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Palestinian Center for
POLICY and
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Changing the Status Quo: What directions for Palestinians?

Is it Possible to Suspend Security Coordination?

Hani al-Masri

Comments by:

Dr. Nasser al-Din al-Shaer

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This initiative has been organized in cooperation with the Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre and the Netherland Representative Office in Ramallah.

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The following is a translation of excerpts from and summaries of the original Arabic.

Preface:

Given the current stalemate in Palestinian-Israeli relations and the potential for wide-scale escalation in the near future, PSR has conducted a 6-month policy research on new directions for the Palestinians. The research sought to explore Palestinian discourse on the best means to move forward. Five short policy papers, written by senior Palestinian experts and academics, explore various approaches and directions for the PA to take (see list of papers and authors at the end of the report). All these directions are currently part of the Palestinian public and elite discourse. Each paper describes a specific approach, outlining its potential impact on the Palestinians and Israelis and exploring its contribution to a more effective Palestinian strategy to end the occupation. Each approach therefore represents a component in a larger proposed strategy. The five papers were reviewed and discussed by a task force, a core group of 20 made up of the five authors and fifteen reviewers and discussants. The discussion of the papers took place in six closed workshops attended by experts, policy makers, academics and activists. An open conference was organized on 29 February and was devoted to a discussion of all five papers.

This paper, a condensed version of the original Arabic, addresses the approach calling for the suspension of security coordination with Israel. Two commentaries by two members of the task force are inserted at the end of the paper. The discussion of this approach and paper among the members of the task force was very vibrant and insightful; for that, PSR wishes to express its appreciation for all members of the core group (see list of names and affiliations at the end of the report) for the time and effort they have devoted to this work. However, the discussion among the members of the task force indicated at times serious differences of opinion. In this light, it should be made clear that this report does not necessarily represent the views of every single member of the core expert group. It only represents the analysis and the assessment of its author.

PSR is also grateful for the support of the *Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre* (NOREF) and the *Netherland Representative Office* in Ramallah without which this project would not have been possible. But it should be made clear that this support does not in any way mean an endorsement, on the part of these two organizations, of the content of the five papers or this final report.

PSR

Is it Possible to Suspend Security Coordination?

Hani al-Masri

It is useful to start by distinguishing between “security coordination,” which pertains to exchange of information with Israel about armed resistance against the occupation; and “civil coordination,” which relates to easing citizens’ lives through ensuring freedom of movement of people and goods, fighting crime, controlling diseases, etc. It is also important to note that “security coordination” formed part of the Oslo Accords, and it has been enforced indirectly in Gaza through various ceasefire agreements from 2003 to the present.

Before the creation of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Israeli occupation forces were responsible for all civil services and security operations, without any partnership with the Palestinian side. Israel will have to resume this responsibility if its partner, the PA, withdraws from fulfilling its security commitments. Hence, freezing security coordination does not imply freezing civil coordination, unless Israel unilaterally decides to cancel civil coordination, an unlikely move since it is in the best interest of Israel that a Palestinian entity bears the burden of governing the Palestinian population, and in doing so, blocks the path to the “one-state solution.”

Israel is expected to subject the Palestinians to an escalating arrangement of penalties should the Palestinian leadership decide to implement the resolutions of the PLO’s Central Committee, specifically the resolution to halt security coordination. Israel’s punitive measures will be structured to force the PA to fulfil its commitments. If the PA refuses to capitulate to Israeli demands, then Israel could dissolve it, or the PA could collapse on its own accord. In this case, Israel will try to replace it with a conformist body.

The questions which should be answered are: Does the PA really want to implement the resolutions of the PLO’s Central Committee? If it does, could it endure the consequences of Israeli escalations? Would the institutional infrastructure created since the signing of the Oslo Accords allow for the annulment of security coordination? Have alternative plans been drawn up, or would it be possible to develop these plans if the PA chooses this path? The answers are likely to be negative, but the absence of plans should not mean the continuation of occupation. It should mean the adoption of a new vision and processes to end occupation.

