



Palestinian National Project

Problematic Partnerships and Deficient Legitimacies

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Introduction

The Palestinian national project is suffering from an impasse and loss of direction. This has impacted negatively on its ability to function, and benefit from the opportunities and the huge potentials of the Palestinian people and the Arab and Muslim nations.

Currently, there is an impasse in the peace process adopted by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority (PA) in Ramallah (both led by Fatah). There is an impasse in the armed resistance path adopted by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). Likewise, there is an impasse in the path of Palestinian reconciliation, signed by the Palestinian factions. The PLO, meanwhile, is suffering from the absence of its institutions and the decline of its role. The PA is suffering from divisions, as well as from Israeli domination in the West Bank (WB) and the blockade in Gaza Strip (GS), not to mention its financial crises. This is all coupled with a state of frustration in the Palestinian street vis-à-vis the performance of Palestinian political leaders.

On the other hand, there is a problem in the definition of the Palestinian national project per se. After the PLO's recognition of Israel, and its concessions made as part of the Oslo Accords, including ceding most of historic Palestine and the ensuing polarization and division among Palestinians, some now bitterly ask: Do we have a national project to begin with? On what basis can a project be "national"? Can conceding most of Palestine to the Israelis be a national act or part of a national program? What are the red lines and national fundamentals that no national project can cross, and violating which is considered treason or contrary to Palestinian interests? How can we differentiate between "treason" and "a point of view," if the fundamentals themselves are subject to interpretation and negotiation?

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First: Historical Background

The crisis of the Palestinian national project and Palestinian division is not new. In the days of British occupation of Palestine, there was a contradiction between the Husseinis and the Nashashibis. Although this took on the form of a familial rivalry, it carried connotations closely linked to national action and the relationship with British occupation, as well as the regional climate and the priorities of armed resistance versus peaceful political action. A crisis also emerged upon the founding of the PLO led by Ahmad Shuqairy, and was boycotted by Palestinian resistance factions especially Fatah... which saw the establishment of the PLO an attempt by the Arab regimes to dominate Palestinian national action. Another crisis emerged when the Rejectionist Front was formed, in protest against the PLO's endorsement of the ten-point program in 1974. Then, after Yasir 'Arafat visited Cairo in late 1983, the PLO became embroiled in a sharp political crisis that led to a new political division, prompting six Palestinian factions to establish the Palestinian National Salvation Front in 1984, led by the head of the PLO National Council Khalid Fahoum. Moreover, the PLO's acceptance of peace negotiations and then signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, prompted the creation of the ten-faction alliance opposed to the peace process, which included Hamas, PIJ, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and others.

However, perhaps what is distinct about the current internal Palestinian division compared to previous divisions in modern Palestinian history, is that both sides of the divide have broad popular support, which makes it impossible to marginalize any side. Secondly, both sides rely on electoral legitimacy in the PA, one through the presidency and the other through the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Thirdly, the two sides control respectively parts of the Palestinian territories, governing a segment of the Palestinian people—regardless of the sovereignty they each enjoy. Fourthly, they have conflicting political visions, peace versus resistance), backed by conflicting Arab, Muslim, regional, and international, popular and official, entities. Fifthly, they have disparate ideologies, and all of this makes the current division unique in Palestinian history.

Second: Conflict of Legitimacies and Partnerships

After 'Abbas won the PA presidency elections on 9/1/2005, and became the PLO and Fatah leader, he sought to open a new chapter that closes the book on *al-Aqsa Intifadah*. He wanted to improve internal Palestinian conditions under his leadership, assimilating resistance forces led by Hamas, and paving the way for what he believed would be an independent Palestinian state through the "Roadmap."

Based on the Cairo Agreement signed on 17/3/2005, Palestinians agreed to rebuild and reactivate the PLO, continue de-escalation with Israel, and hold municipal and legislative elections.

The surprise happened when Hamas won an overwhelming majority of PLC seats (74 out of 132, in addition to four other independents on its lists). In other words, Hamas now controlled the legislative branch and had the right to form a government, while Fatah continued to be in control of the presidency as well as the PLO.

