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# The Palestinian National Project in the Current International/Arab Context

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I recall that in 2013, the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies hosted a conference titled "The Palestinian Cause: The Future of the Palestinian National Project," and another in 2015 titled "An Academic Symposium to Explore the Future of the Palestinian National Project." Multiple discussions on this theme have taken place within the Center and its academic network since then. Yet it is difficult to imagine a more challenging time to take up this topic than the present one. What words can offer a ray of hope on a seemingly bleak horizon? The genocidal war continues, if at a lower intensity, having morphed into a "politicide". The Annual Palestine Forum seems an opportune moment to tentatively revisit this discussion, especially amid the profound transformations the Palestinian people and their political forces are experiencing in the wake of the war and the creeping annexation of the West Bank.

I will begin by addressing the common tendency to conflate the national project with the political programme. Certainly, the latter is a key component of a national project worthy of being called a national liberation movement. Within such a framework, general principles are established and objectives are formulated, enabling the development of a strategy to achieve goals informed by concrete realities and their inherent potential. But the definition remains incomplete if it stops at the programme and does not include the programme's organizational structures and social bases. Political objectives may be outlined in a political essay or speech, but this does not make them a national project. A national project encompasses both the objectives and the forces that champion them. Crucially, these forces must be able to claim national legitimacy, which entails, at a minimum, broad popular engagement with them and support for the liberation programme they espouse.

In the Palestinian case, the regional and international context has acquired greater significance than in other national liberation movements because of its entanglement with both European colonialism in the first half of the twentieth century and the Jewish question in Europe. This was compounded by the intersection with the Arab question and the rise of independent Arab states, with their differing political systems, shifting agendas, and escalating rivalries and conflicts. Then, the special relationship between the US and Israel, the Cold War between the two poles of the global order, and American influence in the region added further complicating dimensions. Having discussed this topic many times, I will not elaborate today on the importance of the Arab and international contexts and their decisive impacts on the Palestinian national project, which encompasses both the political programme and its sociopolitical bases.

## **The Place of Armed Struggle in the Palestinian National Project**

When members of the Palestinian elite who were displaced from their homes in 1948 made it their political priority to preserve Palestinian nationhood, they eventually established an organization to represent the Palestinian national entity. At the time, Palestinians were dispersed across various countries while Egypt administered the Gaza Strip, Jordan annexed the West Bank, and approximately

150,000 Palestinians remained in Palestine within the 1948 borders – the price of their continued presence in their country being Israeli citizenship.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was created after a decade and a half of fruitless demands for the implementation of the right of return, as set forth in UN General Assembly Resolution 194. Its founding affirmed the existence of a single Palestinian entity within the context of the Arab Israeli conflict, at a time when no Arab lands other than Palestine were occupied, and when post-colonial modernizing Arab regimes were still confronting the remnants of colonial hegemony. This was also at the height of the Cold War between two global superpowers, whose opposing alliances in the Arab region deepened the fractures between ruling regimes.

Even so, the Palestinian cause enjoyed a political and cultural Arab consensus that transcended these conflicts, at least on the level of political discourse. Rival regimes boasted of their commitment to liberating Palestine while trading accusations of betraying this cause. But then, the military defeat sustained by the three Arab states directly involved in the 1967 war resulted in the occupation of the rest of Palestine, as well as territories of other Arab states. This watershed catastrophe ushered in new political champions of the Palestinian national project that came to dominate the PLO: the militant factions. The PLO's political programme did not change, but for the new leadership, armed struggle became the sole path to achieving it, and this commitment was enshrined in the Palestinian National Charter. The continuation of armed struggle in the face of defeat became a source of legitimacy for the factions' control of the PLO.

Undoubtedly, the Palestinian proponents and practitioners of armed struggle – influenced by national liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and particularly in Algeria and Vietnam – were genuinely convinced that this was the only way to liberate Palestine. We should acknowledge the genuine conviction and sincerity of those who chose this path, but we should not overlook two key factors that shaped it.

