

# **TOWARDS NEW STRATEGIES FOR PALESTINIAN NATIONAL LIBERATION**

**Options for Achieving Palestinian Strategic Objectives in the  
Light of the Breakdown of Bilateral Negotiations**

The Palestine Strategy Group

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**The Palestine Strategy Group (PSG)** is an open and inclusive forum for strategic discussion in which Palestinians from across the social and political spectrum conduct strategic analysis of the environment of the conflict with Israel in order to strengthen and guide the Palestinian national project for liberation and independence. The PSG hopes that this paper will contribute to enriching the current national dialogue and assist Palestinian decision-makers in adopting the policies that can best serve the higher Palestinian national interest during this decisive phase of our national struggle.

The first part of the PSG's task was completed in September 2008 with the production of the report *Regaining the Initiative - Palestinian Strategic Options for Ending Israeli Occupation*. This, along with the work and meetings that preceded it, formed the basis of the second phase of the PSG's work, which has culminated in this report. It was conducted in three workshops held in Jericho and Gaza in 2010 and Istanbul in 2011. Not all members of the PSG agree with every point made, or can be expected to agree. But there was a powerful consensus in support of the broad thrust of the report, which we believe accurately reflects the will of the majority of the Palestinian people regarding their short- and long-term future to be rid of the occupation and to achieve self-determination and independence.

The starting point for this report is the near-consensus in the PSG that the option of ending the conflict with Israel through bilateral negotiations - which the Palestinian leadership has pursued for 20 years - is not available given the intransigence of the present Israeli government. There is no evidence of Israel's intention of negotiating seriously for a genuinely sovereign Palestinian state. Instead the endless 'peace process' is used as an instrument by which Israel continues to push ahead with plans for ever-expanding settlement and permanent occupation and control. Israel denies to Palestinians the very right to national self-determination on which its own claim to national statehood is based.

Now that the bilateral negotiations option has been closed, we are faced with urgent questions about the possible alternative options and strategies that the Palestinian people can adopt to achieve their legitimate goals. Fortunately, the scope of these options and alternatives has broadened since the onset of the revolutions that are continuing to shake the Arab world. By employing new methods and opening up new horizons, the Arab revolutions have provided the Palestinians with an opportunity to renew their struggle in a different regional context and on a more effective basis.

The report begins by identifying two main *strategic requirements* without which there can be no effective strategy - (a) strategic unity, now greatly enhanced by the process of reconciliation, and (b) consistent and thoroughgoing strategic thinking itself, to which we hope that this report will contribute.

A key component in this document is the preliminary analysis of *strategic scenarios* that was discussed at length in *Regaining the Initiative* (2008). Strategic scenarios are possible futures - in this case those that are acceptable and unacceptable to Palestinians. These are analysed in terms of preferred outcomes (desirability) and the capacity to achieve them (attainability). The shifting relationship between desirability and attainability defines short- and long-term strategic goals and the relationship between them.

Scenarios acceptable to many or most Palestinians are:

- (1) A fully sovereign Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital, and a just settlement that fulfils the Palestinian refugees' right to return and compensation.
- (2) A single bi-national state for Israelis and Palestinians.
- (3) A single democratic state in which all citizens are treated equally before the law.
- (4) A confederation between Jordan and an independent Palestinian state.

Scenarios not acceptable to Palestinians are:

- (5) Continuation of the status quo, with open-ended and intermittent negotiations providing cover for continuing Israeli settlement on Palestinian land and the consolidation of the occupation.
- (6) A Palestinian state with temporary borders and limited sovereignty, permanently under the effective control of Israel.
- (7) Unilateral separation by Israel with imposed borders and restrictions on the movement of Palestinians.
- (8) Any notions involving the absorption of Gaza by Egypt and the West Bank by Jordan, or other comparable arrangements.

A central strategic aim for Palestinians is emphatically to rule out scenarios (5) to (8), because the Israeli belief that these are preferable to an agreed settlement and are permanently available removes any Israeli inducement to negotiate seriously. Palestinians both can and will counter and block all four scenarios and must convey this forcefully to Israel.

The report then moves on to consider *strategic objectives*. There is virtual agreement among PSG members that scenario (1) is the immediate national strategic goal - together with the achievement of equal rights for Palestinians living in Israel and an early lifting of the siege of Gaza. Some PSG members ultimately prefer scenarios (2) or (3), but there is a readiness to unite behind (1) so long as it remains the case that it is the most feasible scenario and the one that receives the most international support. There is agreement that, at the end of the day, the final decision must be subject to a general national referendum whose outcome is accepted by all the concerned political parties and players.

But, if scenario (1) proves unattainable, and the new Palestinian strategy outlined here fails, then strategic objectives will inevitably shift accordingly to other scenarios. This is 'Plan B', which is discussed under the heading 'Plan B: What if the new strategy fails?' in the text.

The main thrust of this report is focused on *strategic options* available to Palestinians in the light of the new circumstances. Strategic options are alternative paths to strategic goals. Six main strategic options are identified by the PSG. The first option (A) (a possible return to bilateral negotiations with Israel) is not available at the moment. The next four options (B) to (E) are complementary - they link together to form the substance of the new Palestinian liberation strategy. The sixth option (F) (dissolution of the Palestinian Authority) is not yet favoured by the PSG and is not immediately feasible. But it lies at the heart of the default option in case the new strategy fails - Plan B - and as such is already integral to current strategic planning, as explained below.

### Strategic option (A): A possible return to bilateral negotiations

The first option is the reopening of genuine bilateral negotiations with Israel, closed at the moment because of the Israeli government's intransigence. What would need to happen to ensure that this option no longer continues to be a spurious cover for continuing Israeli expansion and permanent control? Essentially Israeli decision-makers would have to understand that their preferred alternative scenarios (5) to (8) above are not available, and that a genuine negotiated settlement is therefore in the best interests of Israel. The alternatives will be much worse for the security of the Israeli state. Israelis must realise that the present 'one state' outcome (Israel is the only state, and retains permanent control over mandate Palestine) is not viable and cannot be sustained. There must be a return to the original 1988 basis of the historic PLO/PNC declaration that opened up the way to bilateral negotiations in the first place.

### Strategic option (B): Rebuilding the national movement and renewing the political system

The second option is to reorder Palestinian internal affairs, rebuild the Palestinian national movement, renew the political system and develop Palestinian institutions. The Cairo reconciliation process has now opened the way for the formulation of a unified national strategy. Three main interlinked functions are identified for Palestinian governmental institutions by the PSG: (a) interim management (current administration and service-provision), (b) leader of national resistance in implementing Palestinian strategic options as outlined here, (c) embryonic provisional government of a future independent Palestinian state.

Given the failure of the Oslo plan after 1999/2000 the PSG sees the PA in its present form as hostage to foreign funding and cooperation with Israel in fulfilling role (a) and therefore as yet unfitted for roles (b) and (c). The PSG urges the removal of the current confusion between the roles of the PA and the PLO in relation to these functions.

Within overall Palestinian national strategy the chief purpose of option (B) is its link to option (C) by demonstrating that the Palestinian political system already has in place the political and legal attributes of responsible government.

### Strategic option (C): Securing Arab, regional and international support and recognition of Palestinian national goals

This option now moves centre stage in Palestinian national strategy. The PSG sees this as the main 'balancer' against Israeli military preponderance, and in the end a more potent one. Despite current turbulence and uncertainty of outcome in a number of countries, the PSG sees the recent upheavals as likely to be increasingly favourable to Palestinian aspirations. Continuing and thorough analysis of the interests and capabilities of the main players and their potential leverage in relation to Palestinian strategy, therefore, forms a centrepiece of ongoing Palestinian strategy.