Fatah was not accustomed to sharing power in an equal or parallel manner, and feared losing its influence in the PA and the PLO. Fatah feared Hamas's political positions and resistance activities would disrupt the Roadmap and the peace process chosen by Fatah, and foil the dream of Palestinian statehood, as well as invite Israeli and Western retaliation against the PA and the PLO (should Hamas be admitted as a full partner into the organization based on its popular weight). For this reason, Fatah's leadership, while stating that it respected the results, practically suspended the efforts for reforming and rebuilding the PLO. A series of measures was taken to increase the powers of the Palestinian president relative to the PLC and the government that was going to be led by Hamas. Since then, conflict and division between the two sides began to escalate.

In the last session of the former PLC, in which Fatah had the majority, held after the results of the elections, the council adopted a number of decisions and constitutional amendments aiming to increase the powers of the president, and weaken the government and the elected PLC. The session gave the president absolute powers, when it came to forming the Constitutional Court and the General Personnel Council.³ The outgoing PLC also approved a presidential decree appointing the PLC Secretary General in lieu of the PLC secretary,⁴ who should have been an elected deputy, from outside the council. Hamas considered this at the time a "coup" and "constitutional corruption."⁵ The new council overturned all these decisions later.

The president issued a decree placing all the media arms of the PA under his direct supervision. At the security level, the president issued a decree creating a special committee to run the border crossings, chaired by Fatah former minister and deputy Saeb Erekat. The Rafah crossing, meanwhile, was placed under the control of the Presidential Guard. The president issued another decree appointing former head of Preventive Security Services Rashid Abu Shbak as director-general of Internal Security Forces in the Ministry of Interior, thus heading Preventive

³ *Al-Hayat* newspaper, London, 14/2/2006.

⁴ *Al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, Ramallah, 14/2/2006.

⁵ *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 15/2/2006.

Security, Civil Defense and Civil Police Forces, three agencies previously under the control of the Interior Minister. Suleiman Hillis was also appointed head of National Security Forces.⁶

By doing so, the president imposed his control on all security services. Therefore, the new Palestinian government that took over in 2006 had no full powers, whether in terms of controlling the security forces of the PA, or in terms of controlling the body of civil servants, who are the backbone of the PA, now controlled by the president.⁷

When Hamas formed the tenth PA government in March 2006, it found itself in an almost impossible work environment. It found an uncooperative presidency working to remove its powers, and rushing to hold new legislative elections to get rid of it. And it found itself dealing with ministries and institutions dominated by Fatah cadres, especially in the security forces, which meant that it was very easy to disrupt the work of the government and instigate tension and lawlessness. The government also found itself facing an Israeli and international siege, pressuring it to accept the conditions of the International Quartet (which meant abandoning all its principles) in order to be dealt with. Above all, Hamas's insistence on resistance and carrying out the "Dispelled Illusion" Operation on 25/6/2007, in response to Israeli crimes, invited fierce and wide scale Israeli military and security response. Dozens of Hamas ministers and PLC deputies were detained, effectively paralyzing the PLC.

With the agreement reached by the Palestinian factions that concluded the National Reconciliation Document of Palestinian Prisoners inside Israeli Prisons (June 2006) and the Mecca Agreement (February 2007), it was possible to reach a temporary consensus and form a national unity government led by Isma'il Haniyyah. However, this government faced immense difficulties, especially with the fact of lawlessness instigated by Fatah-affiliated elements. The Interior Minister in this government Hani al-Qawasmi (independent) complained of the dominance of Muhammad Dahlan and Rashid Abu Shbak over the security forces, accusing the latter of controlling the three main agencies and preventing the interior minister from contacting them. The Palestinian presidency also removed his financial and administrative powers. Qawasmi resigned, saying he did not even have the power to summon a police officer except with the permission of Abu Shbak.⁸

Escalation of lawlessness reached an extent that threatened to destroy everything, and spread to every place including mosques and hospitals. On 11/6/2007, the office of Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyyah was attacked. This

⁶ *Assafir* and *al-Hayat*, 15 and 22-23/2/2006; and *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, London, 10/4/2006.

⁷ Mohsen Moh'd Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006* (Beirut: al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2007), p. 36.

