

Palestinian-U.S. Relations Head for Stormy Times

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Washington's response to the speech that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas delivered at the UN General Assembly last September 26 confirms that the bilateral Palestinian-U.S. relations are heading for stormy times.

The U.S., which opposed Abbas' plan to seek a UN Security Council resolution to end the Israeli occupation within a defined timeframe, not only cautioned him against proceeding with any such plan but also issued an official statement condemning the language he used to express the Palestinian people's opposition to the continued occupation and the ongoing war crimes that Israel is perpetrating in the territories it occupied in 1967.

"Abbas' speech today included offensive characterizations that were deeply disappointing and which we reject," U.S. State Department Spokeswoman Jen Psaki said in a statement on last September 27, which criticised Abbas' speech as "provocative," "counterproductive" and undermines "efforts to create a positive atmosphere and restore trust between the parties."

Clearly, Abbas bent before the onslaught of the winds of American rejection. He "submitted" his plan to the General Assembly but he did not ask to bring it to a vote in order to secure an international resolution that would strengthen his hand when he submitted it to the Security Council. It is also noteworthy that while he called for a deadline to end the occupation he omitted the three-year timeframe that he had previously stipulated.

There is no serious Palestinian opposition to Abbas' plan to internationalise the search for a political solution to the Palestinian struggle to end the occupation of Jerusalem , the West Bank and Gaza . It would be extremely difficult to come up with a Palestinian who would argue against replacing US sponsorship with UN sponsorship of the process of reaching a negotiated settlement with the Israeli occupying power. Indeed, this direction is supported by a near unanimity of Palestinian opinion, including among resistance factions that have given Abbas a chance to put his strategy to a last test without obstructing his manoeuvrability.

But Abbas' plan signifies that he has thrown in the towel on his reliance on U.S. sponsorship, which in turn means confrontation with Washington . Clearly, he will not succeed in neutralising the U.S. by merely bowing before its opposition to his plan or by asking for U.S. approval. Certainly, he should not hold out any hope that Washington will not use its veto to defeat his proposed resolution in the UN Security Council. Nor will he placate the U.S. by deferring Palestinian applications to join international treaties and organisations, such as the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice.

All the indications are that the U.S. will campaign against the Abbas plan and continue to

insist on brokering a solution that it has been unable to produce during the more than two decades in which it monopolised the sponsoring the negotiating process with the Israeli occupying power.

On September 23, 88 US senators signed a letter urging U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to take prevent:

“negative developments at the UN General Assembly, UN Human Rights Council, and the International Criminal Court that could derail any prospects for the resumption of peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians.”

Senator Rand Paul refused to sign this letter. He wants Washington to cut off “all aid to the Palestinian Authority until the conditions in Senator Paul’s Stand with Israel Act are met,” according to his e-mail statement to The Washington Post that day.

Warning Abbas “that America’s willingness to cooperate with him will continue to depend on his willingness to return to the negotiating table with the Government of Israel and avoid unilateral measures,” the senators were keen to sustain the usual U.S. “carrot-and-stick” policy, in this case by “enabling the Palestinian Authority to move toward becoming the Palestinian governing authority in Gaza .” This was their bribe to him.

But any policy of confrontation with the U.S. means that Abbas must reject all U.S. bribes, which would inevitably come at the cost of sacrificing the Palestinian resistance.

In addition, in a confrontation of that sort, Abbas would risk losing Arab support in view of the Arab consensus to ally with — or at least not oppose — the U.S. in the war it has declared against ISIS (the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria). Therefore, the resistance and Palestinian national unity will be the only foundation on which President Abbas can rely in the confrontation.

In this context, the Arab League’s declared support for the Abbas’ plan lacks credibility and cannot be relied on when it comes to confronting the U.S. In fact, in the event of a confrontation, the likelihood is that this support would dwindle and fade and turn into an American tool to pressure the PA presidency into bowing to U.S. conditions.

This confrontation is foreshadowed by preliminary chapters of the same, especially since 2011 when the U.S. defeated the Palestinian drive to obtain UN recognition of Palestine as a member state. The following year, the U.S. was not able to prevent the UN from recognising Palestine as a non-member observer state. But Palestinian memory has not forgotten how the U.S. undermined Palestinian accomplishments, such as the International Court of Justice recommendation regarding the separating wall designed to annex another chunk of the West Bank , and the Goldstein Report. The Palestinians remember very well how the U.S. obstructed dozens of international resolutions in support of Palestinian rights and how it continuously prevented the international community from sponsoring any just negotiating process that might end Washington’s own monopoly over what it fraudulently calls the “peace process,” in which the U.S. has never been an honest broker.

The US-Palestinian confrontation was inevitable, even if much delayed. Palestinian leaders from both the resistance and the negotiating factions always tried to avert it. The Palestinians never chose confrontation; successive US administrations however were constantly bent on forcing it on the Palestinian people.

If President Abbas, who for decades placed his faith in U.S. good will, has finally reached the conclusion that it is futile to continue to depend on the U.S. and that now is the time to stand up to Washington and turn to the international community to sponsor his negotiating strategy. His decision will receive the unanimous support of the Palestinian people. However, if he backs down, he will undergo the most important test of his political career, as he will come face-to-face with the people's judgment of the credibility of his strategic choices, which have never obtained a national or popular consensus.

The choice of confrontation also entails the need to press forward in creating and setting into motion the mechanisms for implementing the reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas, as well as the need to respond quickly to the overwhelming Palestinian demand to apply for the membership of international treaties and organisations.

But above all, it requires safeguarding the resistance in all its forms and developing it in quantity and quality until its scope is expanded to embrace all the Palestinian people, wherever they may be. Confrontation means refusing to allow Ezz Al-Din Al-Qassam to be assassinated twice!

Even if the inconceivable occurred and the U.S. acknowledged the will of the international community in support of Palestinian rights, refrained from using its influence to stop Abbas' plan and even refrained from wielding its veto in the UN Security Council, there remains the perpetual risk that the UN resolution would amount to no more than a paper victory to add to the pile of Palestinian paper victories, since any such political victory requires a national force to translate it into a reality on the ground in the occupied territories.

If the Palestinian presidency does not respond to these needs and demands, which receive the full support of the Palestinian people, he will find himself once again singing outside the his national flock.

Regardless of whether or not there is a confrontation with the U.S. , these needs and demands are national requirements that must be promoted, enhanced and developed, because they are indispensable if Palestinian popular will is to succeed in liberating its land and translating "paper" victories into real victories on the ground.

The Palestinians have learned an important lesson from their enemy. The Palestinian national movement has dozens of international resolutions in its favour. This is something the Zionist movement never possessed throughout its history, apart from that one non-binding partition resolution, 181, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1947. But this one resolution the Zionists had translated into reality on the ground and then expanded on it through the exercise of overwhelming military force. This is the power that Palestinians are being prevented from possessing today, just as has been the case in the past.

May God bless late Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel-Nasser who always said that what has been taken away by force can only be regained by force. History has proven him right and events have shown that the course the Arabs and Palestinians took after he died — which headed in the opposite direction to his — was gravely wrong, indeed sinful.

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