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SPECIAL DOCUMENT

PALESTINIAN STRATEGIC OPTIONS: AN ATTEMPT AT ANALYSIS TO INFORM ACTION

In March 2005, a group of independent intellectuals and community leaders engaged in a roundtable discussion of the current challenges facing the Palestinian people and possible strategies for realizing Palestinian rights. This report presents a synthesis of the discussions; the views expressed do not necessarily represent a consensus.

Roundtable participants included Naseer Aruri, chancellor professor (emeritus) of political science, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth; Sami AlBanna, director of strategy and systems architecture, consultant; Phyllis Benis, fellow, New Internationalism Project, Institute for Policy Studies; George Bisbarat, professor of law, Hastings College, University of California; Jamil Dakwar, international human rights advocate; Bill Fletcher, Jr., president, TransAfrica Forum; Linab Habbab AlBanna, psychologist; Nadia Hijab, senior fellow, Institute for Palestine Studies (report editor); and David Wildman, executive officer, Human Rights Office, General Board of Global Ministries, United Methodist Church.

IN ORDER TO IDENTIFY strategic options for moving forward, a full analysis is needed of the present conditions confronting the Palestinian people and of the past decades of struggle for national liberation. Such an analysis must recognize that the Palestinians have scaled down their political aspirations four times over the past four decades: from full liberation, to a secular democratic state, to a national authority on liberated land, and finally to the two-state solution. Only the last proposal gained “traction,” but it was further diluted by the Madrid and Oslo processes. Under international law, the components of a state include territory, population, effective control over resources, and ability to enter into relations with other states. The Palestinians have compromised greatly on each of these, but still have no state.

The Palestinian body politic is fragmented, with an implosion of organizations inside and outside Palestine. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has been marginalized, while the Palestinian Authority (PA) does not represent the Palestinian refugees or exiles. Yet Palestinians everywhere remain eager to participate in shaping their future, restore the body politic, enable Palestinian refugees and exiles to reconstitute their national representation, and bring together Palestinian civil society.

Each segment of the Palestinian people is experiencing fragmentation in different ways. The majority faces a situation of loss of basic rights. The Palestinians’ civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights are violated daily, not only in the West Bank and Gaza but also in Lebanon, Iraq, and other countries. Israel’s gross violations of Palestinian rights are well known, but not enough is known about the Palestinians’ lack of rights

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in other countries. At the same time, we are aware that many Arab citizens are denied basic human rights by their own governments.

At present, the Israelis are implementing their own vision for the region, one that downsizes and “domesticates” the Palestinians under a permanent system of control. The Palestinian leadership appears powerless to prevent this. Furthermore, the present U.S. administration may be planning to impose a ministate on the Palestinians and to force them to give up the right of return as well as large parts of Jerusalem. The occupation would be “ended” or “transformed” into a different form of domination.

Activists face the following dilemma: on the one hand, the call for ending occupation without also calling for the right of return and full equality harms the Palestinian cause by giving the appearance that Palestinian demands will have been met when the occupation is ended. The focus on occupation has led to a sense that the West Bankers and Gazans are “the people” and all those on the outside are just refugees. Unlike in the case of “liberated” Iraq, Palestinian exiles were not allowed to vote in the recent Palestinian elections in the West Bank and Gaza. There is no mechanism for Palestinians outside of the West Bank and Gaza to participate in the democratic election of a national leader or to take part in the decision-making. The Palestinians in exile will continue to be marginalized until they rebuild their organizations.

On the other hand, a specific focus on occupation may help build a strong movement in the United States that highlights the role of U.S. policy in making Israel’s occupation possible. There is a need to distinguish between a vision and the building of a movement to address a specific wrong. The strength of an organization like the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation is that it is sharply focused on a “clear and present danger.” The success of a movement focused on ending the occupation could set in motion and make easier similar movements on refugees and self-determination. This kind of domino effect underscores the importance of strengthening the understanding of how the occupation is linked to other global issues.

In all cases, there is a need for a long-term view while marshalling resources in the interim to minimize the damage wrought by Israel’s policy of *fait accompli*. The challenge is to find ways to express opposition to current plans. One way is to formulate a vision for all Palestinians based on a high moral ground, backed by concrete action that garners international legitimacy and support.

