

PALESTINE IN FLUX: FROM SEARCH FOR STATE TO SEARCH FOR TACTICS

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Official Palestinian institutions and leaders have lost their moral legitimacy in the eyes of the Palestinian people who view them as ineffective or even co-opted by Israel. A new generation of grassroots activists is shifting the focus from the goal of Palestinian statehood to the pursuit of new tactics to resist the Israeli occupation. To improve the lives of Palestinians, this new moral vanguard will need to transform and revive existing Palestinian institutions or build new ones.

Changing Tactics, Uncertain Goals

- Unlike the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the existing Palestinian institutions, the grassroots Palestinian national movement no longer aims at the strategic goal of Palestinian statehood. It tends to defer questions of goals in favor of focusing on tactics that will improve the Palestinian position.
- Eschewing formal and institutional politics, new activists are focusing especially on a set of rights-based tactics designed to undermine the Israeli occupation.
- These activists are working to establish new norms of resistance, such as boycotting Israeli products, by which the old guard leaders must abide in order to retain credibility with the public.
- To avoid prolonged and chaotic violence and to formulate a new consensus on goals, Palestinians will need space and support to rebuild their hollowed-out institutions.
- International actors are limited in what they can do, but they can help aid the institution-building process.

Recommendations for the International Community

Acknowledge the realities on the ground. There is deep institutional decay and corruption in existing Palestinian institutions, an Israeli political leadership that is no longer solidly committed to a two-state solution, and disenchantment with diplomacy among both Israelis and Palestinians.

Take Palestinian institutions seriously. Treat Palestinian institutions as more than technocratic management bodies and encourage their links to grassroots constituencies and organizations.

Tolerate the revival of any national institutions—such as the Palestinian National Council—that can speak for all Palestinians. These institutions must be rebuilt in a manner that draws widely from Palestinian society and avoids making them simply tools for aging leaders and movements or divvying them up among existing factions.

Push for new elections. Pressure the Palestinian leadership to hold inclusive national and local elections in the West Bank and Gaza as well as competitive trade union, professional association, and student union elections. The representation of new and diverse voices can help revive Palestinian institutions and help Palestinians formulate a new consensus on strategic goals.

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