Any unilateral Palestinian action towards halting - or even diluting - security coordination or other associated commitments will certainly result in Israeli retaliations proportional to the seriousness of Palestinian decisions. The severity of Israeli retaliations will increase given a complete halt of security coordination, accompanied by an escalation of resistance and a move towards real boycott. Under such conditions, Israel could gradually escalate its retaliations to include ending travel and other privileges for the PA’s senior officials; withholding the transfer of Palestinian tax revenues collected on behalf of the PA; and intensifying the oppression of the population. This would weaken the PA and could eventually lead to its downfall. Despite the fact that the future of the PA is dependent solely on Israeli decisions, it is also subject to international and regional considerations which Israel must take into account.

In all likelihood, halting security coordination agreements will be accompanied by a re-evaluation of the Palestinian relationship with Israel, moving away from a relationship with a “peace partner” and towards

a relationship with an enemy. It is also likely that Palestinian decisions related to economic and political agreements will follow, since there is no incentive for the Palestinians to continue their recognition of Israel's right to exist after Israel has revoked its agreements with the PA and continued to deny Palestinian rights. In fact, the PA's leadership had hinted at suspending its recognition of Israel, or making the continuation of this recognition conditional on Israel's recognition of Palestinians' rights.

Following from the above, a new context will arise which could lead to the dissolution or collapse of the PA, or a change in its duties and functions. Israel will never accept the continuation of the PA without the fulfillment of its commitments, especially the critically important commitment of security coordination. According to Ya'alon, the Israeli Defense Minister, this coordination has thwarted 20% of military operations planned by Palestinians against Israel. Ya'alon also expressed the opinion that the PA will "disintegrate" if it halts security coordination, since Israel will be forced to exert greater efforts to stop Hamas from controlling the West Bank.

Without the availability of viable alternatives to negotiations and plans to help the population endure Israeli retaliations, it is difficult for the PA to implement the resolutions of the PLO's Central Committee, especially those related to freezing security coordination. Given that the PA depends greatly on foreign aid and on tax revenues collected on its behalf by Israel – and combined with the fact that it functions under complete Israeli control - it will not be able to pay salaries or prevent other forces from filling the resulting power vacuum. On the other hand, the marginalized PLO cannot substitute for the PA, given the same conditions of working under occupation. In addition, the destructive effects of disunity amongst the Palestinians and current infighting in the "Arab World" nullify the option of depending on Arab countries for economic and political support.

Despite the importance of promptly halting the security coordination agreement with Israel, it is unlikely that this will happen for the following reasons:

1. The Central Committee's resolution to halt security coordination did not result from political conviction, but from political posturing, designed to appease popular and political pressure. The decision was a form of political maneuvering, in an attempt to improve the position of the PA in bilateral negotiations, which have deteriorated greatly relative to Palestinian expectations upon signing the Oslo Accords.
2. The development of a new Palestinian reality 23 years after the Oslo Accords - comprising new economic and political structures - has brought benefit to wide sectors of Palestinian society, who are keen on the continuation of this reality.
3. Fear of Israeli, American and even European boycotts and retaliation might lead to the collapse of the PA, or change its direction. Such outcomes are not desired by the PA's leadership.
4. The existing disunity in Palestinian society has served the interest of certain Palestinian factions. There are fears that Hamas or Fatah might exploit the conditions arising from halting security coordination to achieve narrower, self-serving objectives.
5. The absence of any alternative, or even a conviction that a new alternative is needed, blocks the building or planning of new options. The PLO is not capable of producing such alternatives, given its marginalization, and because – as with the PA - it operates under the crippling conditions of Israeli occupation.
6. Fear of Arab retaliation, especially from those countries which maintain relations and peace treaties with Israel, as well as other countries needing the option of an alliance with Israel to check their perception of an Iranian threat.
7. Fear that the expected deterioration of relations with Israel - combined with the crippling weakness of Palestinian institutions; national disunity; and the loss of popular legitimacy by the

PA and its institutions - will result in a political and security vacuum. Such a vacuum will certainly be exploited by competing factions and sectors of Palestinian society, and might result in the reorganization of the PA into a collaborating entity that is willing to accommodate Israel's colonial plans and disinherit the Palestinian people of their homeland.