Historically, there has never been a period where all three Palestinian sectors—in exile, under occupation, in Israel—have been equally involved in crafting a strategy for resistance primarily because of the differing perspectives of the various Palestinian communities. For example, the next stage could entail the creation of something called a “Palestinian state” in the Gaza Strip and on portions of the West Bank. Such a development could improve the lives of some sectors of the Palestinian people. It could stop the killing of Palestinians and reduce deprivation in the West Bank and Gaza. It could give some Palestinian refugees in Lebanon the opportunity to resettle in the occupied territories, though this may not necessarily be an option they would prefer, nor would it address their right of return to their homes. But the lives of most Palestinians would remain unchanged. The challenge therefore is to find ways to highlight the injustice and inequality of such a “peace” even while acknowledging that it may lessen the suffering of some.

Meanwhile, it should be recognized that goals that are not backed by action on other fronts—economic, legal, etc.—have no chance of being realized. The Palestinian right to self-determination has been recognized on paper for decades but nothing has been achieved because ideas are not automatically translated into political forces that make them feasible. Agreements such as Oslo did not contain a direct and clear Israeli recognition of the Palestinian right to self-determination. In this regard, some Palestinians advocate a one-state solution, but in fact there is not a single political party advancing that goal, whether in Israel, Lebanon, or the occupied territories. Indeed, in the occupied territories, no one is questioning the two-state solution, and even Hamas is planning to participate in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

UNDER OCCUPATION, IN EXILE, IN ISRAEL

Inside the occupied territories, a basic challenge is the absence of *al-jabha al-dakbiliya*—the movement that incubated and led the first intifada. It was linked to, but not led by, the PLO outside. Today, by contrast, there has been fragmentation of the party system. Palestinians used to have political parties that transcended several sectors—West Bank, Gaza, refugees, and exiles—but this is no longer the case. Hamas is now the only party able to mobilize inside and outside, underscoring the weakness of the secular democratic movement among Palestinians. Usually, strong parties constrain the leadership to be legitimate and representative, and their absence impacts other parts of society. Unions across the board have been starved of resources. Palestinian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) don't relate to a common, coherent national issue and, without having any democratic mechanisms in their organizational structure that enable them to truly represent or even reflect the will of their constituencies, they are left guessing how to represent the people they aim to serve. How does one reconstitute *al-jabha al-dakbiliya*, especially in the present circumstances where people's major concern is how to negotiate the checkpoints each day? The international movement of solidarity has a presence in the Palestinian territories, but it is not as strong as it was before Oslo.

Meanwhile, Palestinians in the occupied territories are constructing the infrastructure of a Palestinian state. For example, educators are rebuilding the education system in the West Bank and Gaza with a vision of inclusiveness of all children and of what they want Palestinians to be able to do. At this stage, Palestinians living under occupation are welcoming input from Palestinians abroad in this work, and this is an opportunity to contribute to empowerment. It is important for Palestinians abroad to support institutions and structures that defend Palestinians and their full range of rights.

Turning to the Palestinians in exile, efforts are underway to rebuild and strengthen existing channels and mechanisms of communication among exile and refugee communities. The aim of the Civitas collective research project, based at the University of Oxford, is to assess how Palestinian refugee communities living in exile in the Middle East, Europe, and further afield can strengthen civic mechanisms to enable better communication with their national representative, the PLO, and its institutions; with the host country; with the humanitarian agencies that serve them; and with other refugee communities, both inside and outside of Palestine. It is almost entirely a volunteer project run by the participating communities themselves, facilitated by a small team that

coordinates activities in order to carry forward the voices of the refugees to the relevant bodies. During a series of publicly convened debates, each community has discussed the issues concerning it and what it wants discussed within these bodies. Furthermore, each community has run its own needs-assessment exercise to determine for itself what mechanisms might be needed—for example, through strengthening existing structures such as unions and associations, through regular newsletters, delegations, monthly meetings, twinning, committees, and other means of communication—to better articulate and convey its concerns.

