly if the September initiative will mean a return to the reference of international law and provide an opportunity for the Palestinian political movements to reorganize themselves out of failure and start moving again on the basis of international law. Secondly, if the growing social and economic distress in Israel, which is directly linked with the costs of its occupation and militarization, will re-emphasise the importance of the joint popular struggle of Palestinians and Israelis as a guiding principle against the policies of exclusion, racism and impoverishment that Israeli society itself is suffering from.

In conclusion, the meaning of the September initiative does not lie in what will happen, as any result of the UN process will in any case be determined by existing power relations. The ultimate value of this choice must be seen in the fact that it provides an opportunity for all (in the best case) to regain some balance through a return to the axioms that should lead the Palestinian political choices, the point of origin of any political decision: Palestinian national and social rights with all their components.

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