



المركز الفلسطيني
للبحوث
السياسية والمسحية
Palestinian Center for
POLICY and
SURVEY RESEARCH

Changing the Status Quo: What directions for Palestinians?

Peaceful Popular Resistance: Is it an Option?

Dr. Sufian Abu Zaida

Comments by:

Mr. Qais Abd al-Karim

Mr. Jamal Zakout

May 2016



المركز الفلسطيني
للبحوث
السياسية والمسحية
Palestinian Center for
POLICY and
SURVEY RESEARCH

The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR)

PSR is an independent nonprofit institution and think tank of policy analysis and academic research. It was founded in 2000 with the goal of advancing scholarship and knowledge on immediate issues of concern to Palestinians in three areas: domestic politics and government, strategic analysis and foreign policy, and public opinion polls and survey research. PSR conducts policy analysis and empirical surveys and public opinion research and organizes task forces, study groups, meetings and conferences. Its work focuses on current public policy issues with a special reliance on empirical evidence as a tool to advance scholarship and understanding.

PSR is dedicated to promoting objective and nonpartisan research and analysis and to encouraging a better understanding of Palestinian domestic and international environment in an atmosphere of free debate and exchange of ideas. PSR is registered as a nonprofit institution in the Palestinian Ministry of Justice.

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

The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR)

P. O. Box 76, Ramallah, Palestine

Tel: +970-2-2964933

Fax: +970-2-2964934

pcpsr@pcpsr.org

www.pcpsr.org

Author

Sufian Abu Zaida, holds a Ph.D. in Middle East Studies from the University of Exeter in the UK. He is a former member of the Fatah Revolutionary Council. He served twelve years in an Israeli jail (1981-1993) and was known at the time as the prisoners' spokesman. He has served as Minister of Prisoners' Affairs in the Palestinian Authority, deputy minister in the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and director-general of the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation. He currently teaches at Birzeit University and al Quds University. He is an expert on Israeli affairs.

Commentators:

Qais Abd al-Karim, member of the Palestinian Legislative council and member of the Political Bureau of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Resides in Ramallah and originally from Iraq.

Jamal Zakout, writer, political analyst and media consultant. He has served as an advisor for former Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. He serves as chair of the Executive Board of the Land Research Center.

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 non-violent popular resistance. 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 *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

PSR

Peaceful Popular Resistance: Is it an Option?

Dr. Sufian Abu Zaida

Introduction

Many Palestinians leaders confuse the concepts of “popular resistance” and “peaceful popular resistance.” The term “popular resistance” implies the use - by the people - of ALL available means consistent with international law, which stipulates how societies under occupation exercise the right to resist their occupier. Popular resistance leads to the participation of all possible segments of society and is not limited to organized factions or political parties. On the other hand, while “peaceful popular resistance” also depends on recruiting the widest possible segment of society, the resistance must be peaceful without any use of weapons or violence.

The past years have witnessed an increase in Palestinian political discourse on the use of the terms “popular resistance” and “peaceful popular resistance.” Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, in his capacity as President of the Palestinian Authority (PA), the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Fatah, the largest Palestinian faction, is the most active proponent of adopting the option of peaceful popular resistance, especially after the Sixth Fatah Meeting in Bethlehem in 2009 recommended employing this form of resistance at this stage of the Palestinian national struggle.

President Abbas and the top echelons of Fatah are openly calling for the use of peaceful popular resistance, without any reference to the use of armed struggle and violence. The paradigms of Baleen, Nealeen, Bab Al Shams, Al Karama, Resistance to the Wall and other similar examples have become the mainstay of this transformation. In addition, moving the struggle to the United Nations and international institutions such as the International Court of Justice; and the expansion of the boycott movement to isolate the occupation; are all parts of peaceful popular resistance. The path of peaceful resistance is also supported by a significant number of Palestinian factions working under the umbrella of the PLO and a number of Palestinian civil society organizations.

Nonetheless, despite the recent dominance of peaceful popular resistance against the occupation in the official Palestinian discourse, this has not evolved into planned programs, practices, processes and clarifications on what is permitted and what is not. These ambiguities, whether intended or not, do not clarify, for example, if going to “confrontation areas” to demonstrate against occupation forces is considered peaceful resistance or not. Or, if the blocking of colonial settlers-only roads, and the disruption of colonial daily life through mass mobilization count as peaceful resistance. Similarly, does the disruption of settlers’ electric and water supplies passing through Palestina population centers qualify as peaceful resistance? There is also confusion about nonviolence in conducting demonstrations by thousands at roadblocks erected by the

occupation to prevent Palestinians from prayer at Al Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and other faith centers.