The series of publicly convened debates and workshops began in March 2005 and was set to continue until November 2005; it is taking place in dozens of cities in over 25 countries across the Middle East, Europe, and North and Latin America. The debates follow different models according to the local geographic, social, and political constraints. Active members of Palestinian refugee communities have taken it upon themselves to find the most efficient ways, according to their capacities and local circumstances, to reach out to the different sectors of their community in the hope of being as inclusive as possible.

During the meetings that have taken place thus far, participation has varied, ranging from 20 to up to 400 people, depending on the form of the meeting, the size of the community, and the capacity of the local organizers to reach out to the community at large. Many of the new generation have participated in the debates and are expressing their concerns.

The first issue that refugees raised was the primacy of the right of return, as well as the centrality of strengthening the institutions of their legitimate representative, the PLO. They also recommended reactivating unions and other institutional and associational mechanisms. Other ideas include enhancing existing civic structures; addressing practical issues such as obtaining Palestinian identification papers for local refugee communities in Europe as a way both to prove and to protect Palestinian identity; enacting twinning and network-building programs with Palestinian refugee communities around the world; developing radio stations and Web sites; maintaining and updating their registration with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) if they are currently residing outside UNRWA mandated areas; and organizing delegations and committees to voice concerns with all relevant bodies: the PLO, international humanitarian agencies such as the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the host country, or other refugee communities. In Lebanon alone there were over 22 meetings, and this method and principle of collective work mean the people themselves are the ones forging the political strategy.

As for Palestinians in Israel, they are more marginalized and economically hard pressed than ever and have little political weight. The High Follow-up Committee that represents Palestinian political parties, NGOs, and local councils within Israel is not reforming itself in a way that enables it to respond to the challenges that face this community. There are two major political pillars within the Palestinian community in Israel: secular democratic forces represented by the National Democratic Assembly (*al-tajammu' al-watani al-dimuqrati*) and the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (*al-jabba al-dimuqratiyya lil-salam wal-musawa*) on the one hand, and the Islamic conservative movements on the other. It is also worth noting the growing internationalist forces

within the Palestinian community that are using international political pressure in order to defend and advance the indigenous community's rights (i.e., pressuring the European Union [EU] to uphold the human rights commitments in its Association Agreement with Israel). Yet the majority of political forces representing the Palestinians in Israel are still conservative and cautious about breaking the rules of the Israeli game.

The Israeli parliament continues to pass racist and discriminatory laws that undermine the legitimacy of the Palestinian community in Israel. Furthermore, Israeli Jews are working on a constitution for the State of Israel that would give the Israeli Law of Return constitutional status. Under consideration is acknowledging some kind of symbolic cultural (instead of national) rights for Arabs, which is opposed by many in the Arab community. A proposed amendment to the election law would raise the percentage of votes needed to be elected to the Knesset, which would have a big impact on minority political parties.

There are disturbing reports of a rise in racism in Israel, institutional as well as societal, both in general and against Palestinian citizens in particular. Meanwhile, Israeli policies of cooptation and divide and rule continue. Recent sectarian clashes in the Galilee village of Magar between members of the Arab Druze and Arab Christian communities, during which Israeli police turned a blind eye to the melee, have exacerbated internal tensions within the Arab community and highlighted its leadership crisis in addressing political, social, and economic problems. On the international front, there is serious concern regarding the implications of the guarantees Bush gave in his 2004 letter to Sharon, which mentioned the need to "develop" the Negev and Galilee through the resettlement of the Gaza settlers. The victims of such "development plans" would ultimately be the Palestinians in the Galilee and the Negev (Arab Bedouins), an issue that could be brought to wider attention through the efforts of the movement in the United States supporting a just peace.

At the same time, civil society among the Palestinians in Israel is more vibrant, capable, and empowered than it was ten years ago. Groups are active around the issue of the internally displaced Palestinians, who number some 250,000 people and who in 1995 formed the Association for the Defense of the Rights of the Internally Displaced Persons in Israel. The group, which draws attention to the similarity of Israeli policies toward Palestinians in Israel and those in the occupied territories, advocates both domestically and internationally for equality, an end to racist policies including land confiscation and zoning rules, and reconciliation based on a just resolution of the Palestinian question.

Meanwhile, more Israeli Jewish academics, activists, and lawyers (especially of the younger generation) are bravely speaking out on issues of justice and equality within Israel and working with Arabs on these issues. The international movement of support could look into ways of institutionalizing those relationships.

A final note that applies to all the diverse Palestinian communities: it is clear that the history and tactics of the Palestinian struggle have not been sufficiently communicated to younger generations, who often look to other experiences for inspiration. Palestinians have a rich history that includes good examples of strategizing with a long-term perspective and vision. Palestinians need to document their best practices in the areas of strategic thinking, institution building, and community and leadership development in order to serve as a resource for new generations.

UNDERSTANDING THE INTERNATIONAL ARENA

The international movement of support includes social movements, civil society, and governments that are both allies and stumbling blocks. No government is willing to challenge the United States directly, with the possible exception of countries like South Africa, Cuba, and Brazil, but even these worry about being isolated. The United States still decides the course of the conflict, with few constraints from international law and United Nations resolutions. The UN itself is weakened, although some UN bodies are still open to civil society.

At the same time, Israel is still seen as a pariah state by many governments, especially in the global south.¹ A few governments (South Africa, Malaysia, sometimes the Nordic countries) are willing to take some political risks to challenge Israeli actions, usually in the UN context, for example, the UN general assembly resolution on the separation wall. Some of those governments are eager for domestic or international pressure by civil society in order to be able to move more forcefully on Palestine and are looking for quiet alliances with civil society forces.

The European governments need to be reminded of their obligations to a just peace, especially because over 30 percent of Israel's exports are to the EU, and there is the very clear issue of products made in Israeli settlements. European civil society is pleading with the Palestinians to push the Arab governments to push the European governments, which are allowed a free ride while the U.S. takes the heat. Arab governments must also be held accountable: they are allowed to pay lip service to the issue, while Egypt and Jordan now have growing trade relations with Israel. Governments in the south will look to the Arab governments and Arab League for leadership on the issue, and ways must be found to strengthen civil society groups in the Arab world to put pressure on their governments in the same way that European governments are being called upon to act. Ways must also be found to address the fact that countries—in Europe, the Arab world, and elsewhere—are afraid to challenge the U.S. or have acquiesced in limits on their sovereignty imposed by the U.S.

Civil society faces myriad obstacles. One is insufficient communication between groups in different countries. The International Coordinating Network on Palestine (ICNP), the UN-based consortium of civil society organizations, has no staff or money. There is a wide range of political priorities (occupation, right of return, material aid to Palestinians, solidarity with the intifada, U.S. support for Israel, etc.) leading to political and ideological clashes.² Some supporters of Palestinian rights see the UN solely as an instrument of U.S. policy, which means the global movement is not unified in demanding the primacy of the UN in Palestine diplomacy and replacement of U.S. initiatives with those of the UN. Indeed, Palestinians and their international supporters have not been able to exploit the fact that international law is squarely on their side. There is a need to focus sharply on the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

Civil society strengths include the fact that Palestine has become recognized as a central part of the global peace and justice movement and is, after the Iraq war, the issue that most galvanizes international activism. The strengthening of the global anti-war movement has reinforced the emerging global Palestine movement and is framing the issues in terms of human rights and international law, a new development for the movement.

The “dual occupations” approach of linking Palestine and Iraq, and analyzing U.S. support for Israeli occupation in the context of regional and global U.S. strategy, is providing a stronger analytical framework for much of the global movement. The occupation of Palestine and the U.S.-Israeli alliance is and can be presented as the linchpin of the U.S. policy of empire in the Middle East. The presence of Palestine activists within the World Social Forum³ has brought global justice and anticorporate movements into the work on Palestine, strengthening both movements. Some work is underway to forge links among global Palestine activists—for example, the March 2005 international “Peace in Palestine” conference held in Malaysia.

The European Coordinating Committee of NGOs on Palestine (ECCP) has institutionalized NGO input into the EU presidency. NGOs convene meetings with ministers and air local and international concerns. Still, there are major disagreements among the various Palestine support groups, with some accusing others of being too radical or not radical enough. It would be helpful to facilitate meetings and a common platform between the different groups in the ECCP.

