

The Security Concept of the Future Palestinian State

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Palestinian Security Considerations
The Palestinian leadership has postulated its perception of its people's national, historic and religious rights to the Land of Israel, both publicly and in bilateral negotiations. However, unlike Israel, the Palestinians do not underline their security needs as a major consideration, nor do they present sweeping demands in this respect. The Palestinian leaders must realize that the future Palestinian state will encounter serious security problems, yet they have not submitted details on how they plan to deal with them. In effect, the only public attempt to present a consolidated concept on this issue has come from a handful of Palestinian academics, whose conclusions have presumably also reached the ears of the decision-makers. The Palestinian leaders themselves have so far confined themselves to the presentation of isolated elements, not a comprehensive picture, of the security problems to be dealt with by the future Palestinian state.

The reasons why the Palestinians have refrained from submitting a substantial analysis and presentation of their security problems are not completely clear. It should be noted, generally speaking, that public preoccupation with security issues is considerably less in the Arab countries than in the West and Israel,

presumably due to a lack of awareness of this need, and domestic political sensitivity in dealing with security issues. Among the Palestinians, this need is felt even less. To this day they have not developed a solid security perception of their own, and thus no such concept has guided their approach in the negotiations with Israel. They still do not have an independent state, and their governing institutions have only just begun to take shape. Thus, no national institutions have been established for the systematic handling of security issues. In addition, the Palestinians appear more preoccupied with problems regarding the actual establishment of their state, paying less attention to the future security problems it will be required to handle. Basic concepts in Palestinian security thinking, such as "armed struggle" or "the people's war" have grown obsolete and have not as yet been replaced by new concepts more suited to the current circumstances. The Palestinians may have also realized that they cannot provide a genuine military response to their security problems and are therefore relegating their modes of dealing with them to the future.

The following is intended to explore the security problems the future Palestinian state will have to handle to the best of its ability, given

the Palestinians' own concept of the ensemble of problems and their modes of dealing with them, even if these have yet to be consolidated. The point of departure of this analysis is the assumption that an independent Palestinian state will be established in the foreseeable future, conforming in general to the positions submitted by Israel and the Palestinians at the Camp David II summit. While the gaps between the sides remain substantial, the need to analyze security problems will not be particularly affected by exactly what settlement is reached on Jerusalem, where the border will lie, or how the return of the refugees is resolved. The difference lies in the establishment of a Palestinian state within the framework of agreement with Israel or unilaterally in a state of crisis between the two. It is, however, possible that even this is a short-term difference, and that reality will do its part in the long term, gradually blurring the dissimilarity.

The Palestinians' Perception of the Threat

The security concept of the future Palestinian state will be based, first and foremost, on how its leaders perceive the system of threats that face them. It seems safe to assume that the Palestinian leadership estimates that their country will be facing an existential threat from Israel for many

years. The Palestinians have already realized that the strategic balance between their future state and Israel is significantly and asymmetrically tilted in Israel's favor.

Threat perception relies on two factors: evaluating the adversary's intentions to harm the state and its interests, and evaluating its ability to implement them. In this respect, the Palestinians do not doubt that Israel has the military capacity to wipe out the Palestinian state, should it so decide and if they are prepared to pay the price. The key will, therefore, lie in the domain of Israel's intentions. The more critical and hostile the relations between the two parties become, the more acute the perception of the threat from the other side.

Recognizing Israel's superior military capability, the Palestinians are concerned by the geopolitical contours of their future state from several aspects:

- The Palestinian state will comprise two separate territorial units – the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – with Israel situated inbetween. Any future settlement on safe passage between the two will enable Israel to isolate them without any difficulty in the event of a crisis.
- If, under the agreement, certain Jewish settlements remain under Palestinian sovereignty, the Palestinians feel their presence will constitute a source of friction and an excuse for an Israeli intervention on their behalf in the event of deterioration in the area.

Palestinians furthermore fear that Jewish extremist elements among the settlers will operate against their Palestinian surroundings, individually or as a local militia. Even if no settlements remain under Palestinian sovereignty, the future border will include Israeli "panhandles" into Palestinian territory, which will be a source of future security problems.

- An Israeli military presence in the Jordan Valley – whether long-term or permanent – will exacerbate Palestinian feelings of isolation and being sandwiched between Israeli forces to the east and west, and their sense of vulnerability to Israeli intervention in their territory. The presence of Israeli forces at key points in Palestinian territory – say, for early warning purposes – could also strengthen these perceptions.