If this, or part of it, qualifies as peaceful popular resistance, then how should it be transformed into a program of action that starts by identifying priorities, and then formulates an action process that does not lead to the collapse of the PA? One must take into account that such resistance could lead to the collapse of the PA due to counter-measures by Israeli forces.

Steps and Factors which could Activate Peaceful Popular Resistance:

In order to activate peaceful popular resistance, there are many factors to consider and steps that could be taken:

1. The PA, its President and all of its institutions and branches must be part and parcel of peaceful popular resistance. This must be achieved through the allocation of budgets; the changing and redefinition of priorities; and the deployment of all available resources to support this cause.
2. It must be clear to all, through transparent leadership, that the goal of peaceful resistance is to rid the Palestinians of occupation, and not merely to improve our negotiating position, which will ultimately lead us, as history has proved, back to our starting point without any progress towards independence and total liberation.
3. All Palestinian political parties and organizations, including their leadership, symbols, members and supporters must participate side by side with civil society organizations, as well as private sector organizations, in facing up to the heavy economic and financial burdens expected from this struggle.
4. To avoid the errors of previous resistance experiences, we must widely spread awareness among all strata of the Palestinian people about peaceful resistance and the benefits of avoiding all forms of violence, including any kind-for-kind response to the Israeli Occupation Army and colonial settlers' methodical provocations and baiting. These are usually intended to lure the Palestinians into violence, thereby excusing the use of disproportional and overwhelming deadly force by Israel.
5. The PA and the PLO must adopt political positions which will motivate and convince Palestinians to adopt the ideology and practice of peaceful resistance. Examples include ending "security coordination," declaring Palestine a "state under occupation" and gradually decoupling Palestinian lands from the occupation.

Peaceful Popular Resistance must adopt the Following Steps:

1. End security coordination with the occupation. This should be easy to achieve, since there are clear and binding resolutions from the PLO's Central Committee to this effect. All Palestinian factions, including Fatah - the backbone of the PLO and the PA - support this position.
2. Work gradually to achieve complete severance and boycott of all relationships with the occupation and all its institutions, including the registration of Palestinian citizens. This

must include ending the transmission of information and data to achieve the state of civil disobedience.

3. Complete boycott of all Israeli products; ending any Palestinian economic dealings with Israel; and searching for alternative partners such as the Jordanians and Egyptians.
4. Gradually prevent all Palestinian labor from working in Israel. As an immediate and important step, jobs in the local market must be created for Palestinians working in Israeli colonial settlements.
5. Eject Israeli currency from the Palestinian market and replace it with the Jordanian Dinar or any other currency. This will be a symbolic act signifying the refusal to collaborate with the occupation and our determination to end “economic occupation.”
6. Reform the PA and modify its functions in ways that enhance peaceful popular resistance and the steadfastness of Palestinians, who are expected to suffer greatly from the consequences of such resistance, especially in the economic domain.
7. Prepare alternatives and plans to accommodate for expected Israeli reactions to peaceful resistance, which could realistically lead to the collapse of the PA. This includes the re-establishment of local popular committees that flourished during the first Intifada, and the elaboration and expansion of the duties of municipalities and village councils.
8. Assert a firm commitment to the continuation of education in all schools and universities and avoid general strikes. Hindsight has taught us that the victory of peaceful popular resistance needs time, patience, and motivation to preserve its momentum and sustainability.

Expected Israeli Reactions:

The implementation of the steps mentioned above could lead to the collapse of the PA, with the result that all Palestinian areas will return to total Israeli responsibility and control. This collapse could result from an internal Palestinian decision if the PA finds itself, due to Israeli counter-measures, unable to fulfill its commitments and duties towards its citizens; or it could be the result of direct Israeli intervention. Without doubt, the least favorable option for the Israelis is to totally disband the PA, which would require them to assume the expensive administrative and political governance of a rebellious population. This Israeli position could change if the PA becomes powerless to fulfill its duties in accordance with Israeli interests, paramount among them being the continuation of security coordination and freeing Israel from the responsibility of governing Palestinians and the associated costly economic and military resources that would be required for direct occupation. Should this materialize, Israel will resort to implementing drastic changes in its relationship with the PA – the most likely scenario is that Israel will not care if the PA collapses, or if it continues to serve its Palestinian citizens.

Israelis believe that the Palestinians cannot endure the results of a sustained boycott of the Israeli economy, due to Israeli’s complete control over all borders in Palestine. They determine which goods are allowed and the quantities that Palestinians can import and export through their seaports, airports and by land. The Palestinians should also expect to be subjected to various obstacles and procedural complications, including stiff customs’ rates and fees, which Israel is likely to impose on trade activities in order to break Palestinians’ moral and will to resist. This is true from past experience.

