



المركز الفلسطيني  
للبحوث  
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Palestinian Center for  
POLICY and  
SURVEY RESEARCH

# **Changing the Status Quo: What directions for Palestinians?**

*Final Report: Executive Summary*

**Khalil Shikaki**

May 2016





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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.*

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Dr. Shikaki is the author of PSR's 2014 report on "The Likelihood, Consequences and Policy Implications of PA Collapse or Dissolution: The "Day After" Final Report:" <http://pcpsr.org/sites/default/files/finalreport.pdf>

# 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 final report provides a political context and summarize the main findings of the research and the proposed strategy and its five components. The report examines the overall policy implications for the PA and the PLO. It is based on the five policy papers as well as the discussion and contents of the workshops, background research, elite interviews, and public opinion surveys. The discussion 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 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 group. It only represents the analysis and the assessment of its author based on the reports, the discussions and the interviews.

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.

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# Executive Summary:

Palestinians are frustrated with the current status quo in Israeli-Palestinian relations and the inability of their leadership to take bold action to change direction. They demand the adoption of a strategy of total political confrontation. These are the conclusions of a 6-month policy research on new directions for the Palestinians. The research findings, comprised of five short policy papers and a final report, was debated by a core expert group made up of twenty academics and former and current policy makers and activists. The papers were reviewed and discussed in closed workshops and a public conference during the period between October 2015 and March 2016.

The Palestinian frustration stems from a solid conclusion that Israel has no intention, or motivation, to end its occupation of the Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the belief that PA/PLO policy has so far been totally inadequate to meet the challenges arising from this conclusion, and the belief that despite their good intention, the international community is utterly unwilling to force Israel to act in accordance with international law. The frustration with the leadership of President Mahmud Abbas and the PLO Executive Committee stems from a deeply held belief that the PA president is reluctant to make a true departure from the current inadequate policies. The current PA flirtation with various international measures--the French Initiative, the Quartet anticipated report, and a possible UNSC resolution on settlements-- is not seen as a sign of policy departure; rather, it is seen as a sign that the PA is looking for a crutch to justify lack of a self-help initiative. The elite and the public demand such a departure, one that transforms PA policy from cooperation, coordination, and limited diplomatic skirmishes with Israel to a strategy of total political confrontation. The proposed strategy entails not only ending various facets of cooperation and security coordination with Israel, but also organizing and leading a popular non-violent resistance and fully embracing a local boycott and an international BDS campaign. Demands are also made to change Palestinian negotiating position with Israel from one that places a sole focus on self-determination and independence to one that focuses *also* on demand for internationally-enshrined civil and human rights, regardless of the end game, two states or one state. Only in the context of such a fundamental policy departure by the PA and the PLO can this strategy see a place for unconditional resumption of negotiations, in bilateral or multilateral forms. Advocates of the new strategy believe that the risks involved in such a departure are enormous. To reduce the risks, they emphasize the need for a graduated step by step process, one that begins with small measures in all aspects and components of the new direction and tailor policy to cope with challenges as they emerge, including those that might present a serious threat of PA collapse.

The Palestinian-Israeli peace process that started with the Oslo Agreement in 1993 witnessed a major transformation in 2000 in the aftermath of the collapse of the Camp David negotiations and the eruption of the second intifada. In the West Bank, the past decade has been characterized mostly by relative calm in Palestinian-Israeli relations as a new Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, sought to restore law and order, disarm armed factions, reestablish civil and security coordination with the Israeli side, and return to peace negotiations. But the post intifada efforts to revive negotiations, most notably the Annapolis process during 2007-08 and the Kerry mission during 2013-14, failed to deliver an agreement. Indeed, by 2013, gaps in the negotiating positions of the two sides, which gradually narrowed between 2000 and 2008, widened considerably leading to the termination of Kerry's efforts in early 2014.

Failure and absence of bilateral negotiations, an Israeli turn to right wing politics and the expansion of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, three major eruptions

of war between Israel and Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and continued Palestinian internal split and loss of electoral legitimacy have contributed to the consolidation of occupation and a gradual disillusionment and radicalization among Palestinians. They have also complicated Palestinian search for a clear and unified strategy for ending Israeli occupation and building a viable Palestinian state.

