Besieging the Palestinians

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Dec 11, 2006

With the victory Hamas achieved in the Palestinian elections, Israel, the US and some Arab and European countries expressed their dismay and worries about the negotiations process. From the very beginning, these parties together with Fateh started talking about the hardships awaiting the Palestinians and the regrets they are going to express due to their "un-intelligent" choice. The wheels of democracy stopped there, and the Western campaign to spread democracy started to dwindle.

The Western ethical double standard toward democracy has been gravely criticized, and the credibility of those who teach democratic values has been going down the drain. It is now evident more than ever for the peoples in the ME that the West particularly the US wants that democracy which is tailored to their measures and interests; and once the choice of the people doesn't fit in, punishment becomes inevitable. This is the case of Palestinians.

The US and Western Europe threatened to stop financial aid to the Palestinians if Hamas wins the elections. That is what they decided immediately after the results. Now, the Palestinian budget is leveled to zero, and the governmental employees haven't been receiving their salaries for the last few months. The Arab countries have allocated a sum of $50 million a month, but the new Hamas government hasn't received any money yet. This sum isn't enough because the monthly salaries amount up to $120 million. Even if the Arab governments extend assistance, Hamas still has to look for a sum of $70 million more.

What caused the anger of the US is that Hamas doesn't accept the American conditions for making peace in the area, and it refuses to go back to the table of negotiations unless certain important issues are settled such as the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homes and property in Israel, and the complete unconditional Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967. The US used the negotiations in the ME in order to get the Arabs normalize their relations with Israel, establish with it normal diplomatic relations, and work together on what is called the prosperity in the area. The US was hoping to establish the Big ME under the leadership of Israel which is a prime player in the globalization process that the US is adopting.

The US and Europe say that they aren't punishing the Palestinians by halting the financial assistance to the Palestinian Authority. They say that they are exerting pressure on Hamas to meet two major conditions: to recognize Israel and to disarm itself and renounce resistance against the Israeli occupation. This argument is unacceptable because Hamas didn't usurp the authority, and didn't jump to the government through illegitimate means. Hamas came to power through the elections, the democratic process that the Western countries have insisted on. The Palestinians chose Hamas, and any punishment to Hamas is actually a punishment to the Palestinian people.

Hamas clings there to its program, and argues that meeting Western demands is a betrayal for the voters who chose its program. And to make for the deficits, it is making intensive contacts with the Arab countries and with Islamic countries like Iran. The problem here is that most of the Arab countries are puppets of the US, and cannot extend financial assistance to the Palestinians without the consent of Israel and the US. Three Arab countries recognize Israel among of which is Egypt, and several others are

normalizing the relations with it. But it is highly probable that Iran will provide the needed assistance. If that happens, the animosity between Hamas and the US will widen due to the tense relations between Iran and the US. Besides, Israel will not allow passage for any money donated.

Fatah hasn't been working toward overcoming the blow it suffered in the elections, but has been engaged in the international efforts to topple Hamas' government. Fateh is more of a corporation rather than a political organization, and those governmental employees who haven't been receiving their salaries are overwhelmingly Fateh. Fateh hasn't been able to assimilate the fact that it has been defeated and that political and financial power it monopolized isn't there anymore.

From the very beginning, Fateh leaders started blaming Hamas for the financial siege the Western powers are imposing on the Palestinians. They argue that Hamas is incapable of realizing the international balance of power, and unwilling to recognize realities of the international community. Although, in their private activities, they have been propagating the idea that Hamas should meet the American and the Israeli conditions, they insist in their public activities that Hamas should recognize the PLO is the sole representative of the Palestinian people, recognize the international legitimacy and the Arab initiative for solving the Palestinian question. The recognition of any of these items means the recognition of Israel. Fateh is indirectly exerting pressure on Hamas to reach that end.

Besides, Fateh has been asking the governmental employees who are overwhelmingly Fateh people to demonstrate against the inability of Hamas to provide salaries. Abbass, the head of the Palestinian Authority, and his aides have been putting obstacles to prevent Hamas from subduing the Palestinian gangsters (who are also Fateh people) who are crating chaos and insecurity in the Palestinian street. Almost, everyday, Fateh has been activitie to increase the pressure on Hamas' government. And it has been evident the Fateh leaders have collaborating with the Israelis and the Americans.

With this tension in the Palestinian street and the mounting international pressure, some Palestinian prisoners who belong to the different Palestinian organizations made an initiative that might lead to the success of the internal Palestinian dialogue that started among the Palestinian organizations including Fateh and Hamas. The head of the Authority who belongs to Fateh found in the initiative a chance to get Hamas to the recognition of Israel. He has been saying that the prisoners are the most devoted and honorable Palestinians, and their initiative must be accepted as a package. He threatened that the failure of the organizations to adopt the initiative will force him to go back to the people for a referendum on it.

The initiative contains many contradictions such as the insistence on the right of the Palestinians to resist the Israeli occupation and the acceptance of the international legitimacy which deplores the Palestinians resistance as terrorism. For Hamas, the initiative is just a document that might help in the internal Palestinian discussions, and couldn't be a sacred statement that must be adopted. Hamas has been insisting that that the initiative overrides the Palestinian rights and makes major concessions that endanger the future of the Palestinian cause. It says, for instance, that recognizing Israel strips the Palestinian refugees from their right to return to their homes inside Israel.

The Head of the Authority decided to go for the referendum although he needs legal clearance for the decision, and Hamas is arguing against. It is clear that this argument will increase the internal Palestinian tension, and the initiative of the prisoners will turn

to be a source of dismay rather than of relaxation. The days to come will witness activities from all decides on the hope to mobilize public support.