Much discussion in the PSG focused on the question of seeking international recognition for a Palestinian state. The dangers of premature moves are well realised. Detailed and ongoing advice on international law is essential at every point. Nevertheless it was recognised that much headway has been made in eliciting recognition, or potential recognition, from many states. In view of disappointment with the performance of the Obama administration, emphasis is placed on other parts of the world such as Europe, Latin America and other regions. An application in September for a UN General Assembly resolution recognising a Palestinian state as a full member of the UN would

return the Palestinian issue to its origin. There was also discussion of the possibility of inviting the UNGA to refer the Palestine question to the Special Committee on Decolonisation.

#### Strategic option (D): Smart resistance

Smart resistance means an intelligent, focused and flexible use of the various sub-components of the broad strategic option of national resistance in general. These include legal action against Israel in the world's courts and boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) campaigns.

But the main emphasis in the PSG is on non-violent popular resistance, as demonstrated so powerfully in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions so far, and elsewhere in the Arab world. Palestinians have been pioneers in this area as in the first intifada 1987. But now a new chapter needs to be opened because the full force of this strategic option was only partially exploited at that time. It remains a vast and largely untapped resource waiting to be fully activated in the framework of the new Palestinian liberation strategy. The PSG is in general agreement that the scope of popular resistance needs to be broadened and reactivated on all fronts, especially where youth stand to the fore.

The PSG discussed the role of armed resistance and agreed that this is an entirely legitimate tool in international law in cases of foreign occupation. Some see armed struggle as an essential, albeit partial, 'equaliser' to Israel's military power without which Israel will continue to ignore Palestinian demands. Others - probably a majority - think that this is not the moment to emphasise the armed struggle, because it plays to Israel's strength, provides Israeli right wing elements with propaganda tools to justify the use of force, and enables the nature of the conflict to be misrepresented as a military confrontation between two antagonists rather than a clear-cut case of military occupation.

There was a strong feeling in the PSG that attacks on civilians should play no part in the new national liberation strategy as they are in clear breach of international law, which is what our Palestinian strategy mainly appeals to, and only serves to alienate international opinion.

#### Strategic option (E): Framing the issues

In parallel with the conflict on the ground, we are waging a fierce war with Israel in the fields of discourse, slogans, and legal and moral argumentation. The fifth option is to ensure that the cause of Palestinian liberation is argued out in terms of our rights-based discourse, not the Israeli/US discourse that has until recently controlled so much of the discursive terrain. The PSG calls for a high priority within Palestinian strategy to be accorded to promoting and coordinating our discourse via all channels. Recent ferment in the Arab world again demonstrates the importance of this. It includes influencing international news channels, mobilising social networks (facebook, twitter, etc), organising interviews and seminars, coordinating the work of Palestinian ambassadors, organising and mobilising Palestinian diaspora communities, using the creative arts including film, and exploiting all the other dimensions of publicity and influence made available by the communications revolution.

At the core of this effort is not just a 'Palestinian narrative' to be set beside an equivalent 'Israeli narrative', but a lived reality of 60 years of suffering and dispossession, and the undoubted universal legitimacy and justice of our cause. Great advances in the discursive struggle have been made in recent years to the point where Israeli apologists recognise the heightened international effectiveness of our efforts and are at a loss to know how to stem them.

Strategic option (F): Dissolving the Palestinian Authority and leaving Israel with direct responsibility for administering the status quo (Plan B)

This is the default option that arises in case the new Palestinian liberation strategy fails. In that eventuality would the PA linger on indefinitely as service-provider without real sovereignty, administering the occupied territories at no cost to Israel, preserving calm and security - hardly more than a local municipal authority? Although there are grave difficulties and dangers in dissolving the PA and handing back responsibility for administering the inhabitants of the occupied territories to Israel in its capacity of occupying power (as itemised below), what other honourable option would Palestinians have in that eventuality?

The PSG concluded that there would be no other option, however great the cost. If the possibility of attaining scenario (1) - an independent Palestinian state - is seen to be no longer available, then Palestinians will inevitably switch to scenarios (2) and (3) - a bi-national state, a state for all its citizens, or some variation of these. The strategic goal would no longer be self-determination for Palestinians within a separate Palestinian state, but the entire resistance effort would be poured into the demand for civic equality throughout the whole of Palestine. It would make the Palestinian struggle more akin to the fight against apartheid in South Africa, with which there are both similarities and dissimilarities. The conflict would become endless and implacable. Palestinians will never give up the struggle for their individual democratic and collective rights. The suffering of Palestinians would continue, but others would suffer, too, as radicalisation and instability increased throughout the region as a direct consequence. Should this happen, it would not just be Israel's legitimacy, but its very existence that would be under threat. And this will have been brought about by Israel itself.

This is the outcome that Israeli planners need to understand now. Scenarios (5) to (8) simply are not available. Even scenario (7) - unilateral Israeli separation including redrawing of borders and population movement - would in the end inevitably fail in the face of international outrage and never-ending Palestinian opposition as the torch of resistance is handed on from generation to generation.

The remainder of the report outlines the key points raised as a result of this analysis for further national discussion over the next six months. This includes ongoing analysis of Israeli politics and society in order to determine how best to influence friendly Jewish and Israeli opinion, and anticipate and counter hostile Israeli strategy. The full development of a new Palestinian national liberation strategy, contributed to by Palestinians from every region and constituency and commanding maximum support, is now an urgent national priority. The complex external conflict environment is changing rapidly. Our own prospective internal elections (local, legislative, presidential, PNC) are likely to be disruptive, and to tempt us to look inwards. This may distract our attention from the priority of formulating, developing and implementing the new external strategy. In response to this, therefore, the PSG intends to continue its work, hopes that as many Palestinians as possible may be inspired to participate, and suggests that a national 'strategic thinking' unit should be set up to guide and motivate the national strategic debate at this critical time.



## **INTRODUCTION**

**The Palestine Strategy Group (PSG)** is an open and inclusive forum for strategic dialogue and discussion in which Palestinians from across the social and political spectrum conduct strategic analysis of the environment of the conflict with Israel in order to strengthen and guide the Palestinian national project for liberation and independence. The PSG hopes that this paper can contribute to enriching the current national dialogue, and assist Palestinian decision-makers in adopting the policies that can best serve the higher Palestinian national interest during this decisive phase of our national struggle.

The first phase of the PSG's work was completed in September 2008 with the production of an important report titled *Regaining the Initiative – Palestinian Strategic Options for Ending the Israeli Occupation*. This, along with the work and meetings that preceded it, formed the basis of the second phase of the PSG's work which was conducted in three workshops held in Jericho and Gaza in 2010 and Istanbul in 2011.

This paper does not take on the task of formulating a new Palestinian national strategy, nor does it make any such claim. That is the responsibility of the Palestinian peoples' elected leaders. It is hoped, however, that the in-depth analysis of strategic options which it offers can contribute to the formulation of such a strategy, at a time when many of the assumptions on which Palestinian policy has so far been based have become redundant or been discredited and are no longer applicable. The paper also directly sets out recommendations about how we can move forward by replacing unworkable assumptions (or strategies) with new ones.

All members of the PSG participated in the discussions held at the three workshops and have contributed directly or indirectly to proposing and formulating the ideas in this document. While there was a powerful consensus among them in support of the broad thrust of the paper, it is important to note that this does not mean that every PSG member agrees with every idea it contains, implausible though that would have been. It can nevertheless be said with a high degree of confidence that in spirit and direction, this document reflects the will of the majority of the Palestinian people regarding their short- and long-term future: to be rid of the occupation and achieve self-determination and independence. National debate about devising the best possible strategies will naturally continue. This is vital and essential, and is to be welcomed as part of any genuinely democratic discussion of the Palestinian future. The value of the debates and their conclusions as summarised in this paper -- and perhaps the gauge of their success too -- lies in the extent to which they can contribute to the new phase of the national struggle, especially after the Palestinian reconciliation.