The implementation of the Central Committee's resolutions, including the halting of security coordination, might lead to the following scenarios:

First Scenario: Dismantling the PA and then Re-Creating it

In this scenario, Israel will dismantle the current organization of the PA and replace it with a more submissive entity that is willing to accept the realities that Israel wishes to impose on the Palestinians. Salient among these realities will be conflict management and not resolution, where the Palestinian can, at most, achieve limited autonomy as part of a final solution to the conflict. In this scenario, Israel could choose to replace the PA with competing and quarrelling local authorities, wholly controlled by the occupation system. This scenario is likely because it represents a continuation of the plans and realities that Israel has tried to systematically impose on the Palestinians. The likelihood of this scenario is confirmed by the fact that Israel refrained from dissolving the PA - or pushing it to total collapse - during the violent armed confrontations of the second Intifada, where much of the PA's institutions and security organizations were destroyed, with hundreds killed and thousands wounded. Despite that violent conflict, Israel allowed the PA to continue to exist, but with changes to its form that succeeded to a large extent. This scenario could branch out into several directions, such as:

- a- The creation of a Palestinian state with temporary boundaries based on the current status quo
- b- The creation of a Palestinian state with Gaza as its center, responsible for administering the West Bank's population. Alternatively, Israel could create a political entity in Gaza without any ties to the West Bank. The probability of this scenario becomes stronger if Palestinian disunity continues, and if indirect negotiations between the current authority in Gaza and Israel succeed in solidifying the current truce.
- c- The adoption of a regional solution, especially a pan-Arab one, where the "Jordanian Option" returns in the form of a con-federal or federal arrangement with Jordan.

Second Scenario: Collapse of the PA

In this scenario - due to the diminishing of Palestinian rights, the marginalization of official institutions and their loss of legitimacy - the PA collapses and the status of Palestinians returns to the conditions that were prevalent before the creation of the PA. This will result in security chaos on the ground; the disintegration of the PA from a single authority into many units; and the fragmentation of Palestinian decision-making to an even greater extent than now. This scenario is unlikely because it will ignite open confrontation with Israel. Since Israel knows well that any alternative to the PA will be harmful to its interests, it will prefer the continued survival of the PA. Israel does not desire to re-assume the costly responsibility of its occupation, or lose out on the high profits accumulated from managing international aid to the Palestinians. Faced with the heavy financial and political burdens of maintaining the occupation, Israel will be faced with two fateful options: annex the West Bank or large swaths of it; or rejuvenate the so-called "peace process."

Third Scenario: Dissolution of the PA

This scenario will materialize if the Palestinian leadership decides that the best way to obtain international recognition of Palestine is through the dissolution of the PA, which currently represents an entity that could, through negotiations, evolve to an independent state. The PA, however, could decide that it is in the best interests of the Palestinian people to turn the verbal threats of self-dissolution to a practicable option. This option differs from the gradual scenario of the PA's collapse due to external pressure, where it is not possible to exploit the collapse politically. Self-dissolution - before or after its implementation - could result in serious negotiations leading to a solution. This is especially true if self-dissolution is accompanied by calls for a bi-national state, an option which greatly worries Israel, as it exposes the Jewish-only state to the feared "demographic" Palestinian threat.