Today, question marks are raised regarding (1) the viability of bi-lateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, and (2) the feasibility of the two-state solution. In the midst of the gloom, and as a result of recurring failures in negotiation, the Palestinian drive to internationalize their conflict resolution with Israel has gained significant momentum, particularly since 2014. Indeed, internationalization of the conflict has become the cornerstone and the flagship of Palestinian strategy to end occupation and gain independence. For its part, civil society has been engaged for years in an effort to panelize Israel for its continued occupation and violation of international law through calls for local and international boycott, disinvestment, and sanctions (BDS). Moreover, since October 2015, Palestinian youths have taken to the street to confront Israeli soldiers at checkpoints and dozens of youths carried out stabbing attacks that has led to rising Palestinian and Israeli casualties.

Most Palestinians believe that military occupation, with its settlement expansion, is sustainable only because Israel's cost-benefit calculation favor's continuation of the status quo. They therefore conclude that Palestinians must resort to all available means to impose costs on Israel thereby changing its calculus. Since the Palestinian leadership under President Mahmud Abbas has shown that it is determined to prevent any eruption of violence-- viewing armed attacks on Israelis as detrimental to Palestinian interests with potential catastrophic consequences for the well-being of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories-- other alternative directions have come under review.

There are two options that are currently viewed by the Palestinian leadership and public as unacceptable: maintaining the status quo and resuming negotiations without a freeze on settlement construction or clear and acceptable terms of reference. On the other hand, internationalization of the conflict is favored by the PA leadership as it imposes diplomatic costs on continued occupation by reliance on international law and UN institutions. But many Palestinians believe that reliance on international diplomacy alone is likely to prove ineffective, as it did in many previous occasions, due to US use of its veto power and the failure of the international community to consider the imposition of sanctions on Israel. Those skeptics call for additional measures that go well beyond diplomatic skirmishes with Israel, measures that entail a much wider political escalation in Palestinian-Israeli relations. In this regard, five additional approaches, or directions, have been the subject of Palestinian public and elite discourse. They can all be viewed as various facets of a strategy of political confrontation, one that takes the PA away from its current civil and security cooperation and coordination with Israel and plunge it into a large scale political confrontation entailing elements from all five approaches. Each proposed approach capitalizes on one or more resource or asset they believe the Palestinians have: public rejection of the status quo and motivation to challenge it at a heavy cost, willingness to provide Israel with a market for goods and services, willingness to cooperate with Israel to prevent violence and ensure quite, demography, international support/legitimacy, and ownership of the only true key to Israel's legitimacy in the Arab and Muslim Worlds.

The first approach calls upon the PA and civil society to design and adopt a clearly outlined and thought-out popular non-violent campaign involving large scale popular demonstrations that seek to express opposition to occupation, dismantle army-erected checkpoints in the West Bank, and block main roads and facilities used by Israeli settlers and army. A second approach calls for a systemic boycott campaign, at the local and international, government and popular levels that

targets settlements in its first stage but ultimately escalates into a full scale boycott of the state of Israel. This approach seeks full coordination and harmonization with the international BDS movement. A third approach calls for a gradual termination of security coordination with the Israeli army thus withholding Palestinian cooperation in preventing violence and thereby forcing the Israelis to invest greater resources in achieving that goal. Furthermore, without security coordination, in which the Palestinian security services facilitate Israeli military incursions into the areas of the West Bank designated by the Oslo agreement as “A,” i.e., under full Palestinian civil and security control, such incursions might become costly. Various versions of these approaches, with varying degrees and scopes, have been tried in the past.

A fourth approach calls for a new and more innovative approach, one in which the Palestinians embrace a rights-based approach, one that wages a campaign that seeks to insure full individual rights for Palestinians. While this might be labeled a “one-state” approach, it in fact does not advocate a clear end-game and does not call for changing Palestinian negotiating position from a two-state to a one-state orientation. It also does not call for the dissolution of the PA. This new approach seeks to force Israel and the Israeli public to contemplate more seriously the consequences of continued occupation and subjugation of the Palestinians. In this view, the Israelis, who constantly emphasize the Jewish character of their state, would soon find it in their best interest to negotiate a two-state solution rather than give the Palestinians equal rights or impose an apartheid regime on the Palestinian population.

A final possible direction argues in favor of a return to direct bi-lateral negotiations while simultaneously pursuing the internationalization, popular resistance, boycott, rights-based, and other approaches. In this context, a Palestinian return to the negotiating table would be more effective this time because the simultaneous adoption of these other approaches can serve to increase the costs of continued Israeli occupation. To consolidate this message, the negotiation approach also entails an outreach plan to explain Palestinian positions directly to the Israeli public.