First, the Arab Israeli conflict continued after the Arab defeat, which, in turn, helped justify these factions' control over the PLO. Crucially too, Arab states rejected a political settlement dictated by Israeli military achievements. They were therefore prepared to embrace, finance, and arm the Palestinian resistance because of the primacy of the Palestinian cause for public opinion and the self-perception of these regimes and their social bases. As these regimes vied for regional leadership and their interests and alliances clashed, they took different Palestinian factions and political forces under their wings and fuelled rivalries between them. The regimes allied with the militant resistance believed that the question of war with Israel and when to wage it should not be left to the armed factions, even as they themselves used Palestinian armed action to exert pressure on other fronts. In other words, at various times, they attempted to control Palestinian decision-making and bend it to their own agendas.

Second, the armed struggle was also an arena of power conflict within the Palestinian national movement. The armed factions' political actions were initially aimed against the PLO's original

political leadership, which comprised Palestinian urban elites who, before 1967, were dependent on Arab states, and particularly Egypt. After assuming control of the PLO, the focus of the factions' political action shifted to two main spheres: 1) consolidating independent Palestinian decision-making, led by Fatah, and securing recognition of the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; and 2) competing with other factions to cement their respective roles in the armed struggle and their status and control within PLO institutions. The prevailing criteria in this competition consisted of quantitative factors, such as the number of operations carried out against Israel or the number of martyrs, rather than their cumulative achievements in the core struggle against settler colonialism or their effectiveness in advancing the programme's ultimate goal, namely, the liberation of Palestine.

The description of armed struggle as "the only way to liberate Palestine," enshrined in the Palestinian National Charter, did not lead to an effective Palestinian strategy to realize that end. Despite the prevalence of notions such as a protracted people's war, the dominant tendency was to turn to Arab states and rely on their resolve to wage war to liberate their own territories occupied in 1967.

Armed struggle has thus never been evaluated in terms of its ability to contribute to advancing a political programme. Those who list its accomplishments rarely refer to the gains made toward achieving the goal and instead speak of the preservation of Palestinian identity, the rejection of the settler-colonial reality, and the liberatory spirit it fostered. When evaluating armed action, Palestinians still often hesitate to say, "This choice failed," even when such a conclusion is supported by objective factors. Such is the aura of sanctity surrounding the subject, which is so intimately bound up with collective identity.

Memory is a core component of this identity, but memory, as you know, is one thing, and historical assessment is another. History engages with the past through records, documentation, interpretation, and a retrospective understanding from the present. Memory, on the other hand, is the residue of the past that settles in people's consciousness in the present. It is selective in what it retains and forgets; it is political and cultural, and it is powerful. Memory is enmeshed in our understanding of the self and reality, and it defies attempts to rationally evaluate history.

In any case, the Arab and international context reasserted itself. When the long-awaited war erupted in October 1973, it soon became clear that it was a necessary prelude to negotiations between Israel and Egypt over Egyptian territory occupied in 1967. After Israel and Egypt signed the Camp David Accords, the latter withdrew from the battlefield, effectively bringing the wars between Arab states and Israel to an end. The Zionist leadership grasped the significance of this bargain and was fully prepared to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt as the price for peace. After Camp David, that scenario was not repeated with any other Arab state. But no more wars erupted and no further occupied territories were returned.

## The Impact of the "Land for Peace" Process on the Palestinian National Project

After Arab efforts failed to counter the Camp David Accords, two important developments occurred. First, Arab governments grew increasingly convinced that the "land for peace" model should be applied on other fronts, including Palestine – meaning the West Bank and Gaza. Second, the Palestinian armed resistance factions were expelled from their last strongholds in lands adjacent to Palestine as the result of an Israeli strategic decision, backed by the US and facilitated by the peace agreement with Egypt. This was the declared objective of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 – an aggression staged without the camouflage of "defensive" pretexts, unlike the genocidal war unleashed on Gaza after 7 October 2023.

