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THE PALESTINIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT: WHAT WENT WRONG?

Ahmad Samih Khalidi

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The Palestinian National Movement: What Went Wrong?

Ahmad Samih Khalidi

This is a particularly inauspicious moment in contemporary Palestinian history. Indeed, while there have only been rare moments of promise since the struggle over the land of Palestine began some 100 years ago, the Palestinian people now seem to be living some of the worst of times—certainly since the Nakba of 1948.

What we have today is a national movement lacerated by multiple horizontal and vertical divisions. The backbone of this movement, as historically represented by Fateh, has all but dissolved into minor competing factions and personalities cutting across generation, location and politico-ideological inclination. The emergent Islamist forces, while still relatively coherent, are themselves beginning to witness splits between their Gazan and Damascus-based leaderships. Gaza is totally cutoff from the West Bank and Arab Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been severed from its West Bank hinterland. The West Bank itself has been reduced to local disconnected redoubts; even the post-Oslo fictions of Areas A, B and C have lost their meaning.

The Occupied Territories as a whole are a world away from the Palestinian diaspora, both far and near, and the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] has become an empty shell, blithely representing a power-sharing formula that has little to do with the new political realities on the ground. The PA [Palestinian Authority] is now a virtual government. It is effectively propped up by the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] and is pumped up by an erratic flow of external aid whose sole purpose seems to be to ensure that it does not collapse altogether. Hamas and the PA cannot even talk to each other, let alone find a workable and sustainable formula for government and, harder still, a common political program for either war or peace.

The PA/PLO leaderships' legitimacy and mandate is questioned both inside and outside Palestine. Its ability to negotiate successfully, sign an honorable deal, ratify it, implement it and sustain it is in very serious doubt. Not a few well-informed observers, including senior Fateh leaders, expect its eventual demise at the hands of Hamas or an implosion under the combined weight of its own systemic weakness and its constant failure to deliver politically, economically or in terms of basic security against Israel.

The crisis of leadership is serious and extensive. The few survivors from old national leadership that emerged out of the PLO in the sixties are approaching their biological limits, and the newer local-based leaders have been decimated by Israeli attacks, assassinations and detentions. There seem to be no new emergent figures that have the authority, determination or natural charisma to lead. Beyond the current leadership and its lingering national credentials, the reservoirs for replenishing the Palestinian political class appear to be perilously dry.

In short, the landscape is very bleak indeed.

How did we get here? How did the once vibrant—if always fractious—Palestinian national movement arrive at such a historical low?

There is no doubt that the cumulative effects of 41 years of Israeli occupation and colonization have taken a terrible toll. Since 1967, up to 80,000 Palestinians may have been killed and wounded in the Occupied Territories in the two *intifadas* alone and in scores of lesser confrontations that preceded them. Some 700,000 acts of imprisonment and detention have been recorded (a remarkable figure on a current population base of less than 4 million), let alone the relentless process of Israeli colonization and creeping annexation that has left around 500,000 settlers implanted on Palestinian soil in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The reoccupation of the West Bank in 2002 and the 750 km Separation Wall have reduced Palestinian governance to a cluster of disconnected atolls.

The Israelis' responsibility for the Palestinian predicament is unquestionable. But the current Palestinian woes are not just about Israeli occupation. The bitter truth is that the Palestinian national movement has proven to be both brittle and inconsistent. This is not to belittle the people's enormous sacrifices, from the first stirrings in the 1920s, to the Great Revolt of 1936-39, to the struggle against the Yishuv and the British in the 1940s, to the 'revolution' that put us, as people and a cause, back on the map after 1967. Tens of thousands of Palestinian fighters and civilians have lost their lives in the villages and *wadis* of Palestine, the barren hills of Jordan and the refugee camps of Lebanon.

Nonetheless, today's decline must give us pause for thought. The PLO/PA has failed almost every test from negotiations, to governance, to representation, to its proclaimed goal of liberation and freedom. Some 20 years on, the 1988 national program, which set the consensual goals of an independent state within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital and the Right of Return for the 1948 refugees, is still a pipe dream and is seemingly no closer to realization today as was then.

This precipitous decline can be put down to a number of factors for which the Palestinians themselves must share the blame.

The Ebb of the National Movement

The historical roots of Palestinian national identity and consciousness need not be debated here. Suffice to say that the pulverization and dispersal of Palestinian society after the 1948 Nakba delivered a terrible blow to the national movement as it developed during the struggle against Zionism and the British Mandate since the early years of the last century.