At the January 2005 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, there was a strong and organized presence of Palestinian NGOs with a well-prepared position. A number of Europeans there were pushing for sanctions whereas the Palestinians also wanted support for boycotts and divestment; the former rely on governments, whereas the latter can be used by civil society. There was a lot of tension, but the Palestinians were able to get the boycotts and divestment agenda through in addition to sanctions.

WORKING IN THE UNITED STATES

Current trends in the movement for Palestinian human rights in the U.S. include growing interest in and work on divestment. Divestment takes the action out of the realm of government and moves it to civil society. Thus, it enables colleges, universities, and churches to act without waiting for government. Although it is still being debated, it is a mobilizing process and can have a ripple effect.

There are two main issues in lobbying for divestment within the churches: first, many are still timid on the issue, and second, their understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict often does not have much depth. For example, a church coalition visited the West Bank when Jenin was being leveled, and its leaders were among the first to go into Jenin. However, when they returned they issued a statement that was no different from any others over the last 30 years and said nothing about U.S. policy. That is indicative of a gap in organizing around this issue. Within the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) there is empathy and sympathy for the Palestinians, but more depth of analysis is needed. The Presbyterian leadership was not prepared for the backlash from Jewish and pro-Israel groups in response to their July 2004 general assembly resolution calling for the church to explore the divestment option because the resolution had come from grassroots groups. However, in the face of this backlash the top leadership has become stronger and more determined.

There is a growing momentum for divestment among churches even in the face of attacks: the World Council of Churches has called for member organizations to consider divestment. Some United Methodist local conferences are introducing resolutions, along

with increasing numbers of Protestants. Some Catholics will be exploring divestment as a strategy.

It is worth noting that divestment is at a midpoint between boycott and sanctions, because it is focused on pressuring key decision makers. Boycotts need not engage decision makers but rather the sympathy of large numbers of people. Some organizations have used boycotts very effectively. In one such example, the Council on American Islamic Relations pressured Nike to remove an Islamic symbol from their shoes: within a short period of time they had articles in the Arab press and a massive response. Another example is the boycott of Nestlé spearheaded by immigrant farm workers who developed strong support among the churches. The Palestine solidarity movement should learn from these efforts.

Going forward, the question is how to link church groups with campus groups and others. For example, within the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility there is an alliance with Jewish groups. Politically, there is considerable sympathy for Palestinians, but it is not a front burner issue. The question is how to take this sympathy and mobilize it through greater education into a voice for advocacy. One way could be to highlight the impact on the lives of Palestinian Christians and organize exchange programs and twinning arrangements between U.S. cities and Bethlehem as well as Nazareth. There is a myth that Palestinian Christians are being persecuted by Palestinian Muslims: this can be countered by highlighting the productive way in which these communities interact and pointing out that Americans have much to learn about interfaith work from our Palestinian sisters and brothers because they've been doing it for centuries.

There is a real opening in terms of dealing with Christian Zionism, since other churches criticize this ideology. Another opening is interfaith alliances, for progressive Christians to work with Muslims in the United States. There is a need to better understand and strategize around divestment and to select one area of work that will affect the balance of power and invest efforts in that. If divestment is that issue, how do we mobilize all communities around it, including the Arab community? Moreover, how does one deal with the focus on occupation versus longer-term goals? The occupation in its present form is likely to end in the next few years, and groups like the Presbyterians, which oppose only the occupation, may end their efforts to support Palestinian rights. There is a need to ensure that this does not happen.

There is also a need to think about how to reach out to other U.S. groups and communities. Palestinian and Arab Americans especially need to reach out to and learn from the African American community. Often overlooked is the fact that the Council on African Affairs was established in 1946, so the anti-apartheid movement had a strong base when it began. The council was destroyed through red baiting, but the movement was able to re-emerge on a mass level through the civil rights struggle. Malcolm X and Martin Luther King connected the struggle here with the struggle in Africa, which helped to deepen the roots of the anti-apartheid movement in the U.S. These experiences hold important lessons for the Palestine solidarity movement. Another lesson comes from the ideological diversity of the anti-apartheid movement. It did not matter whether one supported the Pan-Africanist Congress of Azania or the African National Congress, because one could identify with opposition to apartheid, which made it easy for people to join.