Public support for these five approaches varies. Support is high for popular resistance, boycott, and termination of security coordination. Nonetheless, by end of 2015 and early 2016, armed resistance emerged in the eyes of the public as the most effective means of achieving national rights. Moreover, a large majority of the public believes the PA is not serious about taking any major confrontational measure against Israel. A majority of the public rejects the idea of abandoning the two-state solution and embracing equal political rights for Jews and Palestinians, as presumed in the one-state solution, and a similar majority remains opposed to the idea of unconditional return to the negotiating table. More importantly, a clear majority views negotiations with the Netanyahu government as useless. In light of this prevailing perception, most Palestinians view the French proposal for an international conference on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in summer 2016 as another futile effort destined to fail. While most Palestinians are in favor of an international framework to resolve the conflict, a conference lacking the resolve to impose sanctions on those who violate international law is seen by most of the elite as a diversion preempting a much needed Palestinian initiative to embark on a confrontational strategy against Israel.

Three domestic conditions are viewed by the elite as posing serious impediments to the development of a confrontational strategy. The most serious is the belief that the PA president is not seriously contemplating such a dramatic departure from current PA practices, that he is too reluctant to rock the boat or take bold steps, and that his concerns about succession distract his attention. Fatah-Hamas conflict and the continuation of the West Bank-Gaza Strip split is seen as another impediment discouraging Fatah and Abbas from taking potentially destabilizing steps that might create a vacuum for Hamas to fill. Finally, the PA’s lack of electoral legitimacy is

seen as destructive to the ability of the president, Fatah and all other factions to mobilize and organize Palestinian masses against occupation.

But advocates of the various directions among the Palestinian elite acknowledge also that potential risks and pitfalls related to the various approaches might also make it difficult for the PA and civil society to embark on the road of political confrontation with Israel. For example, a popular peaceful campaign can easily, as in the past, turn violent and out of control and could soon turn into a third intifada. Concern has also been voiced by some elite members and those in the business community about the likely impact of the boycott on the Palestinians. Given Palestinian total dependence on Israeli economic and administrative measures, a comprehensive boycott campaign might become more costly for the Palestinians than the Israelis. Some, particularly within the PA security elite worry that an end to security coordination might dramatically increase the chances of Palestinian-Israelis armed clashes during incursions into “A” areas of the Palestinian territories and might make it extremely difficult for Palestinians to deliver security and enforce law and order in “B” and “C” areas of these territories.

One of the most significant aspects of Palestinian discourse on the costs and benefits of the various directions revolves around the concerns that an abrupt or sharp departure from the status quo might threaten the survival and viability of the PA. For example, some argue that the Palestinian leadership is unlikely to take serious steps, such as the termination of security coordination or suspension of other Oslo obligations, as long as it believes that such measures might bring about PA collapse. Questions are also raised about the willingness of the Palestinian public to participate in any massive popular resistance campaign at a time when there is a large barrier of distrust and lack of credibility between the public and the PA. On the other hand, it is feared that the PA, with its twin concerns about loss of control and PA collapse, might discourage such popular resistance because it does not trust the public’s commitment to non-violence and the tremendous discipline it requires.

In light of the French efforts to hold an international conference on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, there is concern among the public and the elite about the efficacy of the whole internationalization efforts and those efforts that seek a return to negotiations at a time when the international community and the Middle East region are preoccupied with other more pressing issues. An overwhelming majority of the public believes that the Arab World has abandoned the Palestinians and that Palestine is no longer its principal cause. Moreover, it is believed that the international community and the major international players, due to the historical legacy and/or domestic considerations, cannot or will not impose sanctions on Israel or press it to respect its obligations under international law and that the US will continue to use its veto power to shield it from international censure.

The choices for the PA leadership are therefore not easy. To reduce the risks involved in a confrontational strategy, the debate on new directions highlighted the advantages of gradualism, starting with small steps and tailoring each confrontational approach into small measures that can be more easily implemented. Gradualism makes it easier for the PA and the Palestinian public to cope with the likely costs and risks and learn to adjust expectations along the lines of a prolonged conflict. It can also help restore some of the currently absent public confidence in the PA and its leadership. By demonstrating resolve, the PA leadership might regain credibility at home and abroad, even among the Israelis. Gradualism might also provide space for the international community to step in and show greater resolve and determination to end the conflict.



## What Directions? – list of policy papers, authors and commentators

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

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