For the first few decades after the Nakba, the Palestinians were a people in national concussion; the Palestinian sense of 'separateness' collapsed into that of 'Arab' refugee status or melded into its broader Arab environment; the West Bankers under Jordan, the Gazans under Egypt, the diaspora trapped by the precariousness of a stateless existence; and later swept up by the broader pan-Arab mood of the day.

The activists and intellectuals turned to the Arab-nationalist movement, [late Egyptian President Gamal Abdel] Nasser, the Baath Party, the various Communist parties and pan-Levantine movements such as the PPS [Parti Pou-

laire Syrien/Syrian Social Nationalist Party]. It was Fateh that led the revolt against this slide towards national dissolution. It was Fateh, supplemented later by the more ideological movements of the radical left, that provided the vehicle for a new national awakening and that brought the Palestinians back to center stage by the late 1960s as the prime actors in defense of their own cause.

What Fateh and the other post-67 movements helped to forge was more than a national *movement*; it was a renewed sense of *political identity*. This transformed the nascent armed organizations that sprung up in the diaspora into a bridge that spanned the scattered clumps in exile and vaulted into the Occupied Territories. In a strict sense, Fateh served to create a *trans-national* movement; one that brought together—amongst others—the middle class in Kuwait, the refugee camps in Jordan and the activists in the Gaza and the West Bank.

But today, this *national* (or trans-national) movement as such has started to ebb away. This is partly the consequence of the Islamist challenge to the nationalist mainstream, but is also a product of other processes; Gaza, always in tenuous association with the West Bank, has begun to take shape as a separate political, economic and ideological sphere. If sustained, a combination of the current siege, Hamas rule and Egypt's gravitational pull will aggravate the Gazan drift away from the Jerusalem/West Bank hinterland and further exacerbate the political and psychological distance that now separates almost a third of the Palestinians from their brethren.

On the West Bank itself, Israeli security measures and the absence of any viable unifying political force or authority have rendered each of the major towns and regions a political island unto itself. And with this has come a resurgence of family, tribal and local identities and loyalties. Today's Ramallah leader will scarcely get a glance from the Hebronites and vice versa. The Nabulsi politician will struggle hard to gain recognition in Bethlehem, and the isolated Jeruslamites seem to have dropped their traditional claims to national leadership altogether. As the PA's presence on the West Bank has waned, Amman's gravitational pull has begun to exert itself again.

Palestinian politics have always been marked by the impact of familial and clannish bonds, regionalisms and strong local affiliations. It is no coincidence that it was only the paradoxical realities of post-48 dispersal that allowed Fateh and the PLO to emerge in the diaspora, where previous localisms and regionalisms were largely negated and superseded by the bonds of common suffering and exile.

But in the current context, the territorial discontinuities, continuing internecine conflicts, aggravating internal divisions, spreading fragmentation and reawakened localisms threaten to accelerate the slide away from a truly *national* identity and back to the more fundamental and naturally familiar loyalties of the past.

The main feature of the current Palestinian political scene is a pervasive sense of public disillusionment with all parties alike. Few believe in the promise of an endless negotiating process in the face of a reality that only seems to consolidate the occupation rather than the opposite. The national impulse towards statehood has turned into a deep skepticism, not only about whether this is possible at all, but whether the much promised state will deliver on the most basic of Palestinian aspirations, even if it were to come about. The entire national enterprise has lost its luster and power of attraction.

The import of this is not hard to gauge. Without a national sense and a strong national identity, national goals become less relevant; local and personal interests take pride of place, national institutions lose their meaning and their defense becomes less of an imperative.

The ebb of the national movement reveals the fundamental fractures of Palestinian society that have been exacerbated and exploited by the occupation but are nonetheless deeply embedded within this same society. It could, of course, be argued that these fractures are a product of the historical devastation wrought by the cumulative impact of the Zionist assault and the Nakba itself; in other words, that the contemporary Palestinians never had a chance to develop a normal and sustainable polity outside the context of the unequal struggle against their national

antagonists.

But it is also hard to deny that these fractures signal a deeper malaise; one that has been replicated throughout the history of our struggle ever since the 1930s and 40s and that suggests that our national consciousness has had severe problems in escaping the political and social realities from which it is meant to have sprung. In the broadest possible sense, this may be posed as the most fundamental challenge facing the Palestinians today.