In terms of advancing the struggle around Palestine, the issue of Darfur needs to be addressed. Sudan has been turned into the new crusade by the right wing and Zionists as an opportunity to bash Arabs. To the extent that pro-Palestinian forces do not address Darfur, this creates a problem in the African-American community. Moreover, in response to the situation in Darfur there is a divestment movement targeting Sudan and modeled on the anti-apartheid movement.

Another question for pro-Palestinian forces to answer is the extent to which a strategy of divestment to support justice in Palestine will really make a difference. They also need to take account of—and think strategically about—the fact that a divestment movement is being organized around Darfur.

The African American experience is important for Palestinians in another way, in terms of how to organize their own communities in the U.S. For example, the Eritreans worked during the entire process of their liberation struggle to develop the most effective movement in their communities abroad. They cared about the Eritrean diaspora and it was central to their entire strategy. The Association of Eritrean Students in the U.S. was deeply rooted, and the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) had branches all over the country. Over the 30 years of struggle, the exile community raised lots of money. They consolidated the Eritreans first and then identified key allies to work with. One mistake the EPLF made was to jettison its U.S. support base when it won, and now it is paying the price. The lesson is the need for a national diaspora organization, and that without it there isn't a victory.

The diverse Palestinian groups in the U.S. can learn from these African American experiences as they strengthen their organizations and mobilize around their issues. It would be important to start by reviewing the history of organizing the Palestinian community in the U.S. and to map the Palestinian groups and communities all over the country. The aim would be to identify what these groups believe is necessary for their empowerment, including skills building in political activism; understanding the U.S. system and the resources available to them; capacities to make their voices and stories heard; and ways of joining existing forums such as the trade unions. Based on this mapping, it would be possible to facilitate an association of U.S. Palestinian communities that would help both to strengthen and empower these communities, enabling them to speak to the U.S. government and society, and to partner with other targeted and disempowered groups, such as Muslims and immigrants.

Meanwhile, if Palestinians want to work in the African American community, they should learn from what others have done. When Fidel Castro came to New York, he stayed in a hotel in Harlem and this cemented his relationship with black America. When Che Guevara came, he held meetings with key black activists. Many Palestinian and Arab leaders have come to the U.S. on numerous occasions and have ignored the African American community and its issues. It is critical that recognized leaders of the Palestinian struggle participate in and show solidarity with the African American struggle for equality and against racism.

Another important arena is the U.S. labor union movement. Currently, the Palestine question is similar to the Cuban question in American labor: a very well organized movement of anti-Castro Cubans holds the union movement hostage and frightens union leaders. The same is true around Palestine and Israel. The Jewish Labor

Committee plays a similar role with regard to Palestine/Israel, reinforcing its message through tours and arrangements with the Histadrut. It is difficult even to have a discussion.⁴

IS A RESTATEMENT OF VISION AND GOALS NECESSARY?

Many Palestinians and their supporters are asking whether there is a clear enough statement of Palestinian vision and goals to enable disparate Palestinian communities in various countries, as well as the international solidarity movement, to understand how their efforts contribute to a national agenda. The current official objective is a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and implementation of refugee rights based on UN resolutions. However, the reality is that most of the land intended for the Palestinian state is being swallowed up by Israel, and conflicting signals are being given regarding Jerusalem and the right of return. The needs and rights of the Palestinians in Israel are not even on the radar screen. How can various groups or communities help articulate a holistic and realistic Palestinian vision and goals? Holistic, in dealing with the diverse experiences of occupation, exile, and second-class citizenship; and realistic, in recognizing that a just and fair solution will need a tremendous effort to shift the balance of power and that this will take a considerable period of time.⁵

Some analysts underline the urgency of such a restatement of vision and goals to counter the Israeli-American "vision" of peace. Other analysts distinguish between vision and direction and suggest the possibility of pointing to a direction rather than crafting a vision. In fact, many movements have been built around powerful statements of a negative, for example, the anti-apartheid movement. The U.S. Declaration of Independence itself is largely a list of grievances. Perhaps the violations committed by the occupation and the segregationist nature of the Israeli state are enough of a vision of what we are fighting against that we do not need to wrestle with positive elements.