Forth Scenario: The Palestinian State

This scenario might be achieved through the achievement of unity and the ending of the current crisis manifested in the historic failure of chosen options, the aging of institutions and leadership and the absence of any possibility for political change. The success of this scenario will depend on choosing a new mantra that replaces the current "partners in peace" relationship between Palestinians and Israelis, to an antagonistic relationship between colonialists and the colonized. Based on the historic fact that independence and state-building cannot be achieved without defeating colonialism, then the Palestinians must reclassify their current agenda away from "state building" and towards "national liberation." To defeat Israeli colonialism, the PA's organization, role and commitments must be reconsidered and then transformed into a "service authority." Its duties and mandate must be returned to the PLO, with the task of revitalizing the Palestinian national liberation movement along with its representatives and institutions, with an emphasis on including the larger political and social spectra of the Palestinian people. This organization will then work as a united front, struggling to realize freedom, independence, sovereignty and the remaining legitimate rights of the Palestinians. To achieve this, Palestinians must re-energize their narrative and recognize their cause as a national liberation movement that aims to restore their rights; and not as a dispute over land, or the nature of peace, or a conflict between moderation and extremism. Slogans such as "not losing what has been achieved" or "dealing with what is possible" must be rejected.

Recommendations:

1. Adopt a radical change to the post-Oslo political process. This change must be based on establishing a new vision by defining where we stand, what we want and which path we should follow, in light of the fact that Israel is the enemy and not a partner in peace.
2. Develop a plan to terminate the Oslo Accords and their harmful ramifications. This must be done through a gradual process, consistent with the formulation of new options based on the principles of equivalence and parity with Israel. This could be achieved through the following steps:
 - Gradually dissolving security coordination, especially in the realm of information exchange, until we reach the point of freezing it or even totally suspending it.
 - Negating all security relations at the political level and excluding these from the Palestinian security apparatus.

- Realigning the annual budget through reductions in security allocations and redirecting the resulting surplus funds to the social domain, to areas such as health, education, national industry and supporting the steadfastness of Palestinian citizens in localities subject to Israeli aggression.
 - Disbanding parts of the security apparatus and restructuring the remainder, with an emphasis on professionalism, patriotism and purity from political nepotism.
 - Achieving the clear separation of security and civil commitments, based on the principle that serving humanitarian needs must continue in all fields, such as fighting crime and diseases and alleviating the effects of natural disasters.
 - Instructing the security apparatus to resist any raids by Israel into Area A.
 - Supporting Palestinians living in villages and areas that are subject to the violence of colonial settlers, through the formation of “defense committees” responsible for the defense of people, their property and their fields.
 - Preparing to deal with all occupation retaliations, including the creation of jobs for Palestinian workers currently working in Israel and the settlements, despite the fact that Israel needs these workers.
 - Denouncing the occupation and isolating settlers legally and economically.
 - Exerting all efforts to obtain Security Council resolutions which stress the illegitimacy of colonial activities and demanding the application of the Fourth Geneva Convention in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
1. Reform the structure, duties and commitments of the PA to make it a partner in resistance, boycott and opposition to normalization with Israel. This reform must transform the PA to serve the Palestinian national program and to bring it into alignment with the PLO. Moreover, many of its functions and political mandates should be transferred to the PLO.
 2. Transfer most of the PLO’s facilities, departments and leadership to locations outside the West Bank, especially the negotiating team. After the completion of reconciliation between Palestinians, some of the PLO’s departments and facilities should be moved to Gaza.
 3. Keep all plausible options open, including the option of the PA’s self-dissolution in the event that it fails to transform its duties and goals.
 4. Prioritize the attainment of reconciliation between Palestinians, and adopt national unity as an existentialist objective.
 5. Restructure the PLO’s institutions along nationalist lines and objectives, with true partnership for all. The PLO must encompass all political and social affiliations and must serve as the sole representative of the Palestinian people, in theory and in practice.

Comment by Dr. Nasser al-Din al-Shaer:

Undoubtedly, many will agree with the writer's analysis and his expectation that the PA will not halt security coordination agreements with Israel. Experience and observation proves that the PA only ever threatened to halt security coordination, without adopting any practical steps towards implementing these threats. Even after the PLO's Central Committee issued resolutions and decisions to this effect in the presence of the President and the Executive Committee, many interpreted these as "mere recommendations" without any obligation to execute them. It is not clear who could coin such interpretations, when the Central Committee meeting conformed to preset quorum and rules, in the presence of the PA's leadership and the leadership of all Palestinian organizations. Implied threats about halting security coordination have become no more than attempts at improving our negotiating position, or attempts to "expose the real intentions of Israel before the world." Despite these attempts, Israel continues with its territorial expansion and colonialism, while we keep trying to attract sympathy from an international community that is too preoccupied by many other causes.