⁸ *Al-Watan* newspaper, Saudi Arabia, 24/4/2007.

prompted Ezzedeem Al-Qassam Brigades to intervene to support the prime minister, who also took over the powers of interior minister. The Brigades were able to impose order in GS, after bloody confrontations with members of Fatah and security forces.

This new situation, which Hamas said events had forced without any intention on its part, led to the political and geographic division of the PA. President ‘Abbas subsequently deposed Haniyyah’s government, and appointed Salam Fayyad to form an emergency government, in contravention of the Palestinian Basic Law. The Basic Law requires that the Haniyyah government become a caretaker government until a new government is formed with confidence from the PLC.

‘Abbas tried to shore up his legitimacy and the legitimacy of his government in Ramallah through presidential decrees, and by resorting to the Fatah-dominated PLO Central Council. He did not go to the relevant authorities that have the power to confirm his government, namely, the Hamas-dominated PLC.

For its part, Hamas said that its actions were not tantamount to a coup, and that as long as it controlled the government and its agencies, and has a PLC majority, there would be no justification for a coup. As Hamas leader Khalid Mish‘al said: “We are the legitimate [government], so how can we stage a coup against ourselves?”⁹

In truth, the person who issued orders to suppress the lawlessness in cooperation with the Al-Qassam Brigades was the prime minister/interior minister... so those events do not constitute a coup. Hamas afterwards continued governing Gaza through its caretaker government, which considered itself the legitimate government of the Palestinian political system.

We, thus, ended up with two governments in WB and GS, each with a different source of legitimacy: the presidency versus PLC. However, the Palestinian presidency was better positioned in terms of regional and international recognition. Israel also dealt officially with the Palestinian presidency, which led the PLO, and was part of the regional and international consensus on the peace process.

For its part, Hamas, which insists on the path of armed resistance, had to bear the burden of governing GS under a crippling blockade and amid continued Israeli aggression. Hamas’s popularity and military performance, as well as the positive climate engendered by the Arab revolutions in the first two years... reinforced Hamas’s rule in GS, and prevented from collapsing.

President ‘Abbas and the Fayyad government proceeded to redraft the economic, social and security laws, taking advantage of the absence of opposition from the legislative authority to their actions. During the period from June 2007 to

⁹ The Palestinian Information Center website, 5/1/2008, <http://www.palestine-info.info/ar>

June 2008, ‘Abbas and the Ramallah government issued 406 decrees covering almost all aspects of life and the political and legal system.¹⁰ As a result, the president and the Fayyad government were accused of staging a coup themselves against the legitimate authority, at the same time they were accusing Hamas of doing so.

Undoing the coup and restoring the pre-June 2007 status quo was a selective notion for some of those calling for it. For them, it meant recognizing the legitimacy of President ‘Abbas, and handing over power and security and civil institutions in GS to him, while holding accountable those who staged the “coup.” It did not mean for them what Hamas understood, namely, that restoring the status quo meant restoring the national unity government headed by Isma‘il Haniyyah, reversing all decrees and laws issued by ‘Abbas without the PLC consent, and restoring all institutions and associations affiliated to Hamas in the WB.

Because the president’s term ended early 2009 and the PLC’s early 2010, the PA obtained a decision from the PLO Central Council (the body that oversees the PA) extending the terms of both... Disputes ensued over the legitimacy of this decision, and the right of the Central Council to grant it... as it had no written powers that enabled it to do so.

As for the national reconciliation agreement signed on 4/5/2011, detailing everything in relation to forming the government, elections, security forces, the PLO, and social reconciliation... its implementation was obstructed and there was an attempt to bypass it in the Doha Agreement of February 2012 and the Shati’ Agreement on 23/4/2014... However, Hamas’s supporters saw that the leadership of Fatah was seeking to selectively implement the agreements, in a way that would force Hamas to hand over power to the PA in GS, and allow Fatah to dominate it again. Other goals were to form a government that commits to Abbas’s political program, and hold elections in a non-favorable environment that would remove legislative legitimacy from Hamas’s hands, all without any real release of freedoms in WB, real partnership in leading the PLO, and without assimilating civil servants appointed by the caretaker government in GS. Meanwhile, Fatah’s supporters were of the view that Hamas was hindering the work of the government in the GS, by insisting on keeping its influence in the PA administrations, and maintaining its weapons and resistance activities, which Fatah supporters claim caused the continuation of the blockade and the suffering of the people of GS.