The difficulties in formulating a restatement of vision for the Palestinians include the following:

- The belief that a statement of vision has to come from the broad mass of Palestinians themselves, through a process of engagement and struggle to recover their representation and voice. Any other vision statement could only represent individual groups or political parties, or a movement to support and enable the Palestinians to fulfill their rights.
- How can one refer to Palestine and the land without espousing an increasingly discredited two-state solution and without restricting the refugees' right of return to what is now Israel? If a vision statement referred to the rights of the people and not their rights to their land, how would the Palestinian struggle differ from a struggle for civil rights? And how could one advocate Palestinian political rights grounded in international law while insisting on being agnostic regarding land and statehood? One cannot pick and choose from the body of international law.

- Could nonviolence as a strategic approach be included as part of the vision, while recognizing the right (upheld in international law) to armed struggle in a situation of military occupation as distinct from attacks on civilians?
- A vision is meaningless unless it is “actionable,” that is, unless actions can be planned to achieve it. There is an unfortunate history of empty statements and declarations that end up discrediting those who issue them. Also, history has made Palestinians sensitive to the use of specific words and why they have been included or left out, a problem that will face any group wanting to issue such a vision.

It may be worth looking at the debate between progressives and neoconservatives in the U.S. for ideas on how to move forward. U.S. progressives note that the neoconservatives have a master narrative, while progressives do not. The question is: who comes up with a master narrative for a cause or a group of people? It may not be a single person, but people need to be thinking about a master narrative that is linked to the realities of people’s lives. Implicit in the discussion of vision is this question: how does the master narrative for the Palestinian people get heard and accepted by the mainstream? If it is accepted that no master narrative is spontaneously propagated, then how does it develop, who takes those steps, and how are the landmines avoided?

FROM STRATEGIC ANALYSIS TO ACTION

The broad analysis above helps identify some areas for action outlined below, recognizing that much more work is needed to flesh out each area.

- Support the empowerment of Palestinian communities, particularly in the U.S., facilitate diaspora associations or coalitions aimed at restoring the Palestinian body politic in each place, and build their capacities to participate in struggles for justice.
- Document Palestinian successful experiences, especially in strategic thinking, and in empowering and enabling institution building, and reach out across generations to communicate the history of struggle in all fields.
- Invest in the relationship between African Americans and Arab Americans and in understanding each other’s concerns, while building a strong coalition in support of Palestinian human rights.
- Work with the churches and with interfaith alliances and others to strategize around divestment, consumer boycott, and other tactics of support to the Palestinian struggle.
- Strategize with different groups on ways to articulate the Palestinian master narrative.
- Invest in consultations between the Palestinian foreign affairs establishment and international civil society.

- Develop programs and plans that directly stimulate empowerment of Palestinian communities to shoulder their civil and human responsibilities and to form free associations and civic organizations
- Work with donors to enable understanding of the capacity needs of the Palestinians under occupation and in exile.

NOTES

1. The report predates the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in August. Israel has used the withdrawal to improve its international image, but the Gaza population remains under siege and vulnerable to attacks, and Israel is consolidating its occupation in the West Bank.

2. The ICNP July 2005 conference's endorsement of the 9 July 2005 Palestinian civil society call for boycott, divestment, and sanctions may move the work forward. See also note 5.

3. The World Social Forum was created to challenge the model for globalization set out at the annual World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. It brings hundreds of thousands of representatives of civil society organizations together at annual forums, the first of

which convened in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2001.

4. There was a split in organized labor in the U.S. in September 2005, and many of the unions that split are against the war in Iraq and may be more open to the issues of justice and national liberation of the Palestinian movement

5. The present report was produced before the Palestinian civil society call for "Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel" on 9 July 2005, an important document (reproduced as Doc. A1 in this issue of *JPS*) that sets out a clear statement of goals that address the national aspirations of the entire Palestinian people and has since been signed by over 180 major coalitions, unions, associations, and organizations in the occupied Palestinian territories, in Israel, and in exile.



Palestinian children reach their hands to Israeli peace activists detained by Israeli security forces during a solidarity rally in Hebron, 21 May 2005. (Hossam Abu Alan/AFP/Getty Images)