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## Seven reasons for Palestinians in the West Bank to seek real change

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# Seven reasons for Palestinians in the West Bank to seek real change

## Seven reasons for Palestinians in the West Bank to seek real change

[Alaa Tartir](#) [1] 30 December 2011

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Acknowledging the complexity of the Palestinian situation, it is surely time for a new revolt against the occupation, for the sake of human dignity and freedom.

A Palestinian revolution may be on its way, sooner than expected. But it is not the Arab spring that the Palestinian Authority leadership has been talking about: it is a revolt fomenting among the oppressed Palestinian people, particularly the youth, who wish to change their dire life prospects, preserve their dignity and liberate themselves from all sorts of oppression and from fear. It could be powerful, this citizen-centric revolutionary initiative.

Palestinian citizens have thus far been non-participants in the Arab spring for various reasons. One major reason for their silence, besides the existence of the Israeli occupation, was to see through the attempt by the Palestinian Authority leadership to seek full membership at the United Nations. This venture, unsurprisingly, is facing various difficulties and will not change the lives of Palestinians in the near future. Another reason for delay was to allow the leaderships of both Fatah and Hamas in the West Bank and Gaza ample time to achieve a genuine and lasting political reconciliation and unification. However, now may be the time for a new Palestinian momentum in the region - aimed at uniting Palestinian society and its leadership, and creating a legitimate, representative leadership for all Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, in the 1948 territories, and in the diaspora.

### There are seven good reasons why this may be the case:

1. **The continuous failures of the leadership of Fatah and Hamas to reach a genuine political rapprochement that unifies the West Bank and Gaza.** The people cannot understand why this reconciliation is not taking effect if, as is claimed, there are good intentions on all sides. Why can't the political prisoners on both sides be released now? Why do party negotiators continue to go to Cairo and stay in fancy hotels to talk some more before anything can happen? Why do they need a broker in the first place? What are these leaderships suffering from that is so 'secret' that the people of Palestine can't be told about it? Is it just a question of personal egos or love of power at root? The regular interim agreements that have never resulted in a comprehensive settlement are inadequate for overcoming the divisions. The so-called Palestinian leadership may soon see that the strategy of 'buying time' and the intentional postponement of reconciliation and democratic elections

has run out of time, only adding more fuel to people's anger so that soon they will find ways to force a reconciliation, or rebel against both of them.

2. **The acts of corruption committed by the current caretaker government**, headed by Dr. Salam Fayyad, which resulted in the resignation of a few ministers, with more to come it seems, mainly due to the level of public protest. The labour, national economy and agriculture ministers were forced to resign after being accused of crimes of corruption. Other issues are under investigation at the social affairs and finance ministries. The citizens are fed up with the never-ending corruption and scandals that the Palestinian Authority has always suffered from but which today, is managed with better bookkeeping. Citizens have finally realised that the Palestinian Authority, thanks to the Oslo Accords, can be corrupted easily, despite all of the control measures put in place. They had high hopes that the current technocratic government, with a reputation for competence and professionalism, would be immune to such tendencies. However recent weeks have demonstrated that such immunity is hard to come by when people are competing for power, and only social pressure and lobbying by the people has led to change – a lesson not lost on the resistance that is emerging in the West Bank.
3. **The policies, particularly in the economy and security spheres, adopted by the Palestinian Authority since 2007** that were based on a neo-liberal economic agenda and security measures prioritizing the needs of the donors and the Israeli agