

The Future of the Palestinian National Project

Invited speakers will take part in a two-day symposium titled “The Future of the Palestinian National Project”, to be hosted by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) in Doha on November 14 - 15, 2015. The recent developments dictate a pressing need to re-examine the present reality and future prospects for the Palestinian national project. More than 25 years have passed since the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) abandoned armed struggle and opted for a peaceful resolution that sought to end the occupation and create an independent Palestinian state. The peace process, however, has only served to deepen the status quo of occupation in the occupied Palestinian Territories, which Israel has held since 1967. In other words, the peace process has itself served to entrench and prolong the occupation, and to provide cover for the accelerated illegal confiscation of Palestinian lands and the construction of illegal Israeli settlements. The need to revisit the Palestinian national project is made more urgent by the crisis currently gripping Palestinian polity, specifically the conspicuous absence of a national agenda supported by the Palestinian grassroots and the established political factions. Additionally, these circumstances are further compounded by the political climate in the Arab world, where popular revolutions demanding liberty and justice were transformed into internecine conflicts and civil strife. Not only has the attempt to achieve a state through negotiations failed, but the Palestinian liberation movement no longer represents the multiple wings of the Palestinian body politic. In response to this dire state of despair, popular anger and disenchantment has made itself apparent in the latest uprising to erupt across Palestinian cities and villages, raising questions about which policy options are available to the Palestinian people in their bid to achieve their legitimate aspirations.

Exacerbating the present predicament of the Palestinian people is the disarray and in-fighting that plague the relationship between the two main political rivals, Fatah and Hamas, despite the nominal acceptance of both sides to form a unity government in mid-2014. The presence of both Fatah and other member factions of the PLO in the apparatus of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) has reflected negatively on these groups’ public standing and adversely affected all facets of Palestinian national life. These groups have now become implicated in the operations of an authority aspiring to replicate an as-yet non-existent state, but which, through security coordination between PNA forces and Israel, has in effect become a vehicle for the preservation of the Israeli settler-colonialist project – actions that are completely at odds with popular sentiment among Palestinians.

Within this political climate, the option of a Palestinian resistance movement seems distinctly implausible and divorced from the reality of present-day political action. The other form of Palestinian political action—negotiated settlement—has moved so far away from the mode of active resistance to the occupation that the latter is now in a position of defending its very existence; no longer is resistance a strategic path for the liberation of the Palestinian people, but rather a tactical measure for self-defense of Palestinian lives. This change is also partly due to the increased impunity with which the Israeli occupation and illegal settlers behave towards the Palestinian civilian population, forcing the latter to adopt and improvise novel means of resistance. With such drastic measures of direct action

likely to continue into the foreseeable future, Palestinian political factions must rise to the challenge of formulating a comprehensive and fully fledged political strategy for the achievement of Palestine's national aspirations.

The recent events present a good opportunity to delve into and investigate the nature and future prospects of the Palestinian national project, while keeping in mind the following three distinctive predicaments faced by the Palestinians:

- 1) The present impasse faced by the negotiations and peace process.
- 2) The transformation of the armed struggle into a struggle of self-preservation.
- 3) The impasse faced by Palestinian political factions and parties.

Participants invited to the two day-meeting are encouraged to examine the above issues in a series of panels with discussions centered on the following:

- The limited horizons of a possible two-state solution in an environment where the Palestinians' ability to build a state is severely constricted.
- The transformations impacting Palestinian armed struggle.
- The marginalization and silencing of the Palestinian Diaspora and means of responding to it.
- Strategic choices facing the Palestinian national resistance movement: individual acts of resistance and popular uprising.
- The future of the PLO and of other Palestinian national bodies.
- The Palestinian cause and strategies for the internationalization of the Palestinian struggle: the roles of the United Nations and multilateral bodies; the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement; Palestine Solidarity movements; and Palestinian civil society.
- Present-day realities of Palestinian political parties.
- Palestinian refugees and the Right to Return.
- Jerusalem as a flash point in the Arab-Israeli conflict.