The starting-point of the PSG's agreed analysis of the strategic conditions and options facing the Palestinians is that the option of ending the conflict with Israel through negotiations -- which the Palestinian leadership has pursued for 20 years -- is over for the foreseeable

future. It has been ended by Israel. There is near-consensus on this within the PSG. No further evidence is needed to demonstrate that Israel has no intention of negotiating seriously about the establishment of a genuine Palestinian state on any part of historic Palestine. On the contrary, Israel's enduring strategic goal is to perpetuate the colonial-settler occupation of our land and to ensure that no genuine or sovereign Palestinian state arises even on a mere 22% of the territory of pre-1948 mandatory Palestine.

Israelis want to deny to Palestinians the very basis in religion, ethics and international law on which their own claim to statehood rests – namely, the internationally recognised collective right of peoples to a national homeland. Israel's ending of the negotiations option reaffirms to the world that it is the Palestinians who never had a negotiating partner over the course of recent years, during which Israel consolidated its occupation and settlement and did its utmost to destroy the dream of establishing an independent Palestinian state.

Now that the bilateral negotiations option has been closed, we are faced with urgent questions about the possible alternative options and strategies that the Palestinian people can adopt to achieve their legitimate goals. Fortunately, the scope of these options and alternatives has broadened since the onset of the revolutions that are continuing to shake up the Arab world. By employing new methods and opening up new horizons, the Arab revolutions have provided the Palestinians with an opportunity to renew their struggle in a different regional context and on a more effective basis. In terms of efficacy of methods, for example, we could draw on the example of the Arab revolutions to revise our own short-term methods and objectives in a manner that marginalises Israel's military might and turns it into a burden and weakness.

But we cannot take advantage of the possibilities furnished by the Arab revolutions and the transformation that is underway in the region unless we are able, first and foremost, to formulate, articulate and implement a coherent new strategy for national liberation. This must be achieved within the coming few months, by the time the current phase of the 'peace process' comes to an end and its failure is formally announced. It will require speedy and effective action.

#### **Section headings:**

- Strategic Prerequisites
- Strategic Scenarios
- Strategic Objectives
- Strategic Options
- Strategic Discussion (incorporating sub-headings: Strategic Authority; Strategic Context; Strategic Resistance; Strategic Discourse; Influencing Israeli Public Opinion; The Strategic Path and Criteria for Evaluation, Action Plan; Conclusion)

## **STRATEGIC PREREQUISITES**

These are conditions without which there can be no national strategy. The PSG identified two main prerequisites in this regard: strategic thinking and strategic unity. 'Strategic thinking' was identified as a prerequisite in its own right because of the bitter experience of the past. Palestinian policy (including military action) has for a very long time been conducted in a haphazard and uncoordinated way, often resulting in counterproductive outcomes. Although there have been signs of recent improvement, we desperately need to formulate a reasoned and coherent strategy that takes all the surrounding complexities into account but breaks with the policy of extemporised and short-sighted reactions. A strategy that is capable of taking the initiative and making maximum use of available means.

The touchstone of strategic thinking is not how theoretically ideal or even logically coherent it may be, but the extent to which it can be implemented on the ground and achieve its goals in practice. Accordingly, there need to be back-up strategies (Plans B) that are ready to be adopted and activated immediately in case the original strategy fails. To move swiftly from one strategy to another in smooth and timely fashion, we will need to call on the attributes that constitute the hallmark of strategic thinking in general: in-depth analysis, boldness, inventiveness, flexibility, speed and the element of surprise.

The second strategic prerequisite is strategic unity. This means that the entire Palestinian people need to be constantly involved, with full transparency, in the decisions that profoundly affect their future. But 'strategic unity' does not mean unanimity or complete consensus. This is virtually impossible to achieve, as there will always be legitimate disagreements about strategic goals and means.

The PSG, conscious of the distinction between strategic unity and complete unanimity, avoids becoming immersed (as a group) in internal Palestinian politics. But it stresses the importance of pursuing a long-term strategic outlook that acknowledges internal differences while not allowing them to undercut national effectiveness. The PSG's outlook is rooted in calling on all Palestinian parties and organisations to subordinate factional and partisan rivalry to the overarching imperative of formulating and implementing a unified and inclusive national strategy that can focus and inspire the entire national effort with maximum effect. This is a national duty that overrides all other considerations. All past sacrifices will be squandered in the absence of Palestinian strategic unity, and the lack of unified and clearly defined national demands would severely compromise our national cause's regional and international standing.

## **STRATEGIC SCENARIOS**

Strategic scenarios effectively represent possible futures. They build and shape strategic thinking by relating preferred and un-preferred future outcomes to the question of relative capacity to promote or block them. They relate preferred outcomes (desirability) to the capacity to achieve them (attainability), taking into account the interests and relative power of the various players. The shifting relationship between desirability and attainability defines short- and long-term strategic goals and the relationship between them.

In its 2008 report *Regaining the Initiative* the PSG set out four strategic scenarios that are relatively acceptable to Palestinians and four that are unacceptable, and then analysed the capacity to bring these about or block them that is available to the Palestinians, the Israelis and the international community. We will not repeat that discussion here, but suffice with listing the scenarios for reference before proceeding to discuss them further in this report. They are:

### **Scenarios acceptable to many or most Palestinians:**

- (1) A fully sovereign Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital, and a just settlement that fulfils the Palestinian refugees' right to return and compensation.
- (2) A single bi-national state for Israelis and Palestinians.
- (3) A single democratic state in which all citizens are treated equally before the law.
- (4) A confederation between Jordan and an independent Palestinian state – possibly even extending eventually to include Israel.

Other possibilities were also considered, including scenarios that transcend the whole concept of the nation-state itself.

### **Scenarios not acceptable to Palestinians:**

- (5) Continuation of the status quo, with open-ended and intermittent negotiations providing cover for continuing Israeli settlement on Palestinian land and the consolidation of the occupation.
- (6) A Palestinian state with temporary borders and limited sovereignty, permanently under the effective control of Israel.
- (7) Unilateral separation by Israel with imposed borders and restrictions on the movement of Palestinians.
- (8) Any notions involving the absorption of Gaza by Egypt and the West Bank by Jordan, or other comparable arrangements.

Again, other possibilities and scenarios were considered.

The conclusion of *Regaining the Initiative* (2008), after consideration of the above acceptable and unacceptable scenarios, was as follows:

**The Palestinians can counter and block all four scenarios (5) to (8), which are destructive for Palestinian rights, and must do so no matter what the cost.**

This clear and categorical position is a key element of the new Palestinian strategy, particularly in relation to Israel and the plans which it attempts to rationalise misleadingly to the outside world. There is an Israeli belief, which we must continue trying to dispel, that these scenarios are perpetually available and implementable. This belief in effect removes any Israeli inducement to negotiate seriously. A major aim of the new Palestinian strategy, therefore, is to eliminate it. We return to this in the section 'Influencing Israeli public opinion and countering Israeli strategy' below.

### **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES**

There is considerable agreement between PSG members that Palestinian strategic objectives constitute the following: to fulfil the Palestinian people's right to self-determination including the right to establish an independent state after the ending the Israeli occupation of the territories occupied in 1967; to fulfil the rights of the Palestinian refugees under UN resolutions and international laws; and to achieve equality for Palestinians inside Israel and secure their individual and collective rights. There is also the early objective of lifting the siege of Gaza. It should be taken into account that there are differing interpretations of these objectives.

There is also virtual agreement that scenario (1) -- establishing an independent state on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital and resolving the refugee issue in accordance with international law -- is the immediate national strategic goal. Some PSG members ultimately prefer scenarios (2) or (3) -- a bi-national state or a democratic state for all its citizens -- but there is a readiness to unite behind (1) so long as it remains the case that it is the most feasible scenario and the one that receives the most international support. There is agreement too that, at the end of the day, the final decision on a solution of any kind must be subject to a general national referendum whose outcome is accepted by all the concerned political parties and players.

But differences and diverse interpretations of national strategic priorities will always arise over the path required to reach the goal -- be it scenario (1) or any of the others. The new Palestinian strategy needs to reconcile these different interpretations and priorities. They are not necessarily mutually exclusive. For example, they can be accommodated as short-, medium- or long-term goals, and will shift in relation to the changing strategic environment and to alterations in the feasibility of the strategic scenarios that inform them.

For example, a 'one state' outcome might be likely to break up into 'two states', and 'two states' might turn out to be the most likely route to some kind of 'one state' outcome - for example via a variant on scenario 4 (a future federation).

The general point to which this alerts us is that we must not waste national effort on picking pointless fights over which one of these scenarios should take precedence over the others. Rather, action in favour of any of the scenarios should support, rather than weaken, the other scenarios.

In particular, if scenario (1) envisaging an independent Palestinian state in the 1967 territories were to prove unattainable, this would directly impact on the strategic desirability/attainability ratio, automatically prompting a shift to other scenarios. It is such thinking with which this paper is concerned, namely the available alternatives and options and their relative feasibility. We return to this under the heading 'Plan B: What if the new strategy fails?' below.

### **STRATEGIC OPTIONS**

We have now reached the question that forms the central topic of the report. What are the main strategic options available to the Palestinians in formulating the new Palestinian national liberation strategy to deliver the strategic objectives outlined above?

Strategic options link strategic objectives to strategic means and to the tactics employed in implementing the new strategy. Strategic options are alternative modes of action, like different paths to a goal. The paths need not be mutually exclusive (we may need to go down several of them at the same time), but we may sometimes arrive at a fork in the road where we need to make a specific strategic choice.

Six strategic options will be discussed in detail below, most of which are complementary - they need to be implemented together.

Option (A): A possible return to final-status negotiations.

Option (B): Rebuilding the national movement and renewing the political system.

Option (C): Eliciting further Arab, and regional and international support (multilateral diplomacy)

Option (D): Smart resistance

Option (E): Framing the issues.

Option (F): Dissolving the Palestinian Authority (Plan B)

The first option (possible return to negotiations) is not available at present, as noted, whereas the second to fifth options (B to E) fit together and constitute the core of the new national strategy. The sixth option (dissolution of the PA) should not be ruled out. It is not yet favoured by the PSG, nor is it immediately feasible. But it could become a major option if

the present national strategy fails (see the section 'Plan B: What if the new strategy fails?' below)

**(A) First Option: A possible return to bilateral negotiations**

The first strategic option is bilateral negotiations with Israel. But this is no longer on the table, having been repeatedly foiled by Israel. A new national liberation strategy must therefore be reconstructed on the basis of the 1988 peace principles and declaration of independence, after evaluating the twenty-year period of intermittent bilateral negotiations since 1991. This then defines our answer to the question: can the strategic option of bilateral negotiation be reopened at some point in the future? Any return to negotiations must be conditioned on, and held within the framework of, the 1988 principles and declaration. (The terms for reconsidering this option are clarified under the 'influencing Israeli public opinion and countering Israeli strategy' below).

For this to happen, Israel will finally have to understand that its preferred scenarios -- (5) to (8) in *Regaining the Initiative* (see above) - are no longer available, and that the alternatives to a return to genuine bilateral negotiations will be, not better, but worse for Israel. Israelis will have to realise that the present 'one state' outcome (Israel is the only state, and retains permanent control over mandate Palestine) is not viable and cannot be sustained, and that the Palestinian people, with the full support and sympathy of the Arab and Islamic worlds and the broader international community, will never abandon their insistence on their right to full national self-determination and independence for the State of Palestine.

The longer Israel persists in flouting international law in this way through forcible occupation, the deeper its international isolation and loss of legitimacy will become. How can Israel demand legitimacy for itself while at the same time denying it to others? Israel is now on course to becoming an international pariah like the apartheid regime in South Africa. It stands to lose the image it has cultivated of itself in Western countries in particular. In addition, as time goes on, demography will increasingly tilt the strategic balance against Israel. That process will hopefully be reinforced by the changes in Egypt and the Arab world too. Israel's military preponderance will no longer constitute a major obstacle, but rather will lose much of its relevance. Any pretence that Israel is the 'only democracy in the region' will be discredited by its serial suppression of popular democratic demonstrations against the rule of its illegal occupation.

Progressive de-legitimisation will have been brought about by Israel itself. Eventually, Israelis will come to recognise the increasing foolishness of their governments, and will discover that Israel missed the opportunity, or opportunities, to resolve the conflict before the balance of power tilted against it.

**(B) Second Option: Rebuilding the national movement and renewing the political system**

The second option is to reorder Palestinian internal affairs, rebuild the Palestinian national movement, renew the political system and develop Palestinian institutions. A strengthened internal structure is a basic imperative of strategic effectiveness (meaning that this must be achieved in parallel with the other options, not as an alternative to them).

It is important for any institutional development programme to be part of a strategy for rebuilding the national movement and renewing the political system, so that the two processes work in harmony rather than clashing, as has been the case with the institution-building experiment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in recent years. Despite creditable achievements in some areas, which earned the Palestinians international standing and respect, this was done at the expense of developing a unified strategy of national liberation. Institution-building was accompanied by a massive bolstering of the security agencies, both in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, to the detriment of individual liberties, democratic governance and the integrity of the political system. More importantly, none of this was closely linked to any clear vision for ending the occupation and achieving liberation.

The prevailing PSG view is that, given the failure of the Oslo plan after 1999/2000, the PA in its present form has to a large extent become hostage to foreign funding, and to the cooperation with Israel which enables it to provide services to a majority of Palestinians. This has in turn constrained its ability to undertake the task of rebuilding the national movement or to lead a unified national strategy for national liberation, let alone to coordinate national resistance.

It has become incumbent on the PA to become a Palestinian Resistance Authority while at the same time playing the role of future government of the Palestinians. For this to happen, the Authority, its institutions and its development programmes need to be integral and essential components of any unified and effective national strategy (see the section 'Strategic Authority' below).

Abandoning the futile negotiations strategy would mean the Palestinians would be rid of the Quartet's pressure and its unjust preconditions. This should free up Palestinian institutions to play a more independent role, despite the continued reliance of some 170,000 Palestinians and their families on foreign aid for their livelihoods. The PSG call is for a radical renewal of Palestinian institutions to make them more democratic and truly representative of the aspirations of all the Palestinian people - particularly Palestinian youth. Emphasis must be placed on a greater role for young people in the process of internal renewal, especially in the wake of the Arab revolutions, the youth-led protests in the West Bank and Gaza Strip aimed against undemocratic and unrepresentative Palestinian institutions and leaderships, and the imaginative new protests devised by young people along the borders with Israel on the anniversaries of the *Nakba* and the 1967 war.

The PSG view is that, despite well-known difficulties, the best option for overall institutional renewal is reform of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and the establishment of an



elected Palestine National Council (PNC) - not least because of the continuity of these two institutions over the decades and their inherited legitimacy among most Palestinians, including those in the diaspora.

New presidential elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as well as PNC elections would also be a key here. Reform of the PA, and institutional rapprochement with Gaza, can then be effected within this overall framework. The PSG agrees that this is in the end dependent on the building of trust among Palestinians of all political, social and religious backgrounds and persuasions. The PSG views the Palestinian reconciliation as an imperative step in this regard. It is essential to implement and sustain it in order to build that trust and proceed towards self-renewal and putting our house in order. This discussion is carried further in the section 'strategic authority' below.

