

# In Search of a Palestinian Strategy

By

[Dr Mahdi Abdul Hadi](#)

Head of PASSIA, Jerusalem

January 2004



Palestinians, wherever or whoever they are, agree that they are witnessing "a new Nakba" exceeded in pain, suffering and losses only by the Nakba of 1948. Since the second intifada erupted in September 2000, Israel has renewed its occupation; 3.4 million Palestinians (distributed among refugee camps (15%), rural areas (28.5%) and urban areas (56.5%)) have become isolated in 'cantons' sealed off from one another by Israeli settlements, bypass roads and the powerful military forces of the IDF. The City of Jerusalem has been cut off from the rest of the West Bank with most of its national and social institutions closed down by the military. In addition around 150,000 middle class and professional Palestinians have left the country.

Since 1996, the elected Palestinian National Authority has become a copy of other Arab regimes; weak, corrupt and lacking legitimate power to enforce law and order, maintain domestic security, and definitely lacking the capacity to resist the policies and practices of the occupying power. Its duties are limited to administrative activities and diplomatic contacts despite a huge bureaucratic system employing more than 120,000 civil servants.

Islamic factions have shown their willingness to challenge the Israeli strategic threat embodied in the 'Apartheid Separation Wall' to prove that it will never be a solution to Israel's "security complex". The Wall will only lead to more confrontation, more 'bleeding' and more nightmares. The Islamists spokespersons have been requesting a "share of political power" since the Cairo cease-fire talks and for the first time they have been arguing that the PLO is not the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

In addition Hamas, one of the main Islamic groups is going through a political transformation with a shift from their old doctrine of "an Islamic state in all of Palestine" to a call for a transitional state on the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital and a just solution to the refugee question; by doing this they are following in the footsteps of the PLO.

The 'Apartheid Separation Wall' is a new strategic factor whose aim is to reshape the relationship between the land and the people, and to mark new borders between Palestinians and Israel using "security" as an excuse. The height of the wall is between 6 and 8 meters with a width of 60 meters and a length of 475km. It will control 16.8% of the West Bank surrounding 206 villages and towns and imprisoning more than 800,000 Palestinians.

The 'Wall' is Israel's current mechanism for isolating Palestinians, forcing them into a giant ghetto, and subsequently, with the ongoing killing, destruction and dehumanizing policies of the Israeli government, achieving 'external transfer' and full Israeli control over the land. As a consequence the 'Wall' will undermine any hope of a viable Palestinian state. The current

international and regional circumstances have not resulted in any intervention by a third party to prevent or amend Israel's plans to impose this drastic unilateral solution.

If the status quo is maintained, with no immediate change, then from an international perspective the Palestinian Question will become focused upon the need to provide humanitarian aid (i.e. food, water etc.) and to facilitate the movement of Palestinians through the "gates, guards and guns" of Israel. The PA is on the verge of collapse and is financially bankrupt, and will be unable to pay salaries in a months time to the 120,000 civil servants. The talk of the need to dissolve it and hand responsibility for the welfare of the Palestinian people to the Israeli military establishment will no longer be limited to backroom chatter or academic speculation, but will become a national demand. However, dissolving the PA will only lead to a deepening of the Nakba and a chaotic situation.

What options can the Palestinian's consider in such an environment of fear and uncertainty and in the absence of any possibility of negotiating with Sharon? What kind of strategy can civil society organizations and the PA establishment develop, that covers the international, regional, Israeli and domestic fronts simultaneously?

In the international arena a case has been submitted to the International Court of Justice against the Apartheid Separation Wall with the support of regional states. This effort will expose Israeli atrocities with the hope that this will lead to international pressure to end them. On the Israeli front efforts should focus on continuing to reach out to public opinion in order to bring down Sharon's rightwing government, which has failed in the last three years to deliver security for Israelis, and to negotiate with the Palestinians as it promised.

Domestically, a joint effort is needed to develop a national agenda so that the PA's reform program will succeed in keeping it alive and to help strengthen the bonds between it and civil society organizations. The long awaited elections should be held to bring legitimacy to regional and national institutions, and reverse the chaos and confusion that has spread in cities and districts as a result of the weakness of the current establishment. Elections will also help to bring the various 'angry' youth groups behind a unified national election list and campaign, for the good of the national cause.

For the last few decades the mission of civil society organizations has been to maintain and enhance Palestinian national identity, heritage and culture with human dignity and human values. Further more they met the daily needs of the Palestinian population in the absence of a national government and a political solution. In the current situation they too are expected to support the election formula.

On the other hand it is time that the PLO leadership put an end to its obsession and fear of the power and rising support for the Islamic opposition factions and the possibility that they may become an "alternative leadership". The PLO should recognize the need for the emergence of legitimate elected councils in every district and not continue to rely on the corrupt, appointed councils.

Civil society groups, the Speaker of the PLC and some PA ministers (including the Local Government Minister) favor the idea of beginning with local elections (with a 20% quota of women) city by city because they hope that fresh elections will bring about a change in the social and political environment and help to implement reforms.

The idea is to demonstrate that there is a "living society" in Palestine with national pride and demand for a two-state solution. But for elections to be made possible there is a need

to ease conditions in the West Bank and Gaza in order to allow people to move, mobilize and campaign. If elections take place they will show Israel and the international community that an alternative path to the current stalemate is possible.

**Mahdi Abdul Hadi**  
**January 2004**

» [Published as a commentary in \*The Daily Star\*, Beirut 24/01/04](#)