To this moment, there have been no signs of a real solution that would activate the terms of the reconciliation document and implement them on the ground.

¹⁰ *Assafir*, 30/8/2008.

Third: Barriers to Reconciliation and National Partnership

Practically speaking, we have two rival partners, who had to engage in reconciliation, while still having sharp disputes. Among the leading causes of the failure of the reconciliation and the disruption of the Palestinian national project are:

1. Intellectual and ideological reference: There is no common intellectual and ideological reference to define what is and what is not a fixed red line that does not accept waiver and bargain, and what is subject to assessment based on political reality, subjective and objective circumstances, and the balance of power at one point. This is the subject of dispute among Islamic, nationalist, leftist, and liberalist movements... Islamic movements, for religious reasons, refuse to recognize Israel or cede any part of Palestine, while other factions link it to realistic considerations, interests, tactics, and interim visions.

At first glance, this appears as though something that could be tolerated. However, practical experience in the Palestinian case has proven the existence of real obstacles. For example, there is the issue of recognizing Israel and its right to have 77% of historic Palestine, which Hamas rejects on principled Islamic bases, while the PLO and PA leadership accepts it as a political commitment resulting from the Oslo Accords, which engendered the PA and the dream of Palestinian statehood. For its part, Hamas wants to exercise its right to serve its people and govern the PA, without recognizing Israel and abandoning resistance, or recognizing the agreements signed by the PLO. In other words, Hamas wants to impose new conditions to manage the game, which is something that the US and Israel reject.

In practice, Mahmud ‘Abbas and the leaderships of the PLO and Fatah want a government that lifts the blockade. However, the US and Israel refuse to lift the siege without compliance to the conditions of the International Quartet, drafted after Hamas won the elections in 2006, led by the recognition of Israel... something that is anathema to Hamas. Thus, in one way or another, a government that lifts the siege is a government that recognizes Israel. Therefore, the essence of the obstruction of the government is not linked to dividing the pie or the number of ministers each side has, but is linked to how it will govern under Israeli occupation, by finding a “magical” formula acceptable to both Fatah and Hamas, with the tacit approval of Israel.

2. Determining priorities and paths: The previous point has impacted the national programs of both sides, how they determine priorities, what concessions they can offer, and their strategic and tactical visions for the projects of resistance and negotiations, and which should take precedence. Questions emerged like whether priority should be given to forming a national unity government and holding elections; rebuilding and reactivating the PLO; reforming security forces;

economic stimulus; lifting the siege and reconstruction; achieving UN recognition of Palestinian statehood; refugee issues; or to confronting Judaization programs especially in Jerusalem. How all these issues must be dealt with appropriately, and what weight should be assigned to each issue, and on what basis any of these could be postponed, and which issues could be tackled simultaneously, etc.?

3. The lack of an institutional point of reference: That both sides could resort to, to determine the priorities of the national project, decision-making mechanisms, the legitimate representation of the Palestinian people at home and abroad, and the mechanisms for the peaceful rotation of power. Although the PLO is the entity that is supposed to play this role, Hamas and the PIJ, along with other popular Palestinian segments... are not included in the PLO, the leadership of which has been monopolized by Fatah for more than 46 years (February 1969). Therefore, the PLO no longer represents the true will of the Palestinian people. There is no unified Palestinian entity that includes all Palestinians, in which they can discuss their situation, develop their national and political program, and set their priorities and agenda.