This point is being re-emphasised because strengthening the internal front is vital and conditional for Palestinian strategy. It is the foundation on which any effective internal and external strategy must be built. In particular, the third strategic option (C) – eliciting more Arab, regional and international support for the Palestinian cause - is posited on a clear demonstration that we are already fully ready internally to assume the functions of responsible government and administer our state. But this is inhibited by a combination of the occupation itself and international pressure and preconditions. In practice, we face a 'catch-22' (which also presages a future clash with the Quartet's preconditions). We are required to be ready for independence while being subjected to an occupation that prevents us from reaching that state of readiness; yet we are told that any progress towards independence is conditional on us achieving it.

**(C) Third Option: Securing additional genuine Arab, regional and international support and recognition of Palestinian national goals (multilateral diplomacy)**

The third strategic option is to elicit additional Arab, regional and international support for the attainment of Palestinian objectives. This option is now moving to centre stage because of the transformed strategic context, which seems set to change rapidly and, despite initial risks, in a direction favourable to us. A central aim of our new strategy, therefore, is to transfer much of our effort to gaining ever-greater momentum on the regional and international stages.

In terms of power, the PSG sees Arab, regional and international support as the main 'balancer' or 'equaliser' against Israeli military preponderance. Effective Arab backing and regional and international support are of central importance, and international legitimacy is in the long run a more potent force than military power. The crucial battle-ground for the foreseeable future is international law and collective and individual human rights. The Palestinians' right to self-determination is individual as well as collective, and they are entitled to exercise their individual rights, too, particularly those pertaining to the refugees. Here there is huge support for the Palestinian cause in Arab and international civil society, which must be mobilised to put maximum pressure on Arab governments - particularly in Egypt.

Arab countries may be preoccupied with their internal struggles at the moment, but in the medium term will come down in the scales on our side. This was clearly evident in the rapid change in Egyptian foreign policy towards Israel and the opening of the Rafah crossing. In parallel there has been a rapid increase in international, support, notably from rights groups and NGOs, regarding recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, coupled with increasing criticism of Israel's current settlement building as a violation of international law and an extreme provocation. We must do our utmost to make major progress on the arena of world public opinion. It has become a serious worry for Israeli strategists who are at a loss to know how to counter this accelerating trend of support for our rights.

Analysis of the interests and relative leverage of the different regional and international players (states, regional organisations, UN) in relation to Palestinian strategic objectives forms the main empirical substance of this option, and will be considered further below in the section 'strategic context'.

Also within this framework, a few words are required on the specific idea of obtaining international recognition of a Palestinian state and the other strategic aims as defined under scenario (1) above. Here we focus on the chief link to strategic option (B). A key role of option (B) within the overall strategy for national liberation is to demonstrate that the Palestinian political system and government already have in place the political and legal attributes of responsible government, and thus qualify for compliance with international benchmarks for formal recognition of a Palestinian state. This has been acknowledged by the World Bank and several other international institutions and actors. We must highlight this qualified and compliant status, so that it becomes increasingly apparent that the main impediment to exercising it on the ground is the continuing Israeli occupation. This will increase international pressure on Israel and undermine the spurious Israeli argument that Palestinians are not ready for statehood.

We must show unambiguously that it is the Israeli military and colonial occupation that is preventing Palestinians from exercising effective sovereignty and control throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip and thus blocking the establishment of a state. But we should bear in mind that it is unacceptable in the first place for our readiness to be a precondition of statehood. The right to self-determination should not be conditioned on capacity to run a state. We recently saw the world recognise the state of South Sudan without laying down any preconditions regarding the southerners' readiness to establish or administer a state.

The PSG undertook careful discussion of the question of international recognition, and there were strong warnings that premature attempts to secure recognition might do more harm than good if this merely meant acknowledgement of existing PA areas of control (only 42% of 22%), thus freezing the current situation.

The PSG also emphasised how important it is to take highly detailed advice on international law and procedure throughout as we pick our way through this minefield. This is a key specific recommendation in the section 'strategic discourse' below. International law has two facets, political and ethical, and we must invest in both. We must be aware that our enemy will try to impede and entangle us at every turn. For example, it must be made clear

that our demand for recognition does not imply acceptance of any alteration to the 1967 border, and that approval of any such change is the prerogative of an independent sovereign Palestinian state. The original 1988 declaration was made at a time when the PLO and PNC had sufficient authority to speak for the Palestinian people. No such authority exists today. Neither the PA nor the PLO are in a position to take new decisions of similar magnitude. So it must be clearly understood that all negotiated details on this and other issues remain provisional until the new state is fully established.

Only an already existing Palestinian state with a constitution and a government elected through democratic mechanisms is entitled to take and ratify major decisions on matters of supreme national interest. One of the main sources of the imbalances that bedeviled the long years of negotiation was the asymmetry in negotiations between an existing state and an occupied entity (not yet a state). From now on, therefore, the 1988 principles enshrined in the peace initiative and independence document must be the basis for any future bilateral negotiations.

Within the wider context of eliciting regional and international support in general, components that could make up the specific option of seeking international recognition for Palestinian sovereignty and independence that have been discussed by PSG members include the following:

**(i) Recognition of a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders by individual states and international organisations:**

This process is already underway and considerable progress has been made. There was a prevalent view in the PSG linking the quest to gain international recognition for Palestinian statehood with Palestinian disappointment in the Obama administration and its failure to exert pressure on Israel. It would therefore make sense to shift our focus to other parts of the world, such as Europe, Latin America and other regions where a succession of countries have been announcing their recognition of Palestine. Others held the view that the US would never voluntarily abandon its leading role in the conflict, but will attempt to reassert it via the Quartet or through unilateral initiatives in the months ahead (see conclusion below).

**(ii) A United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution recognising the Palestinian state as a full member of the UN:**

This possibility is subject to permanent member veto, but may still be worth pursuing. It will require concerted expert preparation and lobbying via media campaigns and high-level visits to the capitals represented in the UNSC.

**(iii) A UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution recognising the Palestinian state as a full member of the UN:**

This avenue returns the Palestinian problem to its origin. It invokes UNGA Resolution 377 (Uniting for Peace, November 1953), which has already been used in relation to Palestine. Again, careful consideration of implications and preparation would be necessary, combined with lobbying of the party convening the emergency session.

**(iv) International trusteeship over the Palestinian territories:**

This would involve inviting the UNGA to refer the Palestine Question to the Special Committee on Decolonisation. It is important here to stress that what is at issue is not just the Israeli military occupation, which brings the matter under the Fourth Geneva Convention among other legal instruments, but also the active colonisation embodied in continuing illegal settlement on Palestinian land. We face both things at once: military occupation and colonisation. The first article of GAR 1514 (December 1960), which opened the way to the setting up of the Decolonisation Committee in 1962, states: 'The subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation constitutes a denial of fundamental human rights, is contrary to the Charter of the United Nations and is an impediment to the promotion of world peace and co-operation'. The danger here is that without clear demarcation of territory Israel could use this to exclude Jerusalem, the Jordan valley and no-man's-lands under exclusive Israeli control.

All of these sub-options need to be worked out in detail, step by step, with the pros and cons of each considered at every stage.

**(D) Fourth Option: Smart resistance**

'Smart resistance' is a term coined in the earlier PSG report *Regaining the Initiative* (2008) (in that document it was described as a 'strategic means' rather than a strategic option). 'Smart resistance' refers to the intelligent, carefully focused, and flexible use of the various sub-components that constitute the broad strategic option of national resistance in general, so that these operate together within a unified national strategy, and are only taken up or dropped when they are seen to be effective or ineffective/counter-productive in relation to the national liberation effort as a whole. There is inevitably legitimate controversy here and room for further inclusive Palestinian discussion.