Although Palestinian armed forces still existed – most were relocated to Algeria and Yemen, while some armed factions remained in Syria – this war ushered in a new phase in the history of Palestinian armed struggle, whose standard bearers were the factions affiliated with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Henceforward, all direct fronts from Arab frontline states were effectively closed to the resistance. By this time, however, the armed struggle had become a *raison d'être*, rather than a means towards an end. National forces do not abandon their principles under enemy pressure. Accordingly, without either compromising on the "principle" or reassessing the armed struggle experience under the new conditions (apart from the reassessments conducted by some researchers or former faction leaders), the centre of gravity of the confrontation against Israel shifted from armed struggle outside Palestine (combined with support for militant operations inside) to peaceful mass struggle in the occupied territories. This drive culminated in the grassroots Intifada in late 1987.

The widespread support that the Intifada aroused across the Arab region and internationally coincided with transformations in the Palestinian phased programme. First, it shifted from establishing a "fighting national authority" over any liberated area to establishing a Palestinian state on any liberated area as a stage toward full liberation. It then shifted to a programme for a Palestinian state based on UN resolutions since 1947, (including, though not clearly stated, General Assembly Resolution 181), as outlined in the Declaration of the State of Palestine in Algiers in 1988. This marked a fundamental change in the Palestinian national project. It now aimed for a Palestinian state in the framework of the so-called "two-state solution." Its tools became mass struggle inside Palestine, as planned by political forces in the West Bank and Gaza with support from the PLO factions that had lost their main bases in Lebanon in 1982, after first losing their bases in Jordan in 1970.

Soon thereafter, the PLO leadership embraced what became known as the "peace process". In other words, it opted for direct negotiations following Israel's recognition of the PLO, and the amendment of key provisions of the Palestinian National Charter. Then, with the establishment of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in 1994, the transformation of the national project was complete.

This is not to suggest that the Palestinian armed struggle lacked fresh bursts of energy before this. Resurgences occurred toward the end of the First Intifada as Israeli repression intensified, and new divisions emerged within the national movement in the occupied territories. A new generation of the Palestinian chapter of the Muslim Brotherhood rose, determined to participate in the resistance against the occupation. Toward this end, they formed the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), which took up arms during the Intifada at a point when the grassroots struggle had suffered multiple crises for reasons difficult to separate from regional and international developments (such as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Gulf War, and the collapse of the socialist bloc). Aside from its resistance activities, Hamas posed a challenge to the PLO-affiliated factions. The rise of Hamas contributed to Israel's recognition of and willingness to negotiate with the PLO. After the First Intifada, the so-called village leagues and other forces that acted under the patronage of the Israeli occupation were no longer the alternative to the PLO in organizing Palestinian society; Hamas became the primary alternative.

At this point, the Palestinian project began to split into two. The first was the statehood project within the two-state solution. This project was being pursued by the PLO, whose focus had largely shifted from the diaspora to the national movement in Palestine (i.e., the West Bank and Gaza). It culminated in the Oslo Accords of 1993 and subsequent agreements, cumulatively considered stages toward establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with negotiation now the primary option. The state was no longer a stage on the road to liberation; rather, the Oslo-based Palestinian Authority had become a stage on the road to statehood, which, in turn, had become the final goal. The second project was that proposed by Hamas: armed struggle and the liberation of Palestine, described in its 1988 charter as an "unrelinquishable Islamic endowment". The Hamas charter has been superseded, for all practical purposes, by the General Principles and Policies Document of 2017.

After the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the PA, major developments occurred at the regional and international levels. Not least among these were the 11 September 2001 attacks against the US and Washington's declaration of the "war on terrorism" leading, among other things, to the war against Iraq in 2003. Israel exploited these developments to escalate from suppressing the Second Intifada to assassinating Yasser Arafat. Hamas, for its part, decided to participate in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections. After achieving an unexpected victory, it agreed to head a PA government under the Oslo framework. Such dynamics increased the weight of Palestinian domestic politics in the strategic calculations of Palestinian political forces, even if the PA was constrained by binding agreements with Israel. Washington, blinded by its pro-Israeli bias, refused to recognize the new reality and failed to grasp the significance of Hamas' move to run in elections and to accept leadership of the government of a Palestinian authority that is bound to agreements with Israel.

