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Four rules for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks

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Four Rules for Israeli-Palestinian Peace Talks

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I have never been a peace negotiator, but as someone who will be profoundly affected by Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, I feel compelled to suggest basic rules of thumb for Palestinian negotiators. Otherwise a bleak future will be imposed on the youth of Palestine.

Any decisions taken in the current peace talks will be the realities on the ground tomorrow. Palestinian youth are not willing to relive the painful decades established by the Oslo Accords. Consequently, Palestinian negotiators -- who, in fact, no longer formally represent the 11 million Palestinians at home or in exile -- would do well to keep these four rules in view.

1. Negotiate when you are strong

The Palestinian Authority (PA) is by design inherently dependent on the Israeli occupation authorities and the international community. It created a new élite but has been a burden on the rest of the Palestinian people and has not adequately pursued the Palestinian journey to freedom and self-determination. Its strong US-sponsored security forces apart, the PA is at one of its weakest points today. It suffers a political divide between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a financial crisis, and a crisis of legitimacy. It has subsumed the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and reduced it to a rubber stamp. The Palestinian people are expressing mounting levels of frustration and anger with the PA/PLO. Embarking on negotiations when you are weak at home is the most harmful starting point for acquiring Palestinian rights.

2. Combine negotiations with power

The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not between two identical parties but between an oppressed and an oppressor. Oslo-style negotiations, with all the imbalance of power between Israel and the Palestinians, can only lead to more disasters and further dispossession. We must combine negotiations with different forms of power such as the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, the youth movement, an agriculture-based resistance economy, international solidarity, international diplomacy, and seeking membership in the International Criminal Court (ICC) among other forms of resistance. If the last 20 years have taught the Palestinians anything, it is that it's irrational to put all eggs into the basket of negotiations. Steadfastness and resistance to Israeli law-breaking achieve goals, and not powerless negotiations.

Palestinian negotiators must stop putting their faith in the U.S. administration as though 20 years' experience was not enough to end their dependency on a dishonest broker that has just appointed Martin Indyk, co-founder of pro-Israel think tank WINEP, as its special envoy. U.S. pressure to reach an overall agreement to end the conflict in nine months will prevent the negotiators from thinking strategically about future generations. At a minimum, it is time to end exclusive U.S. sponsorship and involve other international actors.

3. Aid doesn't work under occupation

The donor community has invested more than \$23 billion over 20 years in failed economic prescriptions intended to buy peace in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). They have succeeded only in destroying the economy and subsidizing Israel's colonial enterprise. Despite the stark failure of this approach, most recently termed "Fayyadism" after former PA premier Salam Fayyad, Secretary of State John Kerry has promised the PA/PLO \$4 billion in international aid to double the Gross Domestic Product in the OPT and cut unemployment from 21 percent to 8 percent in three years. The rationale is still the same: Invest more money to make the Palestinians feel better economically so it will be easier to compromise politically.

4. Peace needs a popular mandate

Palestinian negotiators must be accountable to the people. The negotiators no longer have a popular mandate and live far from the daily realities the rest of the Palestinian people face, enjoying something of a five-star occupation. They are taking decisions on behalf of the Palestinian people, and Palestinian youth in particular, without respecting our views. Indeed, they actively suppress opposing voices, many times violently. For peace talks to succeed, negotiators must have a popular mandate. It is essential to build up a legitimate national body that represents all Palestinians and works for our aspiration to live in dignity in our own land and to practice our right of self-determination. Otherwise, peace will be another form of colonialism wrapped up in modernity.

These four rules of thumb are simple but essential. Although the negotiations are about solving the "problems" that occurred in the past they have current and future implications. Palestinian youth should not be saddled with the consequences of further negotiating

mistakes. Those who failed to achieve good results when the facts on the grounds imposed by the occupying power were "easier" 20 years ago cannot offer us a better outcome today. Negotiate not just to address the injustices of the past, but also for the future.