Smart resistance includes a panoply of sub-options such as taking legal action against Israel in the world's courts and BDS (boycott, divestment, sanctions) campaigns. PSG members consider this to be entirely legitimate and generally effective in putting pressure on Israel until it fulfils Palestinian human rights as set out in the 2005 Civil Society Call. Boycott action must go beyond the PA approach of banning settlement products, because the PA's hands are tied by the Paris Protocol and its freedom of action in this area is constrained.

Non-violent civil popular resistance occupies a key place in smart resistance and can be astonishingly effective. Its power and efficacy in the face of repression and security brutality

– curbed by the peaceful nature of the protests – was demonstrated by the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and elsewhere in the Arab world. The PSG held in-depth discussions on a strategy of non-violent civil popular resistance as one of the modes of resistance which international law sanctions in all its forms – including armed struggle - for peoples subject to occupation.

The PSG's discussions reflected a general feeling among the Palestinian public that the forms of resistance to be adopted at the current stage should depend on prevailing circumstances, and on the potential gains to be made, rather than dogmatically adhering to one form of resistance regardless of conditions.

Regarding popular resistance specifically, it was recalled that the first Palestinian intifada was a pioneering experience in this area, in which the ingenuity of collective public action put the Palestinian cause back on the international agenda. Similar peaceful popular mass action made a success of the Arab revolutions and brought down dictators. Nevertheless, the full force of this strategic option was only partially exploited even in the first intifada, and remains a vast and largely untapped resource waiting to be fully employed and activated in the framework of the new Palestinian liberation strategy.

There was a shared feeling that the scope of popular resistance needs to be broadened and reactivated on all fronts, especially where youth stand at the fore. The young people of Palestine lead the popular resistance on the ground in a variety of areas, and are the liberation struggle's strategic reservoir for the period to come, whether inside Palestine or in Israel or the diaspora. Activating the enormous energy of Palestinian youth is key to activating the resources of the Palestinian people as a whole and imbuing them with new spirit at every level – popular, diplomatic, media, civil society, social networks and party organisations. An inclusive new popular vitality (inspired by the first intifada and the indomitable spirit of the Arab revolutions) would generate the force needed to drive the new national liberation strategy through to the eventual attainment of our national goals.

The PSG discussed the role of armed resistance in relation to all of this. There is no dispute that armed resistance is a completely legitimate tool in international law in cases of foreign occupation, which naturally spawns resistance and movements of national liberation against it. Many in the PSG see armed struggle as an essential, albeit partial, 'equaliser' to Israel's military power, and argue that Israel will never make any concessions unless the military imbalance is corrected (examples cited include the October 1973 war, Hizbullah's military action in South Lebanon which led to the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, etc.). Others - probably a majority - think that this is not the moment to emphasise the armed struggle, because it plays to Israel's strength, provides Israeli right wing elements with propaganda tools to justify the use of force, and enables the nature of the conflict to be misrepresented as a military confrontation between two antagonists rather than a clear-cut case of military occupation.

Smart resistance strategies must consider what position to take on attacks against civilians. There was a strong feeling in the PSG that attacks on civilians should play no part in the new national liberation strategy as they are in clear breach of international law, which is what our Palestinian strategy mainly appeals to. Previous experience has shown that attacks on

civilians have alienated international opinion and led to the legitimate Palestinian struggle being branded as 'terrorism'.

### **(E) Fifth Option: Framing the issues**

This relates to the need to enhance and strengthen our capabilities in campaigning to defend Palestinian rights on the international stage and counter Israel's attempts to deny them. We need to develop a persuasive rights-based discourse that expands the circle of our supporters and sympathisers, and mechanisms to give expression to that discourse. The Arab revolutions showed us the massive potential gains to be made when raising the right slogans (demanding rights, dignity, freedom, democracy) is combined with employing the right means (peaceful popular resistance, mass rather than elite action, television and social media). We know that in parallel with the vicious conflict on the ground, we are waging a fierce war with Israel in the fields of discourse, slogans, and legal and moral argumentation. Whoever succeeds in framing and defining the language in which the issues are discussed goes a long way towards determining the final outcome of the struggle itself.

In the past, Israel and its allies in the US have controlled much of the discursive terrain that determines how the conflict is framed and portrayed internationally. But things are now changing, and we must work assiduously to ensure that our arguments, definitions and discourse - the discourse of national self-determination, of liberation, of emancipation from occupation, of individual and collective rights, of international law - prevail in the debate about our national destiny.

The high priority that must be accorded to media, mobilisation and legal work was a focus of the PSG's discussions. On the media front, it emphasised the importance of influencing international news channels, mobilising the social media (facebook, twitter etc.), organising interviews and seminars, coordinating the work of Palestinian ambassadors, organising and mobilising Palestinian diaspora communities, using the creative arts including film, and exploiting all the other dimensions of publicity and influence made available by the communications revolution. On the legal front, a major PSG recommendation is that Palestinian policy makers should set up a permanent panel of experts in international law and institutional procedure to give continuous ongoing analysis and advice, for example on the whole issue of seeking international recognition, as outlined above under strategic option (C).

But it must all the time be made clear throughout that this is not just a public relations exercise, a display of media and rhetorical skills or a contest akin to a professional rivalry with the Israelis. It is a matter of our individual and collective national destiny. Underneath the battle of discourses lie undeniable *facts* of forcible dispossession, and incontrovertible *principles* of collective and individual rights.

The discursive struggle we are waging is not between two symmetric and equally legitimate 'narratives', Israeli and Palestinian. There is one narrative, one occupier and one people under occupation. This is what we want our Palestinian discourse to reflect.

We must avoid having our discourse labelled as a mere subjective 'Palestinian view'. At its heart is a human dimension which resonates with the yearning for freedom and rejection of injustice shared by people everywhere and of whatever race or creed. It speaks of a bitterly lived reality endured by the Palestinian people for more than 60 years. Yet regrettably, the details and history of that injustice still remain unknown in most of the world. For example, many are unaware of the simple fact that '1967 borders' means an Israeli state on 78% of historic Palestine, or that 'Israeli settlements' means progressive colonisation of the remaining 22% to the point where an independent Palestinian state becomes impossible. As many of us can confirm from personal experience, when these basic facts are made known, the reaction among very large sections of the international public is shock which quickly turns into support.

It should be one of our main preoccupations to consider how best to get our message across and convey the justice of our cause to as broad a segment as possible of international public opinion, and thus gain its support.

**(F) Sixth Option: Dissolving the Palestinian Authority and saddling Israel with direct responsibility for administering the status quo (Plan B)**

This is the default option that arises in case the new Palestine liberation strategy fails. It stems from the PSG's appreciation of the difficulties involved in transforming the PA into a PRA (Palestine Resistance Authority) or into an embryonic transitional government for a future independent Palestinian state. If this cannot be achieved, some big and tough questions will need to be answered without hesitation. Can we accept the option of indefinite continuation of the status quo, in which the PA functions as a service-provider without real sovereignty? What if the new strategy with its various components fails? In that case would the PA simply carry on administering the occupied territories and preserving calm and security at no real cost to Israel? And until when? Would it linger on as little more than a local municipal authority?

In light of these and other questions, we reach the sixth strategic option - dissolving the PA and handing back responsibility for administering the inhabitants of the occupied territories to Israel in its capacity as the occupying power. A drastic move of this nature would entail serious difficulties. But it would take the issue back to basics, and expose the fraudulence of the protracted 'peace process' which Israel has exploited to consolidate its occupation and control. At the heart of the conflict lie a military occupation and a colonial settlement scheme that are preventing the fulfilment of the Palestinian dream of sovereignty and an independent state. Returning administrative responsibility to the Israeli occupation which exercises actual power will put an end to the travesty under which Israel maintains and consolidates its occupation but it is relieved of its daily burdens. Because scenario (1) – an independent Palestinian state – would now be defunct for the foreseeable future, we would replace it with scenarios (2) or (3) – a bi-national state, a state for all its citizens, or some variation of these. This is Plan B.

