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Journey from Oslo to New York after 20 Years

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All the efforts to prevent the Palestinian authority from heading to the United Nations to ensure the proclamation of the state were expected to fail. The Israeli prime minister who kept knocking on Europe's doors among others after he knocked on the United States' doors to thwart this step maintained his position. He wants unconditional negotiations. This is the same position that froze the talks over a year ago, and the one that foiled all the American efforts to activate the settlement and reach the promised Palestinian state.

This failure was expected because President Barack Obama's envoys to the region, i.e. Dennis Ross and David Hill (along with EU Foreign Minister Catherine Ashton), did not offer anything that might have made the authority recant its decision, and did not give it any guarantees or enticements. This failure was also expected because everyone knows that the administration which failed to impose its viewpoint on the Likud government two years ago - while at the peak of its strength - will not be able to anger its strategic ally today, one year before the presidential elections and in light of its preoccupation with the mounting financial crisis, the repercussions of its 'preemptive wars' and the changes sweeping the world, especially the Middle East region.

Abu Mazen had no other option. He cannot back down at the last moment and risk the remaining credibility of the authority which has been engaged for about a year in a wide-scale diplomatic battle throughout the continents to secure the needed votes in support of his decision to head to the United Nations and earn the state's membership in the international organization. In the meantime, he knows in advance what the American reaction will be, seeing how it has already been announced. He did not forget the day he headed to the Security Council to ensure the issuance of a decision condemning the construction of the

settlements and how Obama ended the phone conversation after about half an hour of discussions by telling him that the insistence on heading to the Council was an act of hostility toward Washington! So, what was the American president expected to say in light of the current step toward the international organization?

President George Bush Jr. called for the two-state solution, left and did not accomplish anything. His successor Obama predicted last September that we would see the establishment of the Palestinian state "next September," i.e. in the current days. This was also promised by the Quartet Committee which includes the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations. Nonetheless, all these powers failed to convince Israel about the necessity for it to offer what it should offer to secure the settlement, knowing that most Israeli prime ministers during the last twenty years announced their acceptance of the state and the negotiations to establish it.

Throughout the past months, since the halting of the negotiations and after Abu Mazen announced that one of the options was the inclination to head to the UN, Netanyahu's government did nothing. Washington also did nothing. But now, a few days prior to this step toward the Security Council, they are both raising hell and issuing threats. Netanyahu is even expressing willingness to negotiate, but "without conditions," or else there will be no negotiations in sixty years. For their part, the Palestinians have been waiting for seventy years, and all they got were further losses. They also showed patience during twenty years of negotiations following the Madrid Conference and the Oslo Accord and did not earn anything, at a time when the settlements have been expanding in the West Bank and swallowing additional lands.

It would be too soon to say that the Palestinian step will secure the state because the rejection at the Security Council is almost certain. However, Obama will have to address a message to the Arab and Islamic worlds "as he did the day he assumed power" to reconcile with both. But how will he explain, justify and convince? How will he explain his administration's opposition of a UN resolution to establish the state of Palestine? Did he not promise the world he wanted to see a Palestinian state by the end of the year? Will the Americans, in light of this situation, continue to ask the Arabs and Muslims why they hate them? They must ask the Congress which is threatening to discontinue the financial aid offered to the authority (around \$600 million per year). The paradox is that Washington is mad at Moscow for threatening to use the veto right if the Security Council were to decide to impose additional sanctions on President Bashar al-Assad's regime, but is not asking itself why it is entitled to use that same veto to prevent the recognition of a state in accordance with UN resolution 181 that was issued in 1947 and based on which the Hebrew state was established!

