Whither the Palestinians

Media Mention of Hussein Ibish in Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars - July 7, 2014 - 12:00am
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Events

Whither the Palestinians

July 07, 2014 // 4:00pm — 5:15pm

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Three veteran analysts and practitioners discussed the Palestinians and their politics while sharing their opinions and predictions regarding the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On July 7, 2014 the Joseph and Alma Gildenhorn Middle East Forum of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center hosted a discussion, **"Whither the Palestinians"** with **Robert M. Danin**, Eni Enrico Mattei Senior Fellow for Middle East and Africa Studies, Council on Foreign Relations; **Hussein Ibish**, Senior Fellow, American Task Force on Palestine; and **Shibley Telhami**, Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, College Park, and former Wilson Center Fellow. **Aaron David Miller**, Distinguished Scholar and Vice President for New Initiatives at the Wilson Center, moderated the event. **Jane Harman**, Director, President and CEO of the Wilson Center, provided introductory remarks.

Miller opened the discussion by announcing that the panel would focus on the Palestinians and their internal politics, stating that the Palestinian dimension is very important and also less frequently studied than that of their Israeli counterparts.

Ibish began the panel by focusing on the recent flare-up of tensions. He discussed the lack of control on the Palestinian side, noting that their split government is ineffective because Fatah lacks sufficient officers to operate effectively and Hamas is suffering an identity crisis resulting in its inability to control all of its factions, including its military wing. Ibish stated that this rift allows Israeli settlers to take advantage of the circumstances to create new outposts in strategic areas. The situation has escalated to the point where individuals target children and favor revenge over policy solutions. He

concluded that the outcome could be grim depending on how people behave.

Next, Telhami focused his portion of the talk on the lack of urgency for change in the region, citing inaction after the European Union condemned the Israeli settlements and the preoccupation of other regional countries with internal problems. Telhami believes that the days of the two-state solution are numbered. He noted the main problem is a lack of empathy on each side for the other side's civilian casualties. Each side resents the other and believes "they brought it upon themselves." Telhami said this attitude is a reflection of the people's perception of the conflict—they believe there is no prospect for peace and, therefore, are hardening their hearts in preparation for war.

Danin discussed the internal politics of the Palestinian government, stating that they lack a coherent plan and, instead, operate under the politics of survival. He cited the lack of legitimacy caused by the absence of recent elections, the inability of the government to pay their employees' salaries, and the ever-widening divisions among the factions. Danin claimed that neither Hamas nor Fatah wants the unity government to survive, but neither side wants to be blamed for its failure so they allow it to atrophy and die. Furthermore, due to this disunity, Danin indicated that neither side can overcome the backlash associated with cooperation with Israel, and it will only become harder to return to negotiations in the future.

By Meg Kaiser, Middle East Progra
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