Specifically, the Palestinians perceive an Israeli threat on three levels. On the highest, existential, level is a major Israeli military invasion of the Palestinian state, aimed at reinstating Israel's rule over large parts of, or even the entire, state. Such an invasion could be envisioned in a number of scenarios: if Israel predicts an attack by an Arab country, mainly Syria or Iraq, that involves the use of Palestinian territory and considers it vital to invade the Palestinian state in order to preempt such an attack; if significant changes occur in the Palestinian state to create a threat against Israel (for instance, the establishment of an extremist regime

hostile to Israel, or a serious violation of the peace agreement); or in the event of an uncontrollable deterioration on Palestinian soil (in the wake of a series of particularly severe terrorist attacks, for example) compelling Israel to take very strong action against the Palestinian state.

In Palestinian eyes the probability of such a threat exists, but is not very high, since they assume that violation of the peace agreement will in any event require Israel to pay a heavy political and military price. The Palestinians may also assume that in light of its embroilment in Lebanon, Israel – fearing a heavy toll in lives – will be in no rush to stage a strong military intervention on Palestinian soil, and the probability that such a threat comes to pass is therefore correspondingly low.

The second level threat is a limited military move. The Palestinians calculate that Israel will make such moves, restricted by time and space, against the Palestinian state. Such steps could take the form of limited military incursions into Palestinian territory, or temporarily taking over limited parts thereof. A number of scenarios could result in such a move: Israeli military intervention in retaliation to, or prevention of, terrorist attacks; Israeli intervention in reaction to domestic changes in the Palestinian state or unrest in Jordan; or an Israeli move to aid distressed Israeli settlements, if such remain on Palestinian territory.

The third level comprises possible

expressions of force that do not include military forays into Palestinian territory. They could serve principally to exercise economic pressure on the Palestinian state, if and when Israel perceives it necessary; or as punitive, deterrent or preventive measures in form of an overland, aerial or naval blockade, exploiting the state's economic weakness and dependence on Israel.

Although the principal threat to a Palestinian state will come from Israel, it will face additional threats, albeit of a less severe nature. Two of these should be noted: the Jordanian threat and the domestic Palestinian threat.

Despite Jordan's consistent support of the Palestinian position, Palestine perceives the Jordanian regime as a potential rival, in light of Jordan's interest in the West Bank and the Palestinian interest in Jordan's population, most of whom are Palestinians. What is more, the Palestinians realize that Jordan and Israel share mutual interests in the West Bank and could join forces against the Palestinian administration in order to safeguard them. The Palestinians are not unduly troubled by a possible Jordanian action, however, they are concerned by its ability to cut them off from the east, and to hurt them politically, resulting in various foreign — Israeli, and possibly even other Arab — hands stirring the Palestinian broth.

Similar to most Third World countries, the Arab states perceive their

internal security problems and the stability of their regimes as part of the national security question. The Palestinian leadership thus also regards Islamic fundamentalism as a threat. This threat could be aggravated for two reasons: the economic situation, should it remain unfavorable and disappoint the people's expectations following their independence; and the rejection by quite a few Palestinian elements to accept the concessions made by the Palestinian leadership to reach the peace agreement with Israel.

The domestic problem has an additional aspect. The Palestinian communities in the Diaspora will identify with the Palestinian state. This will compel the Palestinian leadership to cope with harsh criticism from those sectors, particularly the residents of the refugee camps in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, who will feel that the state has abandoned them. The leaders may also be required to determine their policy vis-a-vis Palestinian groups in the two countries — the Israeli Arabs and the Palestinians in Jordan — and this policy will have an impact on the new state's already problematic relations with both.

The Palestinian Response

When the Palestinian leaders begin to structure their response to these grave security issues, they will encounter one significant problem: the Palestinian state will not be able to establish armed forces capable of standing up to Israel militarily. The Palestinian leadership

realizes that the restrictions imposed upon it by the peace agreement, and the condition of their economic and technological infrastructure, even in the distant future, will not enable the state to build a large modern army capable of withstanding an all-out military attack by Israel.

Nonetheless, the Palestinians may wish to persuade Israel to agree to the establishment of a Palestinian military force that would not threaten, but rather strengthen, Israel's security, and would serve domestic Palestinian security needs — in which Israel has a vested interest. The maximum the Palestinians propose is the chance to form a restricted army capable of dealing with limited attacks and preventing military infiltrations, as well as according the new state self-confidence, prestige, stability and the trappings of sovereignty — albeit their chances of obtaining this are extremely doubtful.

The Palestinians are aware of this limitation, and would therefore wish to come up with a comprehensive response, including military, political, economic and even social elements, which, together, would compensate for the lack of adequate military capability and provide a reasonable response to the security problems of the future state.

