

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

b
i
t
t
e
r
l
e
m
o
n
s

Time to change strategy

an interview

Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj

18 August 2008

Time to change strategy

an interview with Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj

A PALESTINIAN VIEW

bitterlemons: As things stand, what are the chances of a two-state solution?

Sarraj: First we must understand the strategy of Zionist leaders and institutions. I think there is general agreement on the Zionist side not to allow for the creation of a sovereign, independent and contiguous Palestinian state. This is seen as too dangerous to Israel.

Once you recognize a sovereign state, this state could have alliances with enemies of Israel, and this is a risk Israel does not want to take. And since the Americans have decided that the question of Palestine is a domestic Israeli issue, Israel will allow partial or full autonomy, but not sovereignty.

bitterlemons: It's a no-state solution then?

Sarraj: This is the thinking. Israel, with the encroachment of its army and settlers on land that is supposed to form the basis of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, is in effect decreasing the practical likelihood of a Palestinian state emerging.

So what is left for us? Because of Palestinian divisions, we are left with Israel, a mini-state in Gaza under Hamas and a mini-state in the West Bank under Fateh. Both of these mini-states are managed by Israel, one way or another and with or without the agreement of Palestinian leaders.

This is now a serious possibility. The plan today is to work toward this kind of three-entity solution whereby Egypt and Jordan are re-introduced into the Gaza Strip and the West Bank respectively, even if security is managed, and will always be managed, solely by Israel.

bitterlemons: Are the Egyptians and Jordanians interested in such roles?

Sarraj: Both countries are in very weak positions. The Palestinian situation is an intensely emotional issue in both countries and both governments are struggling with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. They are also under pressure from Washington, pressure the US is lubricating with money, to work out some arrangement with Israel.

Both countries rely on moral and political American support so they will find it hard to go against Washington's wishes. Hence they are trying to find a role for themselves that will not appear to contradict Palestinian and Arab aims but will at the same time play out the US and Israeli game, with the help of Palestinians if possible. This is why we now see both countries engage all Palestinians, Fateh and Hamas, to see what kind of arrangements might be acceptable.

bitterlemons: What about the Palestinians in all of this?

Sarraj: The Palestinians are the last to decide on the fate of Palestine. The reality is that Israel, the neighboring countries and the US decide this question. Because of their divisions and their failures in peace and war and because of the serious structural damage that has now been incurred, Palestinians are the last to be considered to decide on the question of Palestine. Furthermore, Palestinian leaders are not taken seriously by anyone. There is of course room for them at the table, as long as they are not too obstinate.

bitterlemons: So, Palestinian aspirations for independence are dead?

Sarraj: At this moment in time, Palestinian aspirations for a sovereign state in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza are non-achievable. But this will not last forever. Israel worships power, because Israelis are paranoid about security. Power, however, is for now and tomorrow.

Israel does not consider moral power important. Israel is a state that is built on brutal power, not moral power, and as such has no future. Jimmy Carter is a moral person. He, along with many outside observers, believes that Israel's security can only be guaranteed in the long term by the creation of a Palestinian state and the fulfillment of Palestinian rights. Israel, paranoid as it is, sees the words of Carter as the words of an enemy.

So what is happening is this: the West Bank, because of Israeli violations and the theft of Palestinian land, has seen the germs of a new form of Palestinian resistance, that started in Biliin, emerge. This could really galvanize a new non-violent Palestinian movement of resistance, helped by some Israelis and internationals, to campaign for a one-state solution.

Israel has realized the danger from the demographic situation and this is why it opted to withdraw from Gaza. This also explains the Israeli policy of separation in the West Bank. If Palestinians stop using violence in favor of non-violent tactics against the occupation and campaign for a one-state solution with the help of Israelis, Jews everywhere and internationals, we can start to paint Israel as an apartheid state. Today, the world sees only an Israel threatened by terrorists. We need to correct that image, but that can only be done through no-violent means. Palestinians have historically always used the gun. But this is the last weapon we can win with.- *Published 18/8/2008 © bitterlemons.org*

Eyad Sarraj is a political commentator and the chairman of the board of the Gaza Community Mental Health Program.

<http://www.bitterlemons.org/issue/pal2.php>