Under all circumstances, Israel will not accept any Palestinian resistance movement, even if it is totally peaceful, and will apply all means possible to push the Palestinians from peaceful popular resistance to violent resistance, in order to crush this with its military might.

Obstacles that could hinder the Implementation of Popular Peaceful Resistance:

The most important obstacles to peaceful popular resistance are:

1. The bitterness caused by years of Israeli colonization and occupation of Palestine, and the struggle against it, have deeply entrenched the belief among sectors of Palestinian society that all means of resistance are legitimate. Due to historical and cultural contexts, Palestinian society did not practice peaceful resistance exclusively, but has been keen to use all internationally-recognized methods to resist occupation.
2. Strong disagreement between various Palestinian factions, including differences between mainstream organizations, about the principles of peaceful popular resistance. For example, the open adoption of peaceful popular resistance by Fatah, and by its President Mahmoud Abbas and its Central Committee, coupled with their rejection of all violent resistance methods, is strongly opposed by other Palestinian factions including the mainstream Hamas and Jihad organizations, who refuse to abandon the option of armed resistance.
3. The continuing schism between Fatah and Hamas, or between the West Bank and Gaza, threatens all efforts in this direction and obstructs the adoption of options relevant to resisting occupation. For example, Hamas tries to escalate violence in the West Bank with the goal of undermining the PA and creating a chaotic state, in order to free itself from any restrictions imposed on it by Palestinians' collective will.
4. If confrontations erupt; and if economic and security conditions deteriorate; Israel might succeed in pushing peaceful resistance into the playing field that it excels in: violence, where it can use its overwhelming force against Palestinians.

Is Peaceful Popular Resistance Implementable?

It is clear that peaceful popular resistance is not compatible with the current duties and capabilities of the PA. Therefore, changes must be made. For example, we propose the declaration of Palestine as a "state under occupation" in order to pave the way for planned peaceful popular resistance. This will include a state of civil disobedience, an economic boycott of Israel and the implementation of other important peaceful resistance measures.

For this option to be practicable, it is essential to define the goals of this resistance such that the field of action is restricted to the areas of Palestine occupied in the 1967 war. It is also essential to precisely define political goals without any ambiguities: the creation of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the implementation of United Nations' resolutions regarding the refugee problem.

Consideration must be given to the negative effects of the disastrous events in the region at large, especially in Syria and Iraq. From a regional and global perspective, the scale of these events is

dwarfing the oppression committed by Israel against Palestinians. Hence, embracing the option of peaceful resistance requires seeking Arab and international support. This support must materialize as assistance to Palestinians, and as a pressure factor on Israel. Once this occurs, the goal of achieving freedom becomes closer. Moreover, consideration must be given to the fact that regional and international political inclinations are focused on avoiding any steps that could change the status quo; and the desire to - as far as possible - absorb Israeli actions and provocations.

However, the real difficulty facing the enactment of peaceful resistance, or at least what will diminish its efficiency once implemented, is Palestinian divisions and the continued schism between the West Bank and Gaza. This division must end quickly, because no matter what resistance option is taken, the chances of its success will be nil if this issue is not resolved.

Comment by Mr. Qais Abd al-Karim:

There is a need for a new Palestinian strategy to enable the Palestinian national movement to overcome its blocked path to freedom. The strategy's central element must be focused on making the continuation of occupation so costly to Israel so as to force it to submit to a political solution. This is practicable, and could be achieved along three axes:

1. Escalate popular resistance into a wide-ranging uprising
2. Increase Israel's international isolation, and hold her accountable for her crimes and liable for her violations of international law
3. Reconsider the PA's relationship with the occupation, with the aim of ending all its obligations related to the protection of Israel's economic and security interests in the occupied areas, especially in light of Israel's violations of her reciprocal commitments

It is clear that any progress along these three directions requires the solidification of Palestinians' internal affairs, through mending current divisions, building national unity and undertaking the democratic renewal of PLO institutions with the participation of all sectors of Palestinian society. It is also essential to enhance the steadfastness of the Palestinians through the establishment of a social and political environment based on a fair distribution of the burdens of occupation.

Popular resistance must be the backbone of the required new strategy. Squabbling over the methods of popular resistance will invariably lead to the same chasm which has plagued Palestinian political thinking for many decades, and which is hampered by the tendency to sanctify specific forms of national struggle and transform them into ideological options. In this context, we have in the past experienced the sanctification of "armed struggle," and currently, we are experiencing the tendency to sanctify "peaceful struggle" and "non-violence." The use of all methods of resistance against the occupation is a legitimate right, as long as we abide by international laws. However, recognizing this "right" does not necessarily imply that it should be practiced under all conditions and circumstances.

