




Prospects for Development under Transition



By Jamil Rabah




The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is based on five main pillars, namely people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnership. These pillars are intended to strengthen universal peace, end poverty, and provide opportunities for all people to be players in the overall human development undertaking. This paper examines whether peace and development can be achieved under transition and in an environment where military occupation remains despite the existence of a transitional government, as is the situation in Palestine.

Democracy under transition

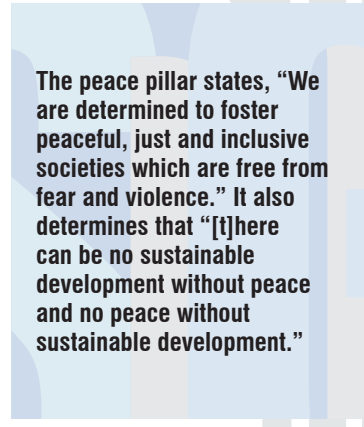
The Palestinian political establishment, that pursuant to the Oslo Interim Agreement of September 1995 took control over parts of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, has been accused of being undemocratic, untransparent, corrupt, and unaccountable. It has furthermore been asserted that this is the reason why peace and development have not materialized. Surprisingly, even some Palestinian circles subscribe to this argument.

Over twenty years have elapsed since Oslo, and the perceptions (local and international) toward the Palestine leadership have generally remained the same. International bodies such as Transparency International and Freedom House have ranked Palestine extremely low on ratings regarding corruption and democracy.

While many may argue against the negative way in which Palestine is perceived, the question of whose perception is correct is somewhat more academic than practical. Can a political system under transition subscribe to democratic values and principles without jeopardizing the final end game? And will the dominant power – namely Israel – allow for the implementation of democratic principles and the flourishing of a democratic culture?



Looking at the main factors that hinder Palestinian political development, in general, and democratization, in particular, many issues come to surface. In essence, any transitional agreement subjects the involved parties to prerequisites, legal obligations, and other constraints; to conditions that are less restrictive on a sovereign regime. The Oslo Agreement imposed a number of such restrictions on the Palestinian leadership that have prevented the proper institutionalization of a *bona fide* democratic culture and the development of free and transparent political institutions. Two of the main obstacles to democratic development in Palestine are related to the issues of security cooperation and incitement. Oslo calls for security coordination between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, which includes the arrest of Palestinians for their opposition to the Israeli occupation and oppressive measures or for alleged incitement. This cooperation has raised many questions among the Palestinian public whose perception is that the Palestinian security forces are commandeered by Israel and mainly serve to contain resistance to the occupation – rather than ensure the security of Palestinians. This perception has widened the gap between the Palestinian leadership and the public, and has led to the implementation of measures that were perceived as anti-democratic.



The peace pillar states, “We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence.” It also determines that “[t]here can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development.”

Regarding incitement, Article XXII of the Interim Agreement states that Israel and the PA “shall seek to foster mutual understanding and tolerance and shall accordingly abstain from incitement, including hostile propaganda, against each other and, **without derogating from the principle of freedom of expression**, shall take legal measures to prevent such incitement by any organizations, groups or individuals within their jurisdiction.”¹¹ As a result of US and Israeli pressure, the Palestinian commitment to curbing the so-called incitement was reaffirmed also in the Hebron Protocol, the Wye River Memorandum.

While Article XXII states that both sides should refrain from incitement, Israel has remained rather immune from accusations, and the nuances

remained largely effective on the Palestinian side. According to Yoni Mendel of the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, “‘Palestinian incitement’ has turned into a winning code that lies at the heart of the Israeli discourse on Palestinians.”ⁱⁱ The Palestinian Authority, on the other hand, had to undermine democratic principles to comply with these requirements, and in order to evade possible sanctions and retributions from Israel and the United States, frequently acting in response to threats from the US administration. For example, two congressmen wrote a letter to President Abbas threatening that congress would halt assistance to Palestinians if the so-called incitement were to continue. Not only have Oslo Agreement-related restrictions on the Palestinian Authority hindered the development of a truly democratic culture, lack of progress in the so-called peace negotiations and continued Israeli occupation measures have increased the gap between the Palestinian leadership and the Palestinian masses.