In reading this paper, one becomes worried that - unintentionally or otherwise - it provides the PA with excuses for refraining from its commitments to halt security coordination with Israel. The author is especially worried about unhelpful international conditions in light of Israel's persistent meddling in all aspects of our lives. He also plays on the PA's fears of the rise of an alternative authority, and the exploitation by Hamas of such a situation. Raising such fears will only push the PA to harden its positions. I would like to remind the reader that the Palestinian street will never accept any foreign or artificial bodies formed to serve the occupation, and that it is very easy to abort such attempts. The preoccupation of the international community with other issues is a real fact that has to be considered, but it is not absolute and the Palestinian cause could be kept alive and active without giving the occupation any excuses. In this regard, the halting or reduction of security coordination agreements is an issue that should be understandable to the international community, in light of Israel's continuously oppressive practices against Palestinians.

Since the author stresses that the survival of the PA is an Israeli and international need, then this should alleviate the PA's fears that Israel will dissolve it. The important point here is to work towards improving the performance of the PA in order to increase people's satisfaction with it and their trust in it, and to prevent Israel from "fishing in troubled waters."

The author argues that the PA will not halt security coordination for both subjective and objective reasons. Any observer of the Palestinian cause must agree with the author. In addition to the reasons and justifications the author uses to support his argument, one could also infer the same result from the official pronouncements of the PA, stressing the needs for security coordination and diminishing its harmful effects on the Palestinian people; even touting it as a fundamental Palestinian requirement. Therefore, how is it possible that we can ask for it to be halted, when it is considered to be a Palestinian requirement? Such announcements could be mere posturing before world public opinion, but even so, such pronouncements do have negative results. Contradictions in opinion and action must be stopped, especially on the issue of security coordination.

What Directions? list of policy papers, authors and commentators

#	Author	Title	Commentators
1	Dr. Sufian Abu Zaida	Peaceful Popular Resistance, is it a Feasible Option?	Qais Abd al-Karim & Mr. Jamal Zakout
2	Mr. Sam Bahour	Asynchronous and Inseparable Struggles for Rights and a Political End-Game	Mr. Mohammed Daraghmeh & Mr. Radi Jarai
3	Dr. Ali Jarbawi	Making Negotiation Viable	Dr. Ayman Daraghmeh & Dr. Azmi Shuaibi
4	Mr. Raja Khalidi	The Prospect for Palestinian Economic Boycott of Israel: Forms and Difficulties	Mr. Fajr Harb & Dr. Ghassan Khatib
5	Mr. Hani al-Masri	Is It Possible to Suspend Security Coordination?	Dr. Naser al-Shaer & Dr. Husam Zomlot

What Directions? members of the task force

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2	Dr. Sufian Abu Zaida	Birzeit University
3	Dr. Hanan Ashrawi	PLO
4	Mr. Sam Bahour	AIM
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6	Dr. Ayman Daraghmeh	PLC
7	Mr. Mohammed Daraghmeh	Journalist
8	Mr. Fajr Harb	Activist
9	Mr. Radi Jarai	Al-Quds University
10	Dr. Ali Jarbawi	Birzeit University
11	Mr. Raja Khalidi	MAS
12	Dr. Ghassan Khatib	Birzeit University
13	Mr. Alaa Lahlouh	PSR
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16	Dr. Naser al-Shaer	An-Najah University
17	Dr. Khalil Shikaki	PSR
18	Dr. Azmi Shuaibi	AMAN
19	Mr. Jamal Zakout	PNC

Changing the Status Quo:

What directions for Palestinians?

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