Under current conditions of occupation, a large measure of unanimity exists amongst Palestinians that "popular resistance" is the most suitable and most efficient; hence, it should form the mainstay of the required new strategy. The importance of this form of "popular" resistance is that it strives to involve all people in confronting the occupation. In other words, the tactics of popular resistance are its main feature. While this implies avoiding the "militarization" of the struggle and preventing it from degenerating into a military confrontation where Israel enjoys an overwhelming advantage; it does not imply preventing the masses from using all means available to defend themselves against the violence perpetrated by the occupation.

Will these steps lead to the collapse of the PA, or force Israel to dissolve it unilaterally? We have witnessed the PA operating during the violence of the second Intifada, where not only did the PA end its security coordination with Israel, but it also entered a total military confrontation with it. The result was Israeli aggression which lasted for several years, during which Israel dismantled Palestinian civil and military institutions and destroyed the PA's infrastructure. However, all these engagements did not lead to the collapse of the PA; or to an Israeli decision to dissolve it - a decision we doubt Israel wants.

Hence, it is logical to assume that the PA could withstand the burden of confrontation with Israel called for by the proposed new strategy. It is necessary to harmonize the structure and

functionalities of the PA to the requirements and needs of the proposed strategy. This brings us once again to the priority of realigning Palestinian internal affairs in order to achieve unity and reconciliation, with a focus on establishing this process in line with the democratic renewal of Palestinian institutions. This goal cannot be achieved without democratic elections for all institutions of the PA and the PLO.

Comment by Mr. Jamal Zakout:

Rebuilding Palestinians' confidence in their political organizations and the PA, while adopting methods of struggle that give people hope in their ability to achieve their freedom, are central to selecting any popular plan of action. This includes directing struggle against the PA, which has recently evolved into an exploitative and tyrannical entity that serves the interests of certain factions and individuals. The realignment of its structure and function - as an institution created to organize the people and to enhance their ability to persist in their struggle for independence and freedom - must be conducted.

A central question and challenge is the possibility of widening popular participation in the struggle, and ways and methods to achieve this goal without slipping into the dangers of militarism and chaos.

Recent developments and the escalation of societal internal tensions, as well as the reluctance of official political centers (the PA and the PLO), various political parties and the opposition (traditional trade unions and civil society organizations) to tackle the issues causing these tensions, have led to a state of schism with numerous fault lines between Palestinian institutions and the rest of society. This raises a serious question about the ability of these traditional institutions to stay attuned to people's ambitions and hopes, and their ability to conduct the realignment needed for leading people to salvation and freedom. This poses another crucial question: are the various popular sectors up to the challenge of assuming the initiative in renewing or building a totally new national movement? This transformation appears complicated, but most indicators, including the recent teachers' strike and its consequences, point in this direction.

Practical Proposals:

Feasible proposals to enhance the status of the PLO and the PA; and help them recover their ability to lead peaceful popular resistance against occupation and the terrorism of colonial settlers; include:

- Allocating a significant part of the national budget (10-15%) to projects aimed at enhancing steadfastness, especially in areas directly threatened by colonialism and colonial settlers.
- Deploying national security forces in all Palestinian population centers, including Area C communities, to protect citizens from settler terrorism.
- Mandating a national civil service period of one year and enforcing university credit hours for voluntary service as a graduation requirement, with an emphasis on projects that aim to protect settler-threatened lands, especially in Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, and other areas subjected to settler terrorism.

- Unifying national institutions in Jerusalem, and allocating adequate budgets governed by transparent committees to enhance the steadfastness of Palestinians living in Jerusalem and its neighborhoods

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

#	Name	Organization
1	Mr. Qais Abd al-Karim	PLC
2	Dr. Sufian Abu Zaida	Birzeit University
3	Dr. Hanan Ashrawi	PLO
4	Mr. Sam Bahour	AIM
5	Mrs. Fadwa al-Barghouti	Fatah
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
14	Mr. Hani al-Masri	MASARAT
15	Mr. Saleh Rafat	PLO
16	Dr. Naser al-Shaer	An-Najah University
17	Dr. Khalil Shikaki	PSR
18	Dr. Azmi Shuaibi	AMAN
19	Mr. Jamal Zakout	PNC
20	Dr. Husam Zomlot	Fatah

Changing the Status Quo:

What directions for Palestinians?

September 2015-March 2016

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 non-violent popular resistance. 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 *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

The Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR)

P. O. Box 76, Ramallah, Palestine

Tel: +970-2-2964933

Fax:+970-2-2964934

pcpsr@pcpsr.org

www.pcpsr.org