Ironically, once establishing a Palestinian state became the agreed-upon goal of all rival factions, there was no longer a single Palestinian national project. It had bifurcated into two sharply contrasting statehood projects, which vied even to the point of armed confrontation in 2007. This culminated in the geopolitical rift that has since manifested itself in two rival authorities: one in the West Bank

and the other in Gaza. The first remains committed to security coordination with the occupation, in accordance with the Oslo Accords. Its main political base is Fatah, which is present across the Palestinian arena. The second project is under siege in Gaza. It is primarily based on Hamas, whose influence also extends across the Palestinian arena. The PLO has effectively become a department within the Oslo-constrained PA. As such, it is unable to free itself from its security obligations to Israel and remains committed to negotiations as its sole option – without leverage. In reality, these negotiations – initially under US sponsorship and later effectively under Israeli control – stalled.

Meanwhile, Israel has continued to expand settlements and entirely reneged on its other commitments under the Oslo Accords. It has also waged several wars of aggression against Gaza, as Hamas consolidated its authority there and developed its military capacities. The Palestinian people, however, were devastated by the West Bank–Gaza schism that befell their national project, which became one of the main reasons for the marginalization of the Palestinian cause internationally.

On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority established by Hamas is much more independent than its Ramallah rival. Despite being besieged by Israel and, to a large extent, by Arab states, it has continued to embrace a spirit of resistance, which has increasingly focused on fighting the siege itself after Israel rejected all initiatives to ease it, in exchange for long-term truces. Hamas has been able to rely on its social base and on the support of a regional bloc led by Iran, known as the "Axis of Resistance." However, nothing budged. A kind of stagnation prevailed, as if Israel were intent on maintaining the status quo: suspending negotiations with and marginalizing the PA in the West Bank, while sustaining the blockade on Gaza interspersed with punitive wars of retaliation for rockets that the resistance launched from Gaza – intermittent salvos intended as reminders of the Israeli siege, whenever the world seemed about to forget that inhuman blockade.

## After Al-Aqsa Flood

In October 2023, Operation Al-Aqsa Flood erupted against the backdrop of Israel's determination to tighten its stranglehold on Gaza, expand settlement activity in the West Bank, and intensify the Judaization of Jerusalem, including al-Aqsa mosque itself. There is no need to elaborate on this Hamas operation, as much has already been said about its background, objectives, and outcomes. However, after what has happened since, it would be naïve to believe that a Palestinian national project could still be conceived on the same premises and tools. The sheer scale and brutality of the Israeli response, the complicity of the US and other world powers, the expansion of Israeli influence in the region, the decisive blows sustained by the Axis of Resistance, the damage inflicted on Hamas and its authority in Gaza, and – above all – the suffering endured by Palestinians in Gaza and then in the West Bank have radically changed the equations.

Al-Aqsa Flood was a shocking, major event. But the Israeli response at the Palestinian and regional levels turned it into both an earthquake and the beginning of a new phase. At a moment when



Israel's extremist right-wing coalition – openly bent on upending the Oslo Accords – was stepping up settlement expansion in the West Bank and intensifying the Judaization of Jerusalem, the Hamas operation suddenly sent it reeling. Stunned and deeply humiliated at having been caught off guard, it launched what it claimed was a retaliatory war with the declared aim of eliminating Hamas in Gaza. Then, with US support and international acquiescence, the war quickly escalated into a clearly comprehensive genocidal campaign intended to expel Gaza's population and/or impose a radical socio-economic-political transformation on the enclave. When expulsion plans failed, Israel shifted tack, aiming to reduce Gaza to a small population pocket preoccupied with mere survival under conditions of a war that deprives it of the basic means of sustenance, with its only lifeline contingent on severing all connection to the vision of a Palestinian national entity.

Then, before long, Israel expanded the war regionally to target the members of the Axis of Resistance, starting with Hezbollah. At the same time, the international focus shifted from achieving a just solution to the Palestinian question to calls for humanitarian aid, meeting basic needs, and, perhaps, reconstruction under international and Israeli supervision.