The implications of Plan B are extensive and complex. It could represent a radical change in our national strategy, in which even the PLO/PNC 1988 declaration of independence

becomes redundant. If we are compelled actually to resort to this plan, we should realise that the 1949/67 border would retain no significance. The national struggle would shift into a struggle for equality of individual and collective rights. The entire resistance effort would be poured into the demand for civic equality throughout the whole of Palestine in a bi-national or civil/democratic state. This would make the Palestinian struggle more akin to the fight against apartheid in South Africa, with which there are both similarities and differences.

The PSG does not advocate dissolving the PA (resorting to Plan B) at the present time. It appreciates that this option would pose immense difficulties and could entail real dangers, and its feasibility and effectiveness are in question. It would not be an easy step to take. It would complicate internal Palestinian politics and wreak economic havoc, causing tens of thousands of people to lose their employment. The return of direct Israeli occupation could be very dangerous in the long run, as it could lead to the annexation of the Palestinian territories, with the Palestinian population relegated to the status of second-class citizens. It could also result in a unilateral redrawing of borders by Israel, intensified Palestinian emigration along with forcible population displacement, and an end to any attempt to resolve the refugee situation.

Nevertheless, a plan for dissolving the PA must be readied in reserve. Otherwise Israel will continue leading us from one impasse to another. Without an alternative option that is capable of seizing the initiative, the status quo will simply persist, providing Israel with the ideal conditions under which to promote its aims of permanent settlement and economic and political control.

Put more clearly, if the new Palestinian strategy were to fail it would be destructive *not* to dissolve the PA in such circumstances – it would amount to accepting permanent dominance by the occupying power. If the PA cannot meet its basic responsibilities - such as ensuring that Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza are able to move freely through Palestinian territory, or that they can carry out construction work without Israeli permission, - it would be shameful for it to remain in place. The only honourable course of action will be to refuse to go on playing a blatant and damaging game. There will be no alternative.

The key point at the moment - which makes Plan B already integral to the new strategy for national liberation - is that Israel must be made to understand that the failure of the Palestinian national liberation strategy will lead automatically to the dissolution of the PA, whatever the consequences, risks and costs. For there is simply no prospect of Palestinians accepting the Israeli-preferred scenarios (5) to (8) above) - the status quo, a temporary state, unilateral separation, or absorption by Jordan and Egypt. Instead, the conflict will escalate inexorably and indefinitely. The suffering of the Palestinians will continue, but everyone else will suffer too, as radicalisation and instability increase throughout the region as a direct consequence. Should that happen, it will not just be Israel's legitimacy, but its very existence, that is under threat. And that will have been brought about by Israel itself.



In short, Plan B is an inevitable outcome of the failure of Plan A. The sequential relationship between the two plans is not incidental, but organic and complementary. It should lie at the very heart of the current, and declared, strategy for national liberation.

### **THE NEED FOR FURTHER STRATEGIC DISCUSSION**

Based on the six strategic options set out above the PSG invites urgent national debate about how best to formulate and implement the new Palestinian national liberation strategy itself.

What follows identifies the main topics and questions that need to be addressed in this debate under the headings: 'strategic authority', 'strategic context', 'strategic discourse', 'influencing Israeli public opinion', and how this all feeds into formulating 'the preferred strategic path'. This is then summed up in a brief 'action plan'.

It is hoped that this will help to focus public debate on the key issues in the critical months ahead.

### **STRATEGIC AUTHORITY**

This is the first area where the PSG invites further urgent discussion to determine what the appropriate authority is for formulating and implementing the new national liberation strategy. This needs to be carried out in relation to the three interrelated functions of:

- (i) Interim management (current administration and service-provision).
- (ii) Leader of national resistance in implementing strategic options (A) to (E) above.
- (iii) Embryonic provisional government of the future independent Palestinian state.

The PSG urges the removal of the current confusion between the roles of the PA and the PLO in relation to these functions. Careful consideration must be given to the role of a reformed PA. Would it be better fitted to take on functions (ii) and (iii) – leading the national resistance and acting as an embryonic state? Or can this only be done via the PLO/PNC? How will a provisional government be formed to oversee reform and renewal and link the process of inner renewal and the stages of international recognition?

The question of elections (local, legislative, presidential, PNC) took up much time and reflection at the PSG's discussions. While some favoured holding early elections in order to rejuvenate and revive public institutions and create the necessary legitimacy, others urged caution because of the divisive nature of premature elections before the structures within which they operate are clear. The PSG recognises how difficult it is to do all this under occupation and under severe constraint from outside influences. It nevertheless insists that we can overcome these obstacles and must act to do as swiftly as possible.

Ultimately, if we all appreciate that our opponents' strategic goal is to 'divide and rule', it is up to us to counter and foil it by avoiding division and not allowing our enemy to exploit our differences.

While we believe deeply in the crucial importance of unity, we have considered all eventualities including that of failure to achieve sufficient strategic unity. How would we then turn continuing internal differences from weaknesses into strengths? That is what the Israelis do when, for example, a coalition government combines doves with hawks, some of them invariably hostile to any notion of political accommodation with the Palestinians. Typically, the incumbent prime minister cites the presence of hardliners in the government to demand further Palestinian concessions and/or Western and US indulgence. We Palestinians should learn how to take advantage of our disagreements and turn them into gains and strategies.

These discussions need to be carried to a conclusion over the next months and broad agreement reached along the following lines: Strategic unity as a basic prerequisite. Differences can then be managed in a way that supports and strengthens the broader strategy rather than undermining it, especially after the Palestinian reconciliation. Reconciliation does not necessarily mean complete political accord between the Palestinian factions. But it allows for a shared strategic vision that ensures agreement on broad outlines while upholding political pluralism which serves the greater strategic goal.

### **STRATEGIC CONTEXT**

The PSG discussed and analysed the relative interests, power and leverage of the main regional and international players in relation to the national liberation strategy. These discussions will not be reproduced here, as they largely dealt with the conditions prevailing at the time they were held. But ongoing analysis of this kind will be critical in the coming months as the essential underpinning for determining how best to orchestrate the programme outlined above under strategic option (C) – eliciting regional and international support. What is mainly required here is continued analysis and discussion of the pros and cons of the different ways of seeking international recognition for Palestinian claims, with particular emphasis on international law.

### **STRATEGIC RESISTANCE**

The PSG's discussions about the different ways in which smart resistance can best be exercised and coordinated will not be reproduced here. This is evidently central to a new Palestinian national liberation strategy, and continued national debate on this is a major priority over the next months, with as many as possible participating. A point to keep in mind is that despite the need for coherence and discipline in the way various forms of resistance are coordinated and carried out, it is no less important to preserve the spontaneity of the popular will and the natural passion and creativity, particularly of younger Palestinians. The PSG calls for a vigorous campaign to harness the tremendous

energy of the youth into a unified and flexible multi-faceted/inclusive instrument for furthering our liberation strategy, as noted above under strategic option (D).

### **STRATEGIC DISCOURSE**

The PSG believes that the extensive and rapid spread of social media and other facets of global communication ought to provide a real boost to the projected Palestinian national liberation strategy. There is an urgent need to investigate ways of using the new media to bolster our national effort. We do not reproduce the PSG discussion here, because this is a task for specialists in the field who can enrich the debate with their relative input. But we keep the enormous potential benefit in mind, and focus on how all available media can be deployed to deliver a single message geared to rallying worldwide support for our liberation project (as clarified under strategic option (E) above)

Our greatest strength is the justice and morality of our cause, and the firmness of the legal ground on which we stand. This amounts to an inexhaustible supply of ammunition. But we need constantly to find new ways of presenting our case to world public opinion that are in tune with changing conditions.