The Leadership Crisis

Whatever the arguments for or against his style and *modus operandi*, regardless of his failures or successes and despite chronic criticisms of his policies and practices from both within Fateh itself and the broader Palestinian political spectrum, the fact remains that [late Palestinian President] Yasser Arafat was for some three decades the incontestable leader of the national movement in all its branches.

His authenticity emerged from a slow and laborious process of identity-building led and largely crafted by Arafat himself. The very notion of the Palestinians as a separate political entity capable of independent political action was nurtured and sustained by his particular energy and vision. Fateh, the grand national umbrella, was not his creation alone, but without his drive and dedication, it was as likely to have withered on the vine, as many of the myriad factions and grouplets that began to emerge from under the rubble of the Nakba in the late fifties and early sixties.

His style was and remained intensely personal, his relations almost one-to-one with every member of his nation-tribe. He kept Fateh—mostly—together, and with it, the broad dreams and aspirations of his entire people bound together by a common sense of struggle and fired by the powerful if nebulous notions of ‘justice’ and ‘return.’

While initially claiming to represent a credible measure of continuity with the Arafatist past, today’s PA/PLO leaders have only a precarious hold on the accumulated legitimacy and authenticity acquired and held by Arafat until his death.

Today’s PA/PLO leadership lives in a disconnected isolated bubble. Its *effective* remit is limited to the few islands of its rule on the West Bank. Since the dissolution of the NUG [National Unity Government] in June 2007, it rules by fiat and decree in flat contradiction to its claims of a democratic mandate.

Its leaders, with few exceptions, have little direct contact with the people of the territories and have shown no enthusiasm for any meaningful engagement with their supposed popular base. Its political interaction with the diaspora is even more limited, and its image outside is almost entirely negative. The PLO’s old decision-making mechanisms are both archaic and non-representative of the existing political realities and are now largely used as means of bypassing the post-June 2007 deadlock over government and authority.

The crisis of leadership extends beyond the Occupied Territories. The diaspora as well suffers from a leadership vacuum, and its voice is all but unheard on the overall Palestinian scene. Perhaps, one indicator of the extent of the national movement’s decline is the fact that the only ‘outside’ voice of any authority is that of [Hamas leaders] Khalid Mish’al from Damascus, notwithstanding the fact that Hamas itself and the Islamists as a whole are only a relatively minor force within Palestinian society and cannot credibly claim to speak on behalf of the Palestinian collective—whether outside or inside the Occupied Territories.

Whether this leadership vacuum is open to remedy in the short-to-medium term is questionable. A dramatic and serious breakthrough in the negotiations with Israel that is seen to meet Palestinian aspirations could *conceivably* revive the standing of the PA’s existing leaders, although this prospect is far from certain.

Barring such a development, the process by which a new leadership—or leadership class—may emerge is not one

that can be pre-determined by design, although certain measures may facilitate it. (For example, the release of the 10,000 or so prisoners in Israeli jails—or some of their leading symbols—could revitalize the national movement in the Occupied Territories and provide it with a new impetus.)

Within the context of a continuing struggle for national liberation, *genuine* Palestinian ‘leadership’ is not a function of electoral politics or the mathematics and dubious science of polling. Elections, important as they are, can only provide an inadequate measure of the fluctuating public mood given the absence of a ‘normal’ state and the continuing vagaries of the occupation.

There is compound effect between leadership crisis and national decline; the one clearly feeds and sustains the other. But be that as it may and with all the uncertainties that it may carry, the fact remains that for the first time since the post-Nakba awakening, there is no one leader (or leadership) who can currently claim a *genuine* moral mandate to speak on behalf of the people *as a whole*.

The Erosion of the PA’s Standing

In a situation where the Israeli occupation has been totally reconfigured at Palestinian expense since the reoccupation of the West Bank in 2002, the PA has come to be seen more and more as a proxy for Israel rather than a transitional instrument for ending the occupation.

Rather than defending Palestinian soil, the PA’s security forces are now being strengthened under U.S. supervision and with active Israeli support as means of ensuring *Israel’s* security—a function that differs little in essence from that of the infamous Lahd forces that sought to police South Lebanon on Israel’s behalf until May 2000.