Since the 1973 war, which marked the end of Arab Israeli wars between states, Israel has systematically focused on the Palestinian armed resistance. It began with the PLO factions, then moved against the Lebanese resistance, and then the non-PLO Palestinian resistance factions, namely Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Most recently, as it sustained the genocide in Gaza throughout 2025, it has effectively shut off all space for the armed struggle, while Arab states remained variously sympathetic, passive, or complicit. Given Israel's military structure and its organic integration with the US, as well as the lack of any regional support for armed resistance – if not active Arab containment of such an option – no main Palestinian force remains in a position to seriously propose armed struggle as a path to liberation. This refers to strategic political choices within the Palestinian national project. It is not to suggest that the reality of occupation and its violence will not provoke resistance and violent responses.

When we replay the statements by Hamas leaders (who were assassinated during the war) on the first day of Al-Aqsa Flood and those of Hamas spokespersons in the following weeks, we hear declared objectives of the operation that are no longer mentioned today. This is because precisely the opposite has unfolded. Settlement expansion in the West Bank intensified; Arab states did not sever diplomatic relations with Israel; those without such relations came under pressure to normalize; and some Arab states even prevented their own populations from demonstrating in solidarity with Gaza.

The marginalization of the Palestinian cause was reversed by Al-Aqsa Flood, the scale of Israeli crimes, the embarrassment they caused others, and the steadfastness of Palestinian resistance for over two years – an achievement unmatched by any other resistance movement, let alone Arab states. It is also true that Israeli atrocities, the mainstream Western media's attempts to cover them up, and their exposure on social media precipitated major shifts in global public opinion, particularly in Europe and the US. Yet international engagement with the Palestinian cause since then can be classified into two categories:



The first consists of various attempts to contain a cause that had begun to galvanize international support due to the genocide. Typically, such attempts consisted of calls for an international conference to revive the two-state solution, which had been consigned to oblivion in the years preceding Al-Aqsa Flood. We might regard such proposals as positive; however, bear in mind that they did not extend to means to pressure Israel to end the genocide or include concrete steps to advance towards the goal of statehood. Instead, they tended to divert attention from the core issue – the ongoing Israeli occupation – by focussing on such demands as "reforming" the Palestinian Authority, as if poor governance were the reason Israel rejects a Palestinian state.

The flipside of this containment-oriented approach is the formation of the so-called "peace council" to oversee Gaza's administration. The obvious disparity between this US-supervised council's size and composition and Gaza's geographic and demographic reality speaks of the desire to contain the enclave and fragment the Palestinian national project. It also betrays the complete indifference to the suffering its population has endured – with the active complicity of many council members, foremost among them the US, the chief supporter of the genocide. The inclusion of an Israeli construction company owner alongside such figures as Tony Blair and Jared Kushner on the council's executive body epitomizes in the most glaring and scandalous way the nature of that council's mission.

The second category of international engagement with the Palestinian cause consists of global solidarity movements of a scale Palestinians have not seen since 1948. Not even the extraordinarily high level of global solidarity with the First Intifada – which took the form of peaceful grassroots resistance actions by an occupied people against an occupying power – reached the levels of continuity and radicalism we see today. The difference can be attributed to various factors, which I will not elaborate on here. Among them, the social media that did not exist at the time, the exponentially higher degree of brutality Israel has unleashed against Gaza today compared to the level of repression during the First Intifada, and the growing emphasis on values in the struggle against a far right that is both anti-immigrant and aligned with Zionist lobbies in Western countries. Surveys have repeatedly shown the growing aversion among young people in Western democracies toward Israel and its policies, coupled with their increasing solidarity with Palestine.

