

15 January 2009

**Analysis of Some Interviews with Palestinian officials
(1-15 January 2009)**

This analysis will focus mainly on substance.

Background:

The political atmosphere: More than 20 days ~~after~~ ~~+~~ ~~after~~ the Israeli onslaught on the Gaza Strip, tension is mounting in the Palestinian and Arab streets following the death, and injuries of thousands of Palestinian civilians and the incineration of Gaza. The growing resentment against the Palestinian Leadership in the Palestinian and Arab street is due to the growing belief that it failed to take immediate and meaningful measures ~~respond adequately and promptly~~ to: (1) bring an end to the Israeli aggression on Gaza (2) address ~~end~~ the internal divisions and Palestinian rift ~~and~~ the 'blame game' and (3) convey the widespread sense of people's despair with the political / negotiations process ~~which~~ ~~that~~ proved to be futile and achieved nothing to bring freedom to the Palestinian people..

The Palestinian performance in the media: ~~As it was~~ expected in a time of crisis, Palestinian leaders and spokespersons were interviewed and hosted on several news programs ~~shows~~ in both the Arab and International media. The poor performance, and the contradictory ing and unclear (old) messages that were delivered by the different Palestinian officials, left an unprecedented negative image of the Palestinian leadership among the Palestinians, Arabs, and the International solidarity movements.

Assessment of problems and recommendations for overcoming them ~~Problems that the leadership fell into:~~

- **The immediate official Palestinian response to the Israeli aggression** created the impression that was foreseen as the PA / PLO leadership was putting the blame ~~solely~~ on Hamas rather than condemning Israel. The President's press conference in Egypt and ~~the~~ respective interviews with the President's advisors did a lot of communications damage as all Israeli and international spokespersons used such 'blame' as a way of 'explaining' ~~n opportunity to explain~~ the onslaught taking place ~~going on~~ even against ~~on~~ Palestinian civilians. A suggested remedy is to take immediate steps to that demonstrate that the ~~show the Palestinian leadership~~ main adversary in this crisis is Israel, both ~~whether~~ by publicising the ~~making a~~ general message that *Israel must accept that its security depends on justice and genuine peace with its neighbors, and not upon the criminal use of force* and take ~~starting on~~ concrete and serious steps to that will bring those Israeli leaders responsible for the aggression before international courts for prosecution. ~~to international criminal court.~~

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- **Usage of terminology that is echoed by Israelis (and certain some international officials):** The leadership repeatedly fell on so many different occasions in the trap of using the same terminology and messages echoed by Israeli officials; words as ‘moderates’ and ‘violence from both sides’, left an impression that the leadership agrees (at least in part) with the Israeli narrative, and hence, by implication with the objectives for aims of the aggression. Echoing such messages should need to be avoided in the future.
 - Recommended terminology: attack by occupying power against a protected population;
 - Today there are no moderates or extremists – we are all Palestinians, standing shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters in Gaza against this brutal attack and
- **The Palestinian messages should BE COORDINATED AND CONSISTENT.** It is worth noting that even after President Abbas decided that open accusations in the media between parties must stop, some political figures such as Palestinian Foreign Ministry Malki or the President’s Advisor Nimer Hammad continued their accusations against of Hamas openly.
- **The leadership’s failure to take make clear, immediate and concrete steps (even ones with no political value)** left the Palestinian and Arab street angered and enraged. The hesitant reply regarding negotiations should have been avoided. The PLO’s Executive Committee’s decision to suspend the negotiations came a little bit too late, and was criticized for not being strong enough given to meet the catastrophe situation due to Israel’s offensive against that fell on the Palestinians in Gaza.
- **The leadership could do well to be more proactive, rather than responsive in the opportunities provided to them to speak.** They could demonstrate more assertiveness by placing the interview topic and specific questions within the appropriate context and raising big picture issues such as the murder of thousands of Palestinian civilians (**giving names and stories and not only numbers**), paramedics, the perishing of whole families (again with names and stories), the ongoing 41-year old occupation, Israeli war crimes, etc.
- **It would be effective to appoint a new spokesperson for the government.** Someone without ministerial responsibilities and whose only work will be to explain the Palestinian government’s position as well as the actions to be taken. A new, fresh and politically unaffiliated spokesperson would help stopping criticism against the Leadership’s performance.
- **It is more effective to talk about a comprehensive solution of the conflict and the need to isolate this state that uses terror against the Palestinians. Strong wording is highly recommended.** For example: *Israel must immediately and*

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unconditionally end its assault on Gaza, end the occupation of the West Bank, and abandon all claims to possess or control territory beyond its 1967 borders. We call on the international community to take all feasible steps to oblige Israel to comply with these obligations-demands, starting with a programme of boycott, divestment and sanctions.

- **Put together several4 op-eds in the coming days, most importantly**
 - 1 major op-ed by Abu Mazen (NYT, WP, etc.) with the basic message: “Any arrangement that does not lead to the lifting of the siege and permanent opening of Gaza’s borders is a recipe for permanent civil war and effectively the end of the Palestinian national movement, as well as perpetual conflict with Israel, which would mean the end of the two-state solution.”
 - 1 major op-ed by Abu Mazen in the Israeli press (e.g. Maariv, ~~or whatever~~) with the basic message: “For the past two years Ehud Olmert was my partner in seeking to resolve our decades-old conflict... On Dec. 27, he ceased to be a partner (and then go on to explain the human and political toll, etc.)”
 - 1 major op-ed by Abu Mazen in the Arab Press (I would repeat the one of the International Media).
 - 1 major op-ed by Saeb (NYT, WP, etc.) with the basic message: “Pres. Bush, this is your legacy... (and then list the long chain of broken promises, from Mitchell to Roadmap to Annapolis, etc.)”

Expected Israeli narrative during and in the aftermath of its war

- Failure of negotiations is due to a dysfunctional Palestinian national movement. Palestinians could not agree among themselves about a peace process with Israel. It is recommended to start immediately with the blame of the Israeli policies on the ground which hampered any progress in the peace process (giving details of the occupation policies in the oPt).
- We have no partner for peace on the Palestinian side, therefore we will work unilaterally and exclusively for the security of Israel. It is important to be proactive, in this case. **The leadership should not feel obligated to paint a positive picture of the previous tracks / progress in the negotiations, as was the pattern.** Whilst it is important to convey the Palestinian leadership’s readiness to make peace with a future Israeli partner, this should not undermine the message that this Israeli carnage led to a Palestinian decision to stop any bilateral agreements. For instance: comments that: “we have to believe in it, this is the only way for us” gives the impression that we can still make peace with war criminals.