This perception of the PA’s proxy role is enhanced by the fact that the very political survival of the PA now seems to be dependent on the IDF’s presence on the West Bank. In other words, the PA’s putative role as a transitional vehicle towards an independent state has now seemingly been transformed into a cause for perpetuating the occupation.

This is surely not the intended goal of the PA’s leadership. But it is the consequence of its policies and its relations with Israel. As it stands, the PA’s security forces may be the only military force in the world that is being specifically armed and trained to protect its enemies.

The appeal to support institution-building and enforce law and order in an increasingly lawless society is a powerful one. The deterioration in the sense of personal security as a result of the proliferation of armed street gangs claiming ‘resistance’ has created a strong demand for the establishment of the rule of law. But the PA and its security forces’ main mission cannot be redirected towards serving the enemy, particularly since the very same Israeli forces that are helping to arm the PA are killing Palestinians daily in the alleyways of Nablus and on the streets of Gaza. The matter is compounded by the overt complicity between the PA and Israel in confronting those who resist Israeli actions.

There is a need for a genuine debate on the role and priorities of the PA and in particular its view of national security ([Senior Associate Member at St. Antony’s College, Oxford University] Hussein Agha and I have tried to deal with this issue at some length in our *Framework for a Palestinian National Security Doctrine*).

As long as its primary function is—or is seen to be—in the service of Israel, the public’s readiness to sacrifice on the PA’s behalf is likely to be minimal. This is not a matter of reeducating Palestinian youth or vetting the available ranks of the unemployed to find those with the right resistance-free credentials. There are few conceivable circumstances in which the forces of ‘law and order’ can tackle the resistance with public support, unless there is a radical change in both the situation on the ground and the political horizon. To think otherwise is to misconstrue the very nature of the Palestinian struggle.

A Flawed Approach

The PA's basic approach is grounded in the assumption that a final status agreement with Israel is possible based on a 'reasonable' Palestinian position on the core issues, one that will be backed by the international community, 'international legality' and the U.S. in particular. The further underlying assumption is that the balance of power can be redressed through negotiations alone. But neither of these assumptions is self-evident or necessarily true.

'International legality' has rarely served the Palestinian interest. Indeed, the inequities of the Balfour Declaration and its incorporation into the British Mandate were as much a part of 'international legality' as is the current Palestinian claim to independence and self-determination. The 1947 Partition Plan expressed the will of the international community, and this was hardly to the Palestinians' advantage.

None of this is to argue for an outright confrontation with the international community or its institutions, of course. But there is little doubt that the determinant factors have less to do with the alleged impartiality and justice of international law than with the raw realities on the ground.

The fact that half a million Israeli settlers have been continuously implanted beyond the 1949 armistice line over a period of four decades against the express wishes of the international community and in contravention of its norms rules (the Geneva Conventions amongst others) bears concrete witness to the manner by which such 'legalities' have been bent and twisted to suit the balance of power.

Add to this the devastating impact of a congenital U.S. bias and tolerance towards Israel—last but not least manifest in the June 2004 [U.S. President George W.] Bush letter of assurances to former Prime Minister [Ariel] Sharon giving Washington's approval to the annexation of Palestinian land and imperiously doing away with the refugees Right of Return, thus effectively pre-empting the outcome of the very negotiations that the U.S. claims to be facilitating.

The point here is not to bemoan U.S. transgressions against Palestinian rights. The point is that the PA's current approach is predicated on the assumption that the U.S. is, and can be, if not an outright friend of the Palestinians than an even-handed and properly distanced broker of an acceptable settlement.

This unrealistic and unrealizable vision of Washington's role has thrust the PA into the arms of a broader regional aspect of U.S. policy that has pitted it against a significant sector of its own people (and not just the Islamists) who are unwilling to tow the U.S. line in the area.

The fact that three senior U.S. generals are currently at work to define the structure, doctrine and mission of the PA's security forces is of scant comfort to those who are aware of Washington's own propensity to misadventure and its consistent capacity to misread the Palestinian and regional public mood. The implication of this effort is that lessons of the PA's defeat in Gaza in 2007 have not been learnt, and that the attempt to reconfigure the shape of Palestinian politics—even at the expense of instigating civil strife—has not been abandoned.