The departments of the PLO and its institutions have been disrupted and they have lost their effectiveness, as the PA came to dominate its levers. The Palestinian National Council (PNC) has not held any real sessions since 1991, and its members have not been elected properly for many years. In 1996, the PLO leadership (i.e., Fatah's leadership) added around 400 members to the council that convened in April 1996, in a non-justifiable way... This raised the number to almost 800 members, without the knowledge of the PNC Chairman Salim Za'noun or his approval, and without referring the new names to the relevant committees to take the appropriate measures to confirm their membership. The only apparent justification was that the PLO needed to convene the council for the first time in the Palestinian interior in Gaza, under occupation, with the necessary majority to pass one issue, namely, the Oslo Accords. It wanted to abolish all the provisions of the Palestinian National Charter that conflict with the peace agreement, which incidentally account for most provisions of the charter!!

On the other hand, this council, which is required officially to convene every year and to be re-elected every three years, has not met since 1991 except once in 1996 (with many flaws marring that meeting). Its members also met in a "ceremonial" manner on 14/12/1998, in the presence of Bill Clinton, to "bless" the abolishment of the provisions of the National Charter. They also held an emergency meeting in Ramallah on 25/8/2009 in the presence of fewer than half of the members (325 out of 700 members who are still alive) to agree one request, namely, to fill the vacant seats of six deceased members. In other words, this council has not undertaken any of its functions for 24 years, except accept to be "summoned" to approve the wishes of the PLO and Fatah leaderships, including changing the identity of the PLO and the purpose it was created for.

Although the reconciliation agreement requires reforming the PLO and the inclusion of all Palestinian factions, the conduct of the PLO leadership disrupted these commitments as Fatah continued its bid to monopolize its leadership. Furthermore, the political conduct of Hamas, PIJ, and other factions does not only seek partnership in leading the PLO, but also the rebuilding of the priorities of the Palestinian national project on the basis of rejecting the forfeiture of the land and protecting the resistance, which means reconsidering the agreements signed by the PLO. This could cause strong opposition from Fatah.

4. External influence: The external regional, Israeli, and international influence remains a key determinant of Palestinian decision-making, reflecting itself in varying degrees on the crisis of the Palestinian national project.

The role of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia in influencing Palestinian decision-makers is no secret. Egypt usually plays a key role in giving cover to the Palestinian leadership and Palestinian internal arrangements. It was previously behind the foundation of the PLO and the appointment of Shuqairy as its president. It gave cover to his removal and was behind Fatah's takeover of the PLO's leadership and then the continuation of its domination. In addition, Egypt provided cover to the peace process led by the PLO, and was largely responsible (before the revolution of January 25, 2011) for the way Hamas was dealt with, and the attempts to isolate, undermine, and thwart it.

As for Syria, (before the uprising and its internal crisis since 2011), it hosted Hamas and the resistance forces, and that had its impact on the confrontation with the "Moderate Axis." The Arab countries, especially the "ring countries" surrounding Israel, have a historic responsibility in deepening the crisis of the Palestinian national project. For they restricted or even prevented Palestinian resistance, political, and popular activity, and stopped the Palestinian people from organizing themselves freely in those countries, and obstructed elections pertaining to Palestinian national councils except after exacting a high political price.

In relation to Israel, the entry of the PLO and then the PA into the "Oslo age" and ensuing arrangements on the ground since 1993 made Israel the "always-present" actor when it comes to decision making in the PLO and the PA leaderships. The Oslo Accords meant that many former resistance leaders had to live under Israeli occupation in the WB and GS, forcing the PLO to renounce armed resistance, and establish an entity controlled by the Israelis, including its imports, exports, finances and the entry and exit of its cadres and leaders. Israel can destroy Palestinian infrastructure at will, occupy PA areas, arrest anyone it wants, stifle the economy, continue Judaization efforts, and impose any sanctions to subdue the Palestinians. It can also disrupt legislative elections, and arrest pro-resistance figures such as Hamas's ministers and deputies, thereby paralyzing the PA. This has given Israel the ability to coerce

Palestinian leaders and people, making potential Israeli retaliation a key determinant in Palestinian reconciliation and political talks.