The Palestinian decision will definitely embarrass and anger Washington, even if the authority does not succeed in achieving its goal at the Security Council. At this level, the authority never relinquished the calls for negotiations because it knows there will be no practical effects on the ground unless Israel recognizes the state. True, if the recognition is secured at the General Assembly, it will improve the status of the Palestinians in any negotiations, and will enhance their position in light of an international legitimacy which was not available to them in the past. In this context, a lot was said about the acquisitions it will secure, namely the fact that the land will be considered to be occupied and not disputed, that the Palestinian prisoners and detainees in the Israeli prisons will be considered to be war prisoners, and that the reference for any negotiations will be clear "i.e. the 1967 border. Moreover, the membership in international commissions and organizations such as the criminal court will allow the

authority to head to this court and file lawsuits against the Israeli "war criminals" and the settlements among other violations.

The authority was trying to fill the vacuum caused by the halting of the negotiations about a year ago and was closely watching the repercussions of the Arab Spring on the cause and the Palestinian street. This is why it rushed " along with Hamas " to resume the talks and reunify the Palestinian ranks. Indeed, the authority became aware of what Netanyahu's government is still refusing to recognize, i.e. that the Arab Spring has changed and is still changing the rules of the old game in the entire region and will affect all countries, not to mention the crises affecting the superpowers. The world is changing with America's status retreating in the region following two failed military ventures in Afghanistan and Iraq and the recession of its economic strength. For its part, Europe is also facing a major challenge seen in the possible collapse of the Union and not just Greece's bankruptcy.

Through its diplomatic action and its decision to head to the international organization, the authority aimed at exerting pressures to ensure the resumption of the negotiations as there is no alternative for the negotiations. This is being relentlessly repeated by the Palestinian president who certainly did not intend to embarrass Washington and some European capitals. He rather wanted to exit the lethal stalemate at a time when the earth is shaking beneath the world's feet, from Tripoli to Tunisia, Damascus, Cairo, Gaza and the West Bank where the building of the institutions that will manage the state has been completed. Indeed, he will have to pay the price for any stalemate out of the authority's credibility on the Palestinian street firstly, and in the face of Hamas secondly. This is especially true after the movement expressed its rejection of the step to head to the UN, fearful that the recognition of the state will lead to the loss of the right of return and the disbandment of the Palestine Liberation Organization, thus rendering the Diaspora without a reference. The movement is also afraid of losing the card of its non-recognition of the Hebrew state, considering that the establishment of the Palestinian state will be a translation of the division resolution, at a time when it is calling for restoring Palestine, all of it.

The authority's goal was to embarrass Netanyahu before Obama and his administration, and at increasing Israel's isolation. Is it logical for the Turkish prime minister to be more Palestinian than the Palestinians, or rather than the Palestinian authority? He ousted the Israeli ambassador from Ankara, froze all the cooperation agreements and threatened to push his naval fleet toward the Mediterranean to protect the aid sent to the Gaza Strip. Moreover, he is preparing to engage in an international legal and political battle to lift the blockade imposed on Gaza. Could the Egyptians be more Palestinian than the authority as they are trying the figures of their regime in court against the backdrop of charges including leniency at the level of the gas contracts with Tel Aviv, and as they are demonstrating on the squares to demand the revision of the Camp David accords and the closing of the Israeli embassy following its raiding? Could the Jordanians be more Palestinian than the authority as they are demanding the ousting of the Israeli ambassador from Amman?

The authority knows that the Arab regimes can no longer show leniency toward Tel Aviv or take its interests into consideration as they used to do not so long ago. It knows that Israel's deterrence system is no longer valid in the face of the missile networks deployed from the Lebanese border to the border of the Strip - not to mention Iran's missiles - in parallel to its rising international isolation. So, why did Abu Mazen hesitate to engage in this diplomatic battle as long as he is against any new uprising and does not believe in any armed action? This is the only means left for him.

The authority knows that the Oslo Accords did not offer anything, which is why that page must be folded. It must go back to a higher and more comprehensive reference which is the international organization, while the cause must return to the lap of the international community, its institutions, decisions and laws that remain above all laws and agreements. This is the biggest challenge facing the authority, so will it manage to exit the Oslo impasse toward New York's welcoming space?

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