The main obstacle to the development of a protest movement against Israeli practices – specifically one modelled on the solidarity movement against apartheid South Africa – is the lack of a clear Palestinian national project to guide and sustain it after the cessation of hostilities. The current outpouring of solidarity for the Palestinian people cannot replace such a project. While it is vociferous in its opposition to the Israeli occupation and its crimes, the movement has yet to evolve into one that supports a concrete Palestinian national project. Neither the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank nor the governing authority in Gaza constitutes a collective Palestinian project. The former is preoccupied with internal power struggles and self-preservation in the face of Israeli attempts to eliminate any semblance of Palestinian control over the areas between Palestinian cities, and even over the cities themselves. Hamas, for its part, never embodied the Palestinian national project when it controlled Gaza, but then it never claimed to do so. Today, it is focused on defending its existence

against the Israeli plan to obliterate it, while assessing its own future political role. Moreover, it has recently expressed a willingness to hand over power to the US-appointed National Committee for the Administration of Gaza (NCAG), in consultation with Arab states and some Palestinian factions.

As Israel relentlessly undermined the Palestinian statehood project, it has steadily expanded settlements, firmly isolated Gaza from the West Bank, adamantly refused to recognize the Palestinian right to return, and declared war on the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Such developments have made it clearer than ever that what is being built in Palestine is a unique form of apartheid: Israeli in character, but similar to the apartheid regime in South Africa. Unlike its predecessors since 1967, the current Israeli government has explicitly stated that it will not withdraw from any portion of the territories Israel occupied in 1967, and that at most it will accept a technocratic Palestinian authority (or authorities) under Israeli sovereignty. While the proposal on the table internationally is the two-state solution, which would entail the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, the countries that officially support this solution are unwilling to take any practical steps toward achieving it. Instead, they are doing little more than paying lip service to the idea, allowing them to claim they are doing *something* in the face of the genocidal atrocities perpetrated by Israel.

Even before 7 October 2023, a resolution to the Palestinian cause had ceased to be a prerequisite for Arab normalization with Israel. The so-called "Abraham Accords" made this abundantly clear. As a result, the Palestinian state has once more been reduced to a label without substance. For Arab officialdom the core demand is that Israel accept a political process leading to such a state. Palestinians are very familiar with locutions such as "a credible process leading to..." Were the Oslo Accords not once seen as a "credible process" leading to a Palestinian state? These accords brought nearly thirty-three years of entrenching de facto realities designed to prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state.

It is important at this juncture to bear in mind a significant ongoing change in the international and regional geopolitical context. Its primary architect is the current US administration, which openly and unequivocally prioritizes power over law and favours the influence, privileges, and dictates of the powerful – and, of course, the wealthy – at the global level. It applies this logic to regional powers across the globe. Israel is clearly exploiting this new norm in its relentless pursuit to transform the Arab Levant into its sphere of influence, which it hopes to extend along the Red Sea, to the Horn of Africa, and even across the southern Mediterranean. Naturally, the outcome of this design is not a foregone conclusion. Much depends on the Arab response, whether in the form of individual acquiescence or of collective defiance by at least some Arab states. Such a response could also engage regional powers like Türkiye and Iran, which is currently facing its most serious threat since the revolution, although so far there are no signs of such cooperation. The existence and effectiveness of a Palestinian national project can be among the major factors shaping the required Arab response, even if this does not stem from a conviction in the justice of the Palestinian cause – as important as conviction is – but rather from the harm caused by Israel's self-appointment as custodian of the Arab region.

Any discussion of the Palestinian national project under the current circumstances cannot ignore the blatant reality unfolding in Palestine. I am referring to Israel's flagrant annexation of land, entrenching control over it without granting rights to the inhabitants, and to its demographic engineering of the occupied territories, transforming population centres into ghettos behind steel gates to facilitate monitoring and control.

National liberation has come to mean liberation from an entrenched apartheid regime that has proven its readiness to perpetrate acts of genocide and population transfer in order to hold on to the land without its inhabitants. Liberation from this regime could give rise to a fully sovereign Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or a democratic system based on citizenship in the land of historic Palestine. However, as of yet, no political programme or strategy exists that would lead to either of these outcomes without first espousing a national project aimed at overturning the apartheid regime in Palestine and mobilizing international solidarity forces opposed to the Israeli occupation to support this national project. Such a project would be democratic in essence and based on the values of equality, national dignity, and human rights, and would thus stand as the very antithesis of settler-colonial apartheid.