Likewise, the Western and especially US position has a major influence on Palestinian politics. The US provides permanent cover to Israeli occupation and violations against the Palestinian people, and it intervenes to impose the conditions of the Quartet on Hamas and Palestinian factions, including recognizing Israel, renouncing resistance, and accepting the accords signed by the PLO including Oslo. This absolute US support for Israel is a blatant intervention in setting Palestinian priorities and stances. The US and its allies also worked to topple or isolate Hamas, designating it as a terror group, and delegitimizing it, in addition to punishing the Palestinian people for freely electing Hamas... The biased US behavior helped thwart the peace process, along with all efforts to restore all or some Palestinian rights at the Security Council or the General Assembly. It was a substantial contributor in making the peaceful project, suggested by Palestinian leadership, face real crisis.

A crucial part of Palestinian reconciliation discussions thus focused on how the formation of a Palestinian government should be in line with the conditions of the Quartet and potential US and Israeli “vetoes.” The same goes for discussions on elections and reformation of the security forces and so on...

5. The crisis of confidence: between Fatah and Hamas, or between the pro-resistance and pro-peace factions, which grew worse between the two sides over the past years, further complicating matters. This took on many forms: The two sides have often exchanged harsh accusations of failure and collaboration. Between 1994 and 2000, the Fatah-led PA carried out a wide crack down on Hamas and the resistance, as the latter carried out resistance operations that Fatah saw an attempt to obstruct and thwart the peace process that could lead to Palestinian statehood. This is not to mention the attempts by the Fatah-led PA to obstruct and remove the powers of the PLC dominated by Hamas after its overwhelming election victory, and similar attempts against the government formed by Hamas, leading up to the division resulting from Hamas’s takeover of GS and Fatah’s consolidation in WB. Then both sides took mutual security measures to consolidate their control, as security coordination between the PA in Ramallah and the US/Israel reached a maximum, in an attempt to uproot the resistance and dismantle the Islamist base in WB. The lawlessness and mutual bloodletting exacerbated the crisis of confidence between the two sides.

6. The cultural aspect: Related to the backwardness and underdevelopment in Palestine in general, especially in relation to managing differences and the peaceful rotation of power, as well as coexistence away from individual and partisan selfishness, tendencies for monopoly and domination, and inclination towards suspicion, mistrust, and political spitefulness at the expense of joint action and confidence-building.

7. The crisis of the Palestinian leadership: This leadership has not lived up to the aspirations of its people. It fell in varying degrees into the pit of dictatorship and cronyism at the expense of executive institutional work and respect for legislative authority. Instead, partisanship, opportunism, corruption, failure to take advantage of huge potentials among Palestinians, and the incapacity to manage political differences... dominated the scene.

8. Geographical dispersion of the Palestinian people: This complicated the ability to meet, hold understandings, and make decisions. The Palestinians do not live in one place and are not governed by one system. They have different circumstances, as by 2015 there were 2.8 million living in WB under occupation and under Fatah control; 1.8 million in GS under an Israeli blockade and under Hamas's leadership; 1.4 million in Israel (Palestinian land occupied in 1948); 3.6 million in Jordan; 500 thousand in Syria; 0.45 million in Lebanon; 500 thousand in Saudi Arabia; 250 thousand in Europe and 250 thousand in North America... Although the entire Palestinian people aspire to the liberation of Palestine to achieve their dream of returning and of independence, the circumstances of life and various governments have impacted the culture of the Palestinians and the way they understand and deal with issues.

Fourth: Possible Paths

As we mentioned earlier, the Palestinian national project is facing an impasse and a loss of direction.

The path to peaceful settlement is blocked, and military resistance is facing difficulties, and there are complicated Arab, regional, and international circumstances in a region in flux. Internally, Fatah and Hamas have almost equal popularity, both based on legislative institutions, and they benefit from different regional relations. However, they take contradictory paths.

In such circumstances, we face three possible paths:

First Path: National Reconciliation

This path assumes that both parties will go all the way in the Palestinian reconciliation, no matter what the prices are that may conflict with their power, and no matter what foreign pressures they are going to face. This path assumes also that Fatah, which holds the power keys of the PA and PLO..., will decide to open the doors for Hamas and other Palestinian parties and organizations to play a role in an effective partnership which reflects their actual power. It also assumes that both parties will agree to resort to free and fair elections, peaceful rotation of power, and real partnership without eliminating any party.

However, with this option which went a long way, theoretically, through the national reconciliation document (May 2011), the practical applications are still facing many difficulties and no serious willingness to implement its requirements, especially by those in power.