The PA must deal with the U.S. as it is. There is no escaping Washington's long shadow over the conflict with Israel and the region as a whole. But the PA must know that Washington's bias—admittedly exaggerated by the Bush administration—is a fixture of U.S. policy and cannot be redressed by Palestinian subservience to American interests. The Palestinians have no conceivable interest in joining Washington's current or future axis or campaign against any party, domestic or elsewhere in the region.

The PA's current dealings with Israel leave an equally bitter taste. It makes no sense to insist on preconditions for talking to Hamas, while waiving them when negotiating with Israel. It ill behoves the Palestinian leadership to be seen exchanging pleasantries with Israeli leaders while launching a vitriolic campaign against its domestic opponents—regardless of their misdeeds.

It makes no sense for Israel to be pursuing the ‘resistance’ at night while the PA deals with it during the day. The PA cannot be expected to take up arms against Israel. But no people have won their independence with a prior commitment to act in the service of their occupiers’ safety and welfare. In seeking to satisfy Israeli concerns, the Palestinians must find a way to confront Israeli excesses by word or action beyond the routine verbal condemnations of violence from all sides.

The PA’s misguided approach is not just a matter of style. It goes to the core of its strategic approach. The apparent reliance on American good faith, on the power of the president’s word (e.g. on the ‘promise’ to bring about a two-state solution by the end of 2008), the readiness to accede to Israel’s security demands all raise a question as to where the fine line between political naiveté ends and where gross miscalculation begins.

It must be said that the general impression is that the PA has lost its political bearings and has decided to cast itself into the U.S.-Israeli lap with no other option or recourse. The further impression is that it has set no boundaries to what it may or may not accept in the talks with Israel, and that compromise and concession are part of its constitutional remit, as long as the outcome serves to maintain its precarious existence. (This is not helped by public statements from leading PA spokespersons talking of an eventual Palestinian state ‘with diminished sovereignty.’)

This may be a crass and unwarranted picture of the PA’s real stance, but it is undoubtedly part of its eroding and increasingly less credible public image.

The net result of all this appears overwhelmingly negative. And while there may be some on the Israeli side who draw comfort from dissolution, weakness and disorientation on the Palestinian side, the fact is that the Israelis—like the Palestinians—need an authentic capable and effective Palestinian address, as well as a workable and sustainable solution.

A Punitive Construct

So where do we go from here?

The Palestinian state has now become the universal standard for all solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The international community applauds the concept. President Bush proudly proclaims it as his ‘vision.’ The Israelis have come to it belatedly, after years of steadfast refusal and rejection.

Today, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert not only supports the idea but proclaims it as an *existential* Israeli interest: without it, Israel is fated to disappear under dire assault from the ever-expanding Arab population in both Israel and the Occupied Territories.

The fact is that the Palestinian state, as now envisaged by Israel and its friends, is not intended to meet the Palestinians’ aspirations after six decades of exile and four decades of occupation. Rather it is meant to resolve Israel’s *own* dilemma as it struggles to disentangle itself from areas of Arab population density after years of unrestrained and illegal population settlement in the areas occupied in 1967. What was once a Palestinian national goal has become an essential means of salvation for their national enemy.

But statehood, as such, is a relatively recent addition to Palestinian aspirations. Whereas ‘independence’ from British rule animated the Palestinian national movement in the 1930s and 40s, the main Palestinian impetus after the disaster of 1948 was that of ‘return;’ it was more about reversing the loss of Arab land and patrimony rather than the fulfillment of classical post-colonial self-determination via statehood.

Statehood and state-building had no real place in this scheme. Indeed, the first tentative proposals to establish a state on *part* of Palestine (e.g. the West Bank) were rejected as defeatist and a betrayal of the national cause. Fateh and

subsequently the PLO that it took over in 1969 were seeking to undo the post-48 status quo but with no real vision of what would replace the 'Zionist entity' after it was defeated.

This was certainly not an exercise in institution building, land acquisition and state-building by stealth as in the case of the Zionist movement before 1948. It was only after the 1973 war that Fateh's leaders turned to the notion of a state on part of Palestine. This was largely the result of a realistic reading of the balance of power and a recognition of the limits of what force, whether on the part of the Arab states or Palestinian irregulars was likely to achieve.

Without Arafat's conviction and tireless efforts, the two-state solution, as we know it today, would have never become entrenched in the language of Palestinian rights and international diplomacy. But the 'generous offer' it implies has been dissipated by Israeli obduracy, by settlement realities on the ground, by U.S. mismanagement of the peace process and by the loss of the Palestinians' historic leadership and the current deep divisions among the Palestinians themselves.

