

A Case for the Palestinian Government

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Responding to successive decisions made by the US, the European Union and various European and non-European countries to boycott the Palestinian Authority and deprive it of urgently needed funds, Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh described these dictates as both “hasty” and “unjust”.

Hasty for the obvious reason that the new Palestinian government has just been sworn in and is yet to formulate any workable political program, according to which it should be judged. In fact, the democratically elected government has made several overtures and has provided ample evidence that it is willing to compromise on what is perceived as an extremist political stance. The Prime Minister, his foreign minister, Dr. Mahmoud al-Zahhar and various officials made it uncompromisingly clear that they are willing to live in peace “side by side” with their neighbors.

But it appears as if the seemingly contagious boycott campaigns (which confirms beyond a shadow of a doubt that neither the US, the EU and less significantly Canada are truly interested in genuine Middle East democracies, nor is even-handedness on their foreign policy agendas) were meant to impede the new government’s attempt to alter its image through a decided political program that might create an embarrassing political milieu for Israel.

Indeed, these boycotts (which included less distinctly hostile countries such as Norway) were also unjust, not only because the current Palestinian government was elected through, according to various European observers, fairly contested and transparent democratic elections. They were unjust because the demands that accompanied them are unfair.

So, what’s so unfair about forcing the Palestinian government to recognize Israel’s right to exist?

Those truly familiar with the disparity of power between Israel – a formidable nuclear power – and Palestinians with their dysfunctional police apparatus must find the notion tragically funny. It gets even more amusing when one understands that those expected to recognize Israel’s “right to exist” are the decedents and immediate decedents of those who have been utterly victimized by Israel’s policies, and who continue to endure on a daily basis the pain and hurt of Israel’s military occupation.

But is it not unjust to expect the Palestinian government to recognize Israel who has intentionally left its borders undefined with the hopes of robbing Palestinians of the leftovers of the original size of their homeland – 22 percent of the total size of Palestine?

Maybe the EU should hold on for a few months before making such demands, enough time

to allow Israel to unilaterally determine how much it wishes to keep and how much it wishes to spare of the Occupied West Bank, so that Palestinians know what they are recognizing exactly.

Is it not unfair to demand an occupied nation to recognize the same entity that has illegally expropriated its future capital – East Jerusalem – to become part of its own “greater” capital, in defiance of international law? Wouldn’t the PA be recognizing Israel’s sovereignty over what Israel conceives as part of “proper Israel” which includes much of the West Bank and all of Jerusalem?

What’s even more sanctimonious is demanding that the Palestinian government disown violence. Is this some sort of crude joke that the West insists on playing on Palestinians, keeping in mind that Hamas has religiously adhered to a self-declared one-sided ceasefire with Israel for over a year?

Let’s juggle some hypotheses. If the international community thinks that it is imperative that Palestinians abandon violence and terrorist ways of resistance, is it prepared to pressure Israel, through economic boycotts, denial of aid and travel restrictions on its officials to end all forms of collective and individual violence inflicted on Palestinians? More, if such pressure fails, is it prepared to provide Palestinians with a tangible form of protection against wanton Israeli violence, such as the most recent onslaught in Gaza that left 15 people dead and many more wounded?

How about the third demand that the new Palestinian government must commit to peace?

Detached from reality, the demands look and feel both fair and legitimate. But is it not strange that the EU and the US are too busy congratulating the victorious Kadima party in Israel – whose victory was based on a unilateral platform that further espouses the notion that Israel will do what it sees fit, including the illegal annexation of large swathes of the occupied West Bank – while at the same time it punishes the Palestinians for allegedly disowning past commitments to peace, commitments which Israel has openly refused to acknowledge?

Such an approach reeks with hypocrisy.

I wish I could make a similar declaration to that made by the courageous Jewish American lawyer, Stanley Cohen in a recent BBC debate, where he said: “Palestinians don’t need your money.”

True, Palestinians are too dignified to succumb to such debasing pressure, but the reality is that the Israeli occupation and the past corruption of the former Palestinian government has left them broke and totally reliant on foreign assistance. Their economy was intentionally kept with no prospects of self-reliance precisely for a moment like this where such unwarranted pressure is needed.

Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are on the brink of a humanitarian disaster, being punished for making a democratic choice that has been deemed unacceptable from an Israeli point of view and from its benefactors elsewhere.

Palestinians should recognize Israel, quit violence and commit to peace, but only when such demands are equally required of Israel. Until then, they are simply unmerited.

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