In reality, the delay is not strictly related to Fatah's fear of losing power and control, but also to the political requirements and prices required by parties including Hamas, PIJ and resistance supporters in the body of PA and PLO:

- Will Hamas and PIJ accept the foundations on which the PA was founded? Meaning that it serves the purposes of the occupation more than it does for the establishment of the Palestinian state? Will they accept the conditions of the International Quartet, or will they aim to turn the PA into a “resistance authority”... and what this may imply in terms of the collapse of the current authority's form and system? And how will Fatah accept it?
- Will Hamas, PIJ and resistance forces accept the commitments and obligations the leadership of the PLO took upon itself in the Oslo Accords? Or will they try to “revolutionize” the PLO, and cancel all commitments related to peace talks? If so, will there be a Palestinian willingness (from Fatah and the current leadership of the PLO) to pay the potential prices, including losing Arab and international recognition and diplomatic, political and economic networks the PLO took so long to construct... The thing that may also indicate the possibility to once again accuse the PLO of “terrorism” and again attempting to put it under siege.

Under such a scenario hopes are not enough... Palestinian thinkers and politicians must start a deep conversation about the best (and not necessarily the easiest) options to lead the national project, the future of the authority, and the paths of reconciliation versus resistance, and lowering the damages in order to come out with a unified national program... Otherwise, there will be a huge conflict pushing toward the exclusion of this path under current circumstances.

Second Path: The Continuation of the Conflict and Division

This path assumes that there is no possible meeting between the two paths of reconciliation and armed resistance. They are two contradicting decisions that cannot be combined under the same roof, and that taking one path with all its obligations will lead to an abolishment of the second path. For the peace camp (According to Oslo Accords) took upon itself to abandon armed resistance, and only consider peaceful ways, to recognize the state of Israel and to give up 77% of historical Palestine. Whereas for the second camp, it had been already decided, based on religious and patriotic principals, that there will be no recognition of the state of Israel and that they will not give up any part of historical Palestine.

Hence, there is no need to talk about whether one party could lead the other under the same roof (PLO)... as they will both keep competing, conflicting and using whatever tool in their arsenal until one side beats the other and imposes itself popularly, regionally and internationally.

Third Path: Coexisting and Managing Conflicts

This path assumes that there is no room for both camps to meet under the same institutional roof. However, it also assumes that the Palestinians will avoid violent internal conflict, and will find a way to manage their differences in order to reduce the negative side effects resulting from the division, and maybe use it positively to carry out some kind of role distribution!!

Until this moment, despite the popular demands for national agreements and for the Palestinian leaderships to unite, the requirements needed for its success are still incomplete... and things are more likely to progress along the first or second paths.

Fifth: Recommendations

1. Political movements, think tanks, and popular forces... must carry out a comprehensive review of the experience of the PLO, its paths, its political commitments, and how to rebuild and reactivate the PLO.
2. Political movements, think tanks, and popular forces... must carry out a comprehensive review of the experience of the PA, and whether it should be terminated, redefined, or repurposed to serve the Palestinian national project rather than the occupation.
3. Carrying out confidence-building programs between Palestinian rivals, through daily contact and discussions, and enshrining the basic rules of coexistence such as releasing freedoms, preventing political detention, and giving full rights of work, partnership, and representation according to competence and experience, rather than partisanship and factionalism...
4. Encouraging trade union and popular advocacy, and reviving the popular frameworks that are all-inclusive of Palestinian segments (workers, students, women, doctors, engineers, pharmacists...). Unified micro-frameworks could emerge, allowing Palestinians to become accustomed to resorting to elections and peaceful rotation of power, and to accommodate one another and compete only to better serve their people and cause.
5. Calling on Mahmud ‘Abbas to activate the provisional Palestinian leadership framework, and the PLO institutions, without waiting for elections to be held, (as elections are often controlled by Israel). Beginning with PLO reform as a prelude to reforming Palestinian internal structures. Indeed, the PLO is not subject to Israeli domination unlike the PA and unlike other reconciliation-related issues (the government, elections, and security forces).