

The Palestinians and the perspective of Permanent Revolution

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Repeated attempts by Mahmoud Abbas and the Fatah leadership to restore their flagging authority amongst the Palestinian masses have only underscored the abject failure of Fatah's perspective of securing a Palestinian state through an agreement with Israel and its sponsor, the United States.

Abbas, whose presidential term has already expired, has announced that he would not stand in the elections scheduled for January 24, while his spokesmen threatened the collapse of the Palestinian Authority. He did so after being humiliated by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who publicly ditched calls for a settlement freeze that are part of the so-called Road Map for peace in the Middle East. Clinton also praised Israel for making "unprecedented" concessions in offering to limit their construction.

Abbas declared that there would be no further negotiations without a settlement freeze, with officials making clear they also wanted the US to announce that East Jerusalem will be the capital of a future Palestinian state. This met with a stony response from the Obama administration, particularly as Washington calculated that elections were unlikely given that Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, opposes them. It has since been confirmed that Abbas intends to cancel the elections altogether.

Fatah's next move was to announce it was seeking support from the Arab regimes for a unilateral declaration of independence and would then demand recognition by the United Nations Security Council. No such support was forthcoming from the various Arab despots. The US immediately ruled out recognition, as did the European Union.

Finally, Abbas told the BBC that he supported the call by senior Fatah members for a "third intifada." But he made clear that this means only an escalation of

protests against settlement construction and that Fatah will not endorse an armed struggle against Israel. Abbas stated frankly, "There is the military option, which is not realistic, and when I talk about a military solution I mean the Arab countries starting a war against Israel, and there is no Arab country ready for such a scenario. There is the armed struggle, and I am against that because it will only bring destruction and devastation to the Palestinian people, which the last war in Gaza proved."

The Palestinian masses, under Fatah's leadership, have been led into a dead end with truly tragic consequences. It is 61 years after the Naqba, when three quarters of a million Palestinians were expelled from their homes by Israeli forces and turned into exiles. It is 55 years since the movement that became Fatah began decades of struggle for a democratic and secular state of Palestine. It is 16 years since this perspective was abandoned in favour of a "two-states" solution, when the 1993 Oslo Accords were signed by Arafat and Abbas—establishing the PA supposedly as part of a five-year interim period leading to an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Yet today, the Palestinians are confined to two separate militarised ghettos surrounded by Israel and subject to repeated bloody invasions, policed by rival security services and lorded over by a corrupt bourgeois layer that has grown fabulously wealthy while the workers and peasants are denied jobs, medical treatment, decent food and even access to clean water by Tel Aviv. The "peace process," meanwhile, has been nothing but a screen behind which Israel has consolidated its control of East Jerusalem and much of the West Bank's best land, vastly expanding settlements and, in the process, dividing the PA's territories into numerous fragments by a system of

roads, military checkpoints and the infamous “Security Wall.”

This outcome represents not merely the failure of Abbas, even though he personally embodies the attempt to secure a state through an alliance with Washington that began under Oslo. There is no faction within Fatah that offers an alternative to this failed perspective. Hamas merely projects a more radical form of protest, under the guidance of its sponsors in Saudi Arabia and Iran, tied to a regressive advocacy of a religious state.

Leon Trotsky, in his theory of permanent revolution, established that in the imperialist epoch, in countries with a belated capitalist development, the bourgeoisie is incapable of achieving genuine economic and political independence from imperialism. This prognosis has been amply confirmed.

Throughout the Middle East and internationally, the living standards of the workers and peasants have been eroded while corrupt bourgeois cliques act as guardians of the existing economic and social order. The Arab regimes, even when they control vast oil riches, function within a world economy that is dominated by transnational banks and corporations. Their wealth is dependent upon the economic exploitation of the working class. And it is their fear of a challenge to their rule emerging within the working class that is the main factor in ensuring their loyalty to the imperialist world order.

For this reason, the Arab states have again and again played a despicable role in betraying the Palestinian masses. Today, they act as direct accomplices in Israel’s suppression of the Palestinians, as in the case of Egypt, or mouth platitudes while this historic crime continues.

Nothing would be changed by the addition of a Palestinian mini-state dominated by the Palestinian bourgeoisie. There can be no successful struggle by the Palestinians for their emancipation from Israeli oppression that does not take as its point of departure the forging of an independent movement of the working class in opposition to all factions of the Arab bourgeoisie throughout the Middle East.

Central to such a struggle must be a concerted effort to reach out to the Jewish working class. The Arab masses must consciously repudiate the reactionary identification of the entire Jewish people with responsibility for the crimes perpetrated by the Israeli

state.

The foundation of Israel was advanced by the Zionist movement as an answer to the terrible genocide suffered by European Jewry. Fascism, the crimes of Stalinism and finally the horrors of the Holocaust were utilised to legitimise the creation of Israel through the brutal suppression and forcible expulsion of the existing inhabitants of the region. Zionism has, ever since, acted as the major obstacle to the political development of the Jewish working class. But its domination can be overcome.

Israel is wracked by deep-going social and economic contradictions that are rooted in the vast and growing levels of inequality, unemployment and poverty. This is objectively driving the working class into conflict with the ruling elite and its military apparatus. To preserve its existence, the Israeli bourgeoisie must not only resort to ever more grotesque repression of the Palestinians, but must also mount ever more savage attacks on social conditions and democratic rights at home.

A powerful political alliance can be formed, on the basis of the common interests of Arab and Jewish workers in opposition not only to the Israeli state, but to all of the region’s bourgeois powers.

The fate of the Palestinian masses is inexorably bound with that of the working people of the entire region. It cannot be solved within the existing framework of capitalist nation states through which imperialism exerts its control. It requires the unification of the working class, Arab and Jewish alike, bringing behind it the rural poor, for the creation of a socialist federation of the Middle East. Only this can create the basis for the rational development of the region’s vital resources for the benefit of all its peoples and those of the entire world.

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