The widely accepted liberal peace theory states that democracies are immune from internal violent conflict because of the strong institutional nature of the state. Any conflict that emerges in a democracy is resolved without violence because the main tenets of democracy prevail. Countries in transition, however, find it difficult to advance nonviolent means of resolution of internal conflict because they lack adequate institutionalization. The willingness and ability of

the Palestinian leadership to institutionalize the political system is hindered by Israeli political measures such as the confinement of Arafat in his compound in 2002. Their actions did not stop here, however: Israel also destroyed numerous Palestinian institutions and ministries, including the Palestinian security headquarters. Such measures, as well as the continued Israeli settlement expansion, arrests, killings, Judaization of Jerusalem, and others have rendered the peace process ineffective and restrict the Palestinian leadership in its ability to develop political institutions. This failure is the *casus belli* for the increasing gap between the leadership and the general public, thus furthering the prospects for undemocratic measures.

Moreover, the June 2007 split between the West Bank and Gaza was explicitly a result of US and Israeli unwillingness to accept the democratic elections that brought Hamas to power. This position was reiterated by the Quartet that set three conditions: “...all members of a future Palestinian government must be committed to nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Development under transition

Sovereignty and an end to the occupation are prerequisites to achieving peace and development in Palestine. Development necessitates the evolution of democratic and institutional reforms, and most will

assert that development cannot be sustained without democracy.

The effectiveness of the current Palestinian institutions in terms of achieving political and economic development are predicated by Israeli oppressive measures and by a complex web of agreements and arrangements that prevent these institutions from functioning according to Palestine’s economic and developmental efforts. Many aspects of the Paris Protocol undermine Palestinian economic growth as Palestinians are subjected to severe trade restrictions, unable to utilize Area C resources, and more. To the Palestinian public, the Paris Protocol is “a key instrument in the Israeli system of colonial control, occupation, and denial of sovereignty.”^{iv}

For Palestine to develop, a certain level of institutionalization must be achieved that enables its government agencies to inspire the private sector that is essentially the backbone of any developmental effort. Without assurances from the political institutions, the private sector will neither invest in nor capitalize on the Palestinian market.

Conclusion

With no political settlement on the horizon, the international community, spearheaded by the present US administration, pursues a policy that aims to improve the Palestinian economy as a way to reduce persisting tensions and the

The occupation of the Palestinian territories is anathema to development, irrespective of whether this occupation is direct or indirect.

risk of political unrest or even civil war. By improving the economic situation, the international community believes that it could reduce the perils of the political impasse.

Despite instability, the likelihood of bringing about a level of sustainable development in the area without a serious and just solution to the Israeli occupation remains a mirage. No matter how big the intervention in the Palestinian economy is, the likelihood of an economic recovery and of sustainable development will continue to be weak. In order to achieve the peace pillar of the Sustainable Development Goals, the occupation needs to cease to exist.

Jamil Rabah is a policy adviser at the Palestinian Negotiations Support Project. For many years he worked as a pollster with various organizations. Jamil was also a member of the Multilateral Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security.

ⁱ Oslo 2, Article XXII.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ See also Jeremy Sharp, “U.S. Aid to the Palestinians,” *CSR Report for Congress, 2 February 2006*, pp. 3-5, available at <https://www.cfr.org/content/publications/attachments/CRS%20Palestinian%20Aid.pdf>.

^{iv} Hiba I. Hussein and Raja Khalidi, “Fixing the Paris Protocol Twenty Years Later: Frequently Asked Questions for Diehard Reformers,” *Jadaliyya*, February 6, 2013, available at http://photography.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/10023/fixing-the-paris-protocol-twenty-years-later_freq.