As I have said, the national project must not only advance a political objective – in this case, liberation from the Israeli apartheid regime – as a prerequisite for a just solution, but it should also address the organized socio-political forces that can carry this project forward. The challenge today lies in forming these forces. In my view, it is only a matter of time before national forces with the perspicacity to grasp what has happened and is now unfolding will recognize the need to form a political institution to unify Palestinians in the occupied territories and abroad, and to lead the struggle against the apartheid regime in Palestine. Absent this element of will, which does not arise automatically but rather is contingent on the choices of free people, the geopolitical reality in the region and internationally will never, on its own, produce anything close to a just solution to the Palestinian question.

Any process of building a national project cannot ignore the Palestinian factions. These are established political and social forces with proven track records, and their roles and experience should not be underestimated. That said, these factions need to review their policies and methods of operation, and perhaps some of them should merge. Nor should the institutions formed under the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and under Hamas in Gaza be underestimated. This even applies to NCAG, which was established by an American decree and with Palestinian approval and which would be equally mistaken if it ignored the existing administrative structures in Gaza. No society can survive for long without education and health services, productive and economic institutions, and a police force. The countries that gained independence from colonialism did not start from scratch, nor did their people live in chaos before independence. In many cases, colonial powers established institutions that were later inherited by liberation movements and post-independence governments.

Unlike other colonial powers, Israel, in its pursuit of a settler-colonial project aimed at supplanting the indigenous population, has not built institutions in the West Bank or Gaza Strip. But Palestinian society has done so, as has the Palestinian Authority. This is how life works. Political and ideological stances should not give rise to futile positions that ignore the needs of communities and the exigencies of life under occupation. Survival in this sense is a form of *sumūd* (steadfastness). But my contention with the PA does not lie here; rather, it stems from the institution's political choices, its attempts to monopolize Palestinian political representation despite its own dependence on security coordination with the Israeli occupation itself, and its efforts to subjugate the PLO to its will. Instead of attempting to strip the PLO of its substance, the PA should have subordinated itself to PLO, which should be freed from the constraints of the Oslo Accords in order to focus on mobilizing a global campaign against the apartheid regime in Palestine. The PA cannot so much as conceive of itself joining forces under a unified Palestinian national project dedicated to the struggle against Israeli apartheid, while simultaneously accepting an authority that manages the lives of the people without its security obligations.

It is possible for a non-political, quasi-municipal administration in a society under occupation to be national in character without itself embodying the Palestinian national liberation project. Conversely, the fact that the political forces that lead the liberation project do not officially control these institutions in Gaza and the West Bank frees them from any obligation towards the occupying power and spares them the task of managing the daily lives of the population. They may appreciate those who perform these tasks under occupation, and refrain from accusing them of betrayal, provided they do not cross the line by engaging in security coordination against the national liberation project. At the same time, employees in these governmental administrations may also belong to the political forces that champion the national liberation project. Indeed, this is preferable. What matters is that these political forces, as organizations and institutions affiliated with the national liberation project, should continue their struggle – as articulated by a national, democratic discourse – to dismantle the Israeli apartheid regime in Palestine. Moreover, they may choose to enter international and regional alliances without adhering to any kind of agreement with Israel, prior to the dismantling of the existing apartheid regime and before that dismantling leads to a just solution; whether it is a two state or one democratic state solution should be left to the two peoples to decide.

Undoubtedly, any future Palestinian state will benefit from the institutions currently in place. Therefore, it is vital to administer them effectively despite the occupation. It is simultaneously important to ensure they are infused with a national spirit sympathetic to the resistance and opposed to apartheid.

A comprehensive national liberation project that unites Palestinian forces and institutions both inside and outside Palestine that are committed to the struggle against Apartheid is necessary in order to lead the struggle in cooperation with the international solidarity movement and develop a constructive dynamic between the national and the civic dimensions of the struggle, or between national goals and the current exigencies.