The paramount factor lies in the structuring of a Palestinian deterrent capability vis-a-vis Israel. The Palestinians will want to convince Israel that any military intervention in

the Palestinian state is bound to exact a heavy toll in lives. There is no need to establish a large modern army for this purpose. The Palestinians will want to stretch any military organization they establish as far as possible, based on the agreements reached in the peace settlement with Israel, which they could then pad by adding military elements beyond those specified. In any event, the military will remain small, but the Palestinians hope that it will deter Israel from attempting an incursion into their territory. The lessons of the intifada, Israel's embroilment in, and withdrawal from, Lebanon have seemingly convinced the Palestinians that such a deterrent capability is achievable. Should the deterrent fail and Israel mount a military intervention into the Palestinian state, the function of the Palestinian forces will be to intensify the losses of the invaders, including attacks on Jewish settlements, should any remain inside the Palestinian state.

The military deterrent element will also possess a bi-directional political dimension. The Palestinians will want to persuade the Arab countries, particularly Egypt, to support them in face of Israeli and other threats. They feel that the Arab world should do its part to deter Israel from making any military move on the Palestinian state by raising the price Israel would be required to pay. The Palestinians therefore expect the Arab countries to pressure the world powers to curb

Israel's actions, to threaten Israel with the severance of relations, and even to threaten it with military measures, if Israel's army intervenes in the state.

Arab support is intended to augment international backing, which has at least two elements: firstly, obtaining international guarantees, with US involvement, for the existence and security of the Palestinian state; the second factor entails the stationing of an international or UN force in the new state and on its borders. These will make it difficult for Israel to attempt any military interference. Alternately, should Israel move its forces onto Palestinian soil, it will launch a popular war to bring about international intervention aimed at pushing back the invading force and penalizing Israel. In this respect, the international intervention in Kosovo serves as an encouraging precedent for the Palestinians. The expectation of Arab and international backing, therefore, provides a further reason to establish a Palestinian military force, even if small: the force's task will be to stave off any attempted attack by the Israel Defense Forces until outside intervention on behalf of the Palestinian state is achieved.

From the Palestinian viewpoint, Arab and international support could unite to form an additional security element: an Arab-Israeli regional defense system, under which the sides will undertake to prevent the use of force and to resolve crises by peaceable means. The Palestinians feel that such

a system will strengthen the Arab sides' commitment to their cause, enhance the security of their state and contribute to deterring an attack by Israel. In their view, such a system will also add to Israel's security, thereby reducing Israeli motives to harm the security of the Palestinian state.

Conclusions

The future Palestinian state will face significant security problems, centered mainly on a potential Israeli threat, coupled with additional, less severe threats. The response the Palestinians can prepare to these threats is problematic and inadequate. On one hand, the principal military means that have aided the Palestinians so far — the armed struggle and the intifada — are no longer as available as in the past, and their use will be greatly curtailed once Palestinian independence is established. On the other hand, the Palestinian state will not maintain any significant military force, regardless of the situation, capable of preventing Israeli intervention in their state, unless they are firmly resolved to achieve this.

Under these conditions, the main Palestinian response will be to develop a deterrent force: to exact a high price from an invading military force on the one hand, and Arab backing and international guarantees, on the other. At this point the Palestinians seemingly believe that such a response will suffice in order to withstand the Israeli threat.

At the same time, this concept has numerous cracks. It leaves an important part of the response in the hands of others, who have considerations of their own that are not governed by the Palestinians, but can be influenced by Israel. While this concept could provide an adequate deterrent to the threat of a massive Israeli military intervention – a probability that is low in any event – it is doubtful that this response would be acceptable in the face of a limited military intervention, if such an intervention is considered justified in the international arena, and above all if it suffices in the event of non-military threats. It is also doubtful that this can constitute a response to security threats

by non-Israeli elements.

The best possible solution to reduce the threats against the Palestinian state is for it to maintain amicable relations with Israel. At least some of the Palestinian leaders understand this. Some of them are therefore prepared – to the best of their ability – to address Israel's security problems as part of the peace agreement, including a temporary presence of an Israeli military force on Palestinian soil – so as to reduce Israel's motive to attack and persuade it to respond to other Palestinian demands.

For Israel, such a situation would prove advantageous. Presumably, if the Palestinian state is under significant potential threat from Israel,

it will, logically at least, have a vested interest in developing good relations with Israel, if only to reduce such threats. It will, thus, presumably take pains to refrain from deliberately initiating an attack on Israel's security. It will take these steps also because of the Palestinian state's manifold dependence on Israel, the need to accord top priority to the economic development of the state, and the reasonable assumption that the state has a great deal to lose from a military confrontation with Israel. Finally, even if the Palestinians have partial answers to confrontational situations with Israel, they must clearly realize that the balance of power is tilted against them.

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