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An Expensive Bill

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My initial impression of the price that Israel will receive, in return for agreeing to new U.S. proposals to stop settlement construction for 90 days, is that it is an expensive bill. Modern military aircraft worth \$3 billion, for free, political and security pledges to veto any Security Council resolution against Israel, and most importantly, this is a proposal to stop only the latest process of settlement construction.

The proposal of 90 days of suspended settlement construction in the West Bank is intended to facilitate the task of getting the Palestinians to accept the resumption of direct negotiations. This is a very limited deadline, and there is a high possibility that there will be no end result, as has happened on previous occasions. The issues raised are highly complex and sensitive, and could result in a situation whereby the Palestinians are left empty-handed, whilst Israel receives sophisticated weaponry, and new political and security assistance.

Nevertheless, the Israeli right considers the U.S. offer to be a bad deal, as it appears that settlement construction is more important to them than peace. Meanwhile, the Palestinian side, which is considering its official response, is in a difficult position because it has no explicit, practical alternative.

Thus here is the bottom line: What is most important for the Palestinian side, in terms of responding to the U.S. offer, is that they have a clear vision of what they want from the negotiations, and a practical plan to reach their objectives. They must know how to deal skillfully with the obstacles that appear along the road, which up until now appear to have taken them by surprise, and they must have ?responsible? alternatives in case things come to a dead end. ?Responsible alternatives? means not talking about the collapse of the Palestinian Authority, or resignations, because this would only result in a vacuum, sending the Palestinian cause back decades.

Let's take the issue of settlement construction, which seems to be the card used by Israeli politicians on each occasion to disrupt the negotiations, in light of their knowledge of the expected Palestinian and Arab reaction. The question that arises is whether suspending the negotiations will lead to a suspension in settlement activity. The answer is certainly no. Thus the next question is: is there a way to maneuver around this topic, considering that the issue of final borders will eventually override the issue of settlements, and is there a possibility to neutralize this issue, so a temporary settlement freeze will not come with such an expensive bill?

This may be unpopular, or outside the political framework which the Palestinian Authority adheres to, supported by the Arab Monitoring Committee, which provides them with an Arab cover. However, in times of fateful crises, or historical crossroads, there are many examples suggesting that solutions usually come when people think outside the box, outside the usual framework.

It is normal for Israel to impede [the negotiations], to refrain from them, and to seek to obtain the highest price from the Americans sponsors, even at the expense of the Palestinians. We must therefore ask the Palestinian side to also request such a price, guaranteeing them that this 90 day period will not be in vain, or simply a time-wasting maneuver. If the Palestinians agree to the new U.S. proposals, then they must do so with a clear vision that the final objective is a Palestinian state with clearly defined, internationally-guaranteed borders. In the end, the decision must be a purely Palestinian one, in order to gauge the Palestinian side's interests, and their ability to make independent decisions.

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