Today, the Palestinian state is largely a punitive construct devised by the Palestinians' worst historical enemies: Israel, and its implacable ally, the U.S. The intention behind the state today is to limit and constrain Palestinian aspirations territorially, to force them to give up on their moral rights, to renege on their history and submit to Israel diktats on fundamental issues of sovereignty.

It is very unclear how an independent state can be built on the spears of the very force that is occupying it or how viable state institutions can be constructed while the occupation continues to determine every aspect of Palestinian life.

The notion of a state was an offshoot of the Palestinian struggle and not its nodal point. Now is less attractive than ever as Ehud Olmert and [Israeli Foreign Minister] Tzipi Livni demand of us that we must give up our history by recognizing Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people and President Bush decides for us what our borders and rights must be.

There is growing feeling that the possibility of a two-state solution is thus slipping away and may well have even gone beyond the point of retrieval. As things stand, this appears to be a great deal more accurate than the blithe assumption that a workable final status agreement can be reached over the next six months or year, or the blind belief that its eventual emergence is a historical inevitability.

The two-state solution is still the best of all bad options to resolve the conflict. The PA/PLO national program still commands majority Palestinian support (even though this may be fraying at the edges). The PA may yet be able to wage its negotiating campaign with dignity and competence, disprove all its doubters and skeptics and disarm its opposition, both literally and figuratively.

Indeed, the PA deserves every ounce of support it can garner to reach an agreement with Israel that brings about a viable, sustainable, defensible and truly sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital and a fair and acceptable resolution of the refugee problem.

It deserves every ounce of support in seeking to break out from the punitive paradigm into which it is being driven. This will be a first order historic achievement that will serve the Palestinians, the Israelis and all the peoples of the area.

But there must also be an awareness that this simply may not happen. The PA and Israel may fail to agree, and either or both may fail to ratify, implement or sustain any agreement. Neither side can simply assume the best and deny that the worst is both possible and likely. In short, we need a Plan B.

An apartheid-type reality is already encroaching on the conflict, and its expansion and consolidation on the West Bank is another potential alternative. So are various new forms of Israeli inspired population transfer or, worse still, new and as yet unseen forms of inter-communal or asymmetric violence. The possible ripple effect of the failure of final status talks on the future and prospects of Israel's Arab citizens should not be ignored, as should the fall out on neighboring states such as Jordan or Lebanon.

This calls for really serious thinking on all sides about the alternatives and what safety nets there may be in case of precipitous or even gradual failure. The more fanciful notions of bi-nationalism seem premature at best and run counter to the national grain of each side. But there may be scope for exploring other forms of association between Arab and Jew in Palestine/Israel based on different paradigms of mutuality, equality and coexistence. There is no good reason to dismiss outright possibilities that incorporate federal or con-federal concepts as part of this process of rethinking our common future.

But regardless of how and when such models may emerge (and at what price), the Palestinians must also address some more immediate and urgent concerns.

As the current pressing circumstances darken the Palestinians' horizons, there is no alternative but to revive our national spirit, first and foremost, by turning our back on the politics of mutual exclusion and excision. The first essential is to forge a new compact between Hamas and Fateh and define the common grounds for a new national program. In this, the PA/PLO leadership should be encouraged to take the lead in bringing Hamas back into the national fold and to live up to its responsibilities as the leadership of *all* the Palestinian people and not just a select segment of it. Without this, there can be no fruitful negotiations, no final settlement and no stable Palestinian polity.

This is the *sine qua non* to stem the erosion of our national identity, will and sense of purpose. It is not enough to evoke the Palestinian sense of victimhood or to take refuge in the ghastly and chronic imbalance of power, the inequities of international system and our opponent's historic disregard for Palestinian lives and rights. We must overcome the culture of chronic inferiority, constant complaint, misdirected violence against ourselves and others and the easy expectation of succor from the international community.

There is no escape from the intertwined fate of Arab and Jew in the land of Israel/Palestine. It is incumbent upon the Israelis to own up to their massive responsibility for the Palestinian predicament, past and present. But it is equally incumbent upon the Palestinians to take the necessary strides to reconnect their disjointed polity, reverse their slide towards national dissolution and despair and regain the sense that they are also masters of their own fate.

About the Author

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