

Opportunism Trumps in Palestine

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The rash and self-defeatist behaviour emanating from Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and his close circle in the West Bank cannot possibly be intended for the benefit of the Palestinian people or for their internationally sanctioned struggle for human rights, freedom and equality. Abbas, and his self-serving Palestinian elites seem hell-bent on exploiting the unfolding Palestinian drama to further cement their status and position, even if such an attitude will lead to the total decimation of any little hope of recovering Palestinian rights.

The Palestinian, Israeli and international response — spearheaded by the Bush administration — to the Hamas election victory and formation of a government under military occupation, in January and March 2006 respectively, indicated that democracy for all of these players falls into the category of political opportunism: to unleash wars, rationalise illegal occupations or profit financially. Under Abbas's rule, democracy was and remains a vehicle. It is mostly constituted from a bizarre mix of rhetoric, unsubstantiated by any meaningful action.

If true democracy is intended to prevail over all threats and challenges, Abbas has failed miserably. Like every autocratic ruler, he understands that any practical application of democracy in the Middle East as in other parts of the world must pass the American test, an old lesson that the region was forced to learn time and again. Whatever serves American interests represents true democracy; anyone who dares to challenge these interests is duly ostracised and removed. However, friendly regimes (from the US point of view) that fail to exhibit even a token of a democratic governance are viewed as “moderate”, as opposed to the “extremist” others who could be very democratic, such as Hamas. Indeed, Abbas understands the rules of the democratic game very well; well- educated in political science and history, he has been immersed in the region's tumultuous politics for over four decades.

While Abbas has the right to deduce his own view of the world, he has no right to apply such deductions to eradicate the historic struggle of an entire nation. His actions are both unethical and unjustified, to say the least. The ageing leader and the shady characters surrounding him will go down in history books alongside all the rulers and elites that sided with their occupier and tormentor of their own people in exchange for worldly profits and shallow status. While corporate media across the world predictably fails to acknowledge the anti- democratic nature of the Abbas-managed charade, Israeli politicians, policy advisors and commentators are hardly discreet about the role they expect Abbas to play: his security forces must crack down on any dissent among Palestinians. His militants will carry out the dirty business of kidnappings and assassinations, in line with Israeli and American policy objectives.

In fact, Abbas's apparatus has proved exemplary in meeting these objectives. Thus, the Palestinian leader and his Prime Minister Salam Fayyad are being rewarded generously: tens of millions of US taxpayers' dollars, tax funds that Israel has illegally held from the elected Hamas government, military training for its weak security forces and, finally, an international platform to provide Abbas with the political validation he needs. Abbas, in return, is throwing in a few extras, beyond the measures expected from him. A few of his government's mouthpieces are disseminating inaccurate information to international media equating Hamas to Al-Qaeda terrorists and Taliban militants; some have gone as far as alleging an actual link between Hamas and Al-Qaeda, a charge that can only contribute further to the misery and isolation of the Palestinians.

As a reward for Abbas's active involvement in deepening the desperation in Gaza and widening disunity among Palestinians, he has been granted the privilege of meeting Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert once every two weeks, and also the trust and confidence of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and her boss. Any attempt at reconciliation with Hamas, which is supported by the majority of Palestinians, at least in the occupied territories, would most definitely lead to the withdrawal of some, if not of all of these advantages, a risk Abbas will not take.

But Palestinian disunity is disastrous, not only because it's a diversion from the struggle for freedom and sovereignty and because it distracts the international community from Israel's illegal occupations, it also presents Hamas and Fatah with very limited options: Hamas's isolation will likely strengthen the more radical view among its members, which will make it difficult to find a common ground in the future; Fatah, which is losing its popular support by the day, would have to continue to rely on outside help and initiatives, notwithstanding the hardly promising international Middle East peace conference aimed at solidifying the support for Abbas against Hamas, or at the revival of the Jordan option, linking the West Bank to Jordan through a confederation. Talks about the latter, reported recently in the Israeli daily Haaretz — though the idea has been floating for many years — could become terrifyingly real for two reasons: first, the internationally recognised Palestinian leadership of Abbas cannot maintain control over the Palestinians without the active support of regional and international actors, such as Egypt and Jordan, and second, the same leadership has proved most capable of sinking to new lows daily.

In the months leading to the November peace conference, Abbas is expected to further demonstrate his trustworthiness to Israel and the US, at the expense of the Palestinian people, who are now denied the only strong card in their six-decade struggle for freedom: their sense of collectivity, which, despite occasional fragmentations, always managed to survive against all odds. The day this is no longer possible, Israel's victory will be complete.

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