### **INFLUENCING ISRAELI OPINION AND COUNTERING ISRAELI STRATEGY**

*Regaining the Initiative* (2008) emphasised why, as in a game of chess, it is integral to strategy to look at the board from the perspective of the opponent - otherwise you lose. For this reason the PSG spent time discussing the nature of Israeli society, Israeli political trends, the scope for positive and negative inducements in influencing Israeli opinion, whether anything can be done on this front, and – if so – what and how.

On the positive front, PSG members considered what allies we have among Israeli Jews and Jewish communities elsewhere who support Palestinian rights. This is seen to have long been a relatively neglected topic in Palestinian strategy. The discussion then turned to the importance of determining what positive inducements there are for Israelis to come to a genuine settlement that responds to at least a modicum of Palestinian rights. To do this we need to make more effort to understand Israeli fears and the likely reactions to which they give rise. A multi-faceted discussion of those fears covered:

- (i) The collective sense of insecurity and victimhood in Israel, which is easily manipulated into defensive aggression when isolated or threatened.
- (ii) The perception ‘why should we give anything up since we are already the possessors and to relinquish control will only create a vacuum into which our enemies will rush’,
- (iii) The fear of demographic vulnerability and the sense of being outnumbered and besieged by surrounding Arab and Muslim populations

- (iv) Apprehension - and incomprehension - about progressive international de-legitimisation. To fears about Iranian nuclear capability has now been added great concern and uncertainty about the outcome of the popular upheavals in the Arab world.

In handling all this, we must be astute but vigorous in combating the Israeli government's illegal policies and its attempts to brand us with anti-Semitism. We must adhere to core human values while we struggle against the racism of Israeli occupation. Our suffering from that racism must not prompt us to adopt any racist concepts, let alone policies, of our own, in whatever guise and from whatever source.

On the negative front, the PSG has continued the analysis in *Regaining the Initiative*, discussing how scenarios (5) to (8) above – open-ended negotiations, a state with temporary borders, unilateral separation, absorption by Jordan and Egypt - can best be opposed and blocked, and how Israeli counter-strategies to the new Palestine liberation strategy can best be anticipated and dispersed. For example, we must be clear-sighted in recognising that scenario (7) - unilateral separation and forced population displacement - is a very real danger, which would be difficult to counter in the short term. But again the PSG is of the view that even if this happens, unjust and illegal unilateral arrangements imposed by military force cannot endure in the long term, even if they pose a real short-term threat.

If it comes to overturning any unilateral Israeli measure, we have the necessary strategic options and means to achieve that, provided we deploy them well. As a background to this, the PSG discussed the need to remain closely apprised of Israel's demographic make-up and changes in social, political and ideological interests and opinions. All of this needs to be an integral and ongoing part of our strategic analysis and national debate.

### **THE PREFERRED STRATEGIC PATH, CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION, ASSESSMENT POINTS**

This paper outlines some of the main strategic options available to Palestinians now that the option of bilateral negotiations has been ended and suggests ways in which these need to be combined into an integrated Palestinian strategy for national liberation. The PSG identifies this as the central task for Palestinian leaders and elites over the coming months. Further work is certainly needed to determine the specific steps and stages required to develop this into a fully articulated and comprehensive national plan, which can inspire the whole Palestinian people, which is clearly and immediately comprehensible to third parties in a way most likely to elicit maximum international support, and which plays to our strengths and exerts maximum pressure on Israel's points of greatest weakness.

This includes agreeing criteria for evaluating the strategic effort as the situation evolves, flexible criteria that can assess the effectiveness of strategic tactics and determine, as events unfold, whether they should be retained or be adapted, or if strategic direction should be changed.

## **ACTION PLAN FOR THE NEXT MONTHS**

In light of the extensive discussions at the three workshops held in succession, the PSG view is that Palestinian planning and strategic effort needs to address seven main tasks in the coming few months, defined by the following questions.

Formulating the Palestine liberation strategy	How can strategic options (B) to (E) – political renewal and institution-building; international recognition, smart resistance, framing the issues and making the case – be best combined into a coherent and effective strategy for liberation, and a new strategy be formulated?
Strategic Authority	How can the necessary internal strategic unity be attained?
Strategic Context	How can sufficient Arab, regional and international support be gained in support of a particular strategy?
Strategic Resistance	How can smart resistance be organised?
Strategic Discourse	How can we ensure that the Palestinian discourse and narrative advance and prevail wherever the question of the Palestinian future is discussed?
The Strategic Opponent	How can current Israeli strategies be countered? How can Israelis be persuaded that a genuine settlement along the lines suggested in this paper are also in their own best interest?
Preparing Plan B (the fallback plan)	How can Plan B be formulated in case Plan A fails, and in such a way as to help ensure that Plan A does not fail?

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper set out to initiate an in-depth debate about the proper working out of a new Palestinian liberation strategy as an urgent task for the entire Palestinian people, and, specifically, to affirm that this task must be concluded in the next few months (six months at most). It lies essentially in integrating strategic options (B) to (E) – political renewal and institution-building; international recognition; smart resistance; framing the issues – into an overall strategy that leads to our goals of national liberation, freedom, and justice.

Following Netanyahu's May 2011 Washington speech in which he offered nothing new but reaffirmed Israel's intention to continue controlling the Palestinian territories under the pretext of security, and given the hesitation (and impotence) of the US, the PSG does not expect any change on the bilateral negotiations front. Even if fresh rounds of meetings are held in accordance with the French initiative, these would be on the same old basis we have known for 20 years.

On the internal front, everything possible must be done to strengthen and make a success of the reconciliation, which has moved us an important step closer to realising the first prerequisite identified in this paper - the achievement of national strategic unity. The reconciliation must pave the way, among other things, for the second prerequisite, namely systematic strategic thinking and action that is based on it. This prerequisite - comprehensive strategic thinking and planning - is the main missing element in the Palestinian reconciliation agreement. But this can be remedied.

We must accord the highest priority to strategic planning for the post-interim government period. This should be done while it is being formed, so it can better prepare for presidential and parliamentary elections and the reconstruction of Gaza – where the most serious challenge lies.

In practical terms, a special 'strategic thinking' unit could be set up to guide and motivate the national strategic debate over the next few months. Otherwise, in the absence of forward-looking strategic planning, there is a real fear that the advent of elections will reignite internal differences, and take us back into the impasse of the past few years.

The starting point for this paper has been the collapse of the twenty-year period during which sporadic bilateral negotiation with Israel has been at the centre of international peace efforts. This has been a time in which, after the unprecedented PLO initiative of 1988, we have been continually pressured to sacrifice more and more while receiving less and less. Freed from all the shackles imposed by those failed negotiations, the paper puts forward the outlines of a new strategy for Palestinian national liberation, based on a mix of unilateral and multilateral initiatives, that can offer a better prospect of achieving our national goals.

The Palestine strategy group, therefore

- Salutes all who took part in or contributed to concluding the Cairo reconciliation agreement, which has opened the way for the formulation of a unified national strategy, and considers this to be the bedrock of our next strategic moves. But more important is translating that reconciliation into reality on the ground, and this remains a serious challenge which calls for national cohesion and for national rather than factional interests to be given precedence;
- Urges all Palestinians in the land of historic mandate Palestine and the diaspora to join together in further defining and implementing this strategy;
- Appeals to our Arab and Muslim brothers and sisters to lend solidarity and support to this strategy;
- Calls on the wider international community to honour past international resolutions and the basic principles of international law by justly recognising the demands that lie at the heart of this strategy, which reflect the Palestinians' continued adherence to their rights after 60 years of suffering and disinheritance, and their insistence that they be recognised and upheld by the international community.

The beating heart of the new Palestinian strategy is the Palestinians' persistence and steadfastness. They have never abandoned their struggle by various means to achieve their national goals and their right to self-determination and freedom from occupation. Unless this is understood and fulfilled, the Middle East will not know real peace, and the banner of struggle will be passed on from one Palestinian generation to another.