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Will the New Palestinians End Security Coordination?

By: Haidar Eid · December, 2012

Amidst the fervent talk of national reconciliation sparked by Israel's recent assault on Gaza a question remains. What happens to the security coordination between the Palestinians and the Israeli occupation forces that protects Israel's settlement enterprise and undermines not only Palestinian security but also continued existence as a people? Indeed, is it possible to achieve national unity while simultaneously coordinating security under U.S. supervision?

The Israeli-Palestinian agreement is a rare historical model: Only South Africa's Bantustans participated in such a system. The arrangement is at the heart of the Oslo Accords and it is doubtful that the Palestinian Authority (PA) would be allowed to continue to function in the West Bank if it ceased security cooperation with its occupiers. And more doubtful still that such coordination could be reconfigured to focus onto Palestinian security.

There is a new reality after Israel's attack on Gaza that provides an opportunity to overturn the security component of Oslo once and for all. Most Palestinians believe that Israel did not achieve its goals during November 2012 despite the enormous power imbalance between the Palestinian resistance groups and one of the world's largest armies equipped with U.S.-made F16s, Apaches, the drones that hovered continuously over the Gaza Strip, and a massive propaganda machine. As a result, Israel has handed the Palestinian resistance groups an impressive victory.

If anything, Israel's attack on Gaza may be the final nail in the coffin of its "Dahiya Doctrine" which, it is worth recalling, was developed in Israel's academic institutions, particularly Tel Aviv University. Israel first applied the doctrine in Lebanon in 2006, deliberately targeting densely populated residential areas to pressure the Lebanese resistance to surrender and to turn the population against it. Yet the Lebanese resistance stood fast despite the horrendous losses in dead, injured, and infrastructure.

Three years later, Israel applied the Dahiya Doctrine to the Gaza Strip, killing 1443 Palestinians, including 434 children in a brutal 22-day campaign in December 2008 and January 2009. Israel had set three objectives for its operation: releasing the captive Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, eliminating rocket fire from Gaza, and ending the rule of Hamas. None were achieved, and Shalit was only released through negotiations and a prisoner exchange.

The intensive eight-day aerial bombardment in the most recent war on the Gaza Strip proved the Dahiya Doctrine's biggest failure yet. First, all nationalist and Islamist forces joined ranks in a potent display of national unity although some played a greater role in defending the civilians in Gaza. Second, the changed Arab order meant that Gaza was no longer isolated. Israel's accomplice, the dictator Hosni Mubarak, has vanished from the political scene, weakening those Palestinian factions that used to rely on him. In other words, the deterrence Israel aimed to achieve through its attacks required, if not active cooperation, a compliant Palestinian domestic environment.

This changed environment is the key difference between the wars of 2009 and 2012. But will the Palestinian resistance groups prove capable of putting it to good use? They committed a strategic error after the 2009 massacre by failing to capitalize on their victory. They unanimously accepted the Mubarak regime's invitation to all Palestinian political forces to participate in national dialogue under its auspices, even though it had completely lost its credibility by co-

blockading the Strip and closing the Rafah Crossing. Moreover, the war on Gaza was announced in Cairo in the presence of the Egyptian foreign minister.
By accepting that invitation to national unity negotiations in these circumstances, the Palestinian resistance factions lost not only the opportunity to end security coordination but also to end the blockade. They should have refused to leave Gaza unless the Rafah Crossing was reopened and Arab leaders visited the Strip. In fact, the siege has continued until this day, and was only slightly eased after Israel's attack the Freedom Flotilla in 2010. The crossing still awaits a decision to be fully opened to the unrestricted passage of people and goods.

Those of us who survived Israel's 2009 operation were certain that Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation would not survive what was described as a war crime and a possible crime against humanity by the United Nation's fact-finding mission on Gaza (also known as the Goldstone Report.) And yet it did.

Today, there is a new Palestinian. It is not the new Palestinian who embodies the neo-liberal Oslo vision and who is much heralded by the West. Rather, it is the tens of thousands of Palestinians who took to the streets of Gaza at 9:00pm on November 21, 2012, to express their overwhelming happiness at an unprecedented victory over Israel, their head unbowed despite the crippling blockade underway since 2006. It is also the thousands of Palestinians who took to the streets of the West Bank, of Nazareth and Israeli campuses, and of all around the world on the first day of the November war to say no to the killing of the Gazan Palestinians.

These new Palestinians underscore the common destiny of the Palestinian people despite the prescriptions of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, the abhorrent security coordination, the years of futile negotiations, and the appalling moves toward normalization.

These are the Palestinians who continued to resonate to the messages of steadfastness and of resistance to oppression, who fought normalization, and who

refused to embellish the occupation. Without them, the victory now being celebrated would not have been achieved.

Because the tears of the Al-Dalou and Al-Samouni families still flow, there is an overwhelming momentum to end the division in the Palestinian national movement and restore its strength.

But this cannot be done without a final break with of the agreement for security coordination with Israel. Maintaining security in the West Bank cannot be achieved at the expense of Palestinian blood in Gaza. And fulfilling the Palestinian rights to self-determination, freedom, justice, and equality cannot be done by maintaining the security of the illegal settlements, helping Israel strengthen its apartheid policies, and normalizing with the multi-faceted Israeli oppression. Ending security collaboration must top the agenda of the new Palestinian.

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