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# Talk about Reconciliation Following Meshaal's Visit

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If this is the road to the Palestinian reconciliation, as promised by the head of Hamas' politburo Khaled Meshaal, then this will most certainly be a difficult road ridden with conflicting positions and campaigns. Most likely, the feeling of victory that the two Palestinian parties are currently experiencing – Fatah feels victorious as a result of winning the voting at the UN and Hamas considers the truce in Gaza a “victory” over Israel – is causing the talk about reconciliation to be quite “fashionable” these days.

But let us discuss the backdrop of this issue. In this context, Leila Khaled – an official at the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and an anti-Israeli activist since the days when kidnapping planes was still a means of resistance – made an interesting comment on the occasion of the so-called historic visit: she has suspicions regarding the good intentions demonstrated by both Fatah and Hamas concerning the reconciliation and ending the division. Leila added that the differences between the two movements are still too numerous and too complicated despite what is being said about the positive atmosphere and the reconciliatory speeches.

In reality, the visit of Abou Walid to Gaza could have been a historic one had he been received there by the Palestinian President Abou Mazen in his quality of the president of the state of Palestine, now that the Palestinians are celebrating the latest acquisition of the statute of a non member state at the United Nations. Abou Mazen's absence in Gaza, which is a part of the state of Palestine, was quite surprising especially now as he is touring the world as a representative of this state. And although Fatah did have a modest representation with a few flags shyly raised here and there, the actual presence of this main Palestinian symbol would have given the best impression that the differences have ended and are now replaced by national unity.

The statements and speeches given by Meshaal in Gaza did not help create the impression that the old differences with Fatah concerning the strategy of the Palestinian work have been resolved. Through his talk about the constants that must represent the common bases for the national project, Abou Walid listed these constants as follows: the land, Jerusalem, and the right to return and to resist without letting go of one parcel of the land and without acknowledging the state of Israel.

Raising the issue of “letting go” the land brings about a mountain of accusation campaigns between the two largest Palestinian factions. Indeed, Fatah follows the politics of negotiations and stresses on the 1967 borders for the future Palestinian state including East Jerusalem. Fatah also insists on resolving the issue of the refugees by reaching an agreement and on the basis of offering amendments (these are the principles that constituted the basis of the latest voting at the General Assembly). However, Khaled Meshaal raised the bar of the demands in Gaza and announced that “Palestine from the river to the sea and from the north to the south is our land and our right and our nation and we won’t let it go.”

I am not arguing against this demand since it is of course a just one from a humanitarian and rights-related point of view. This demand serves the purpose of rectifying a historic mistake that was made against the people of Palestine. However, the insistence of the Hamas leadership on clinging to this position at a time when the Fatah leadership is following a more realistic and less rigid path is definitely not helping the reconciliation. It is also paving the way for Israel to take advantage of the differences between the two parties and allowing for accusations of treason against Fatah’s “soft” position, which might ultimately lead to campaigns against Fatah and to prevent it from working in Gaza just like in 2007.

In addition, the measures that were taken during Khaled Meshaal’s visit to Gaza and Israel’s insistence on preventing the leader of the Islamic Jihad, Ramadan Shalah, from coming along, do not allow for raising the level of the Palestinian threats and demands. Indeed, the calm prevailing over Gaza these days was achieved through specific terms and Meshaal is quite aware of the repercussions of these terms. Therefore, Meshaal’s exciting speech should rather be looked at as being an address to the “masses” and Hamas should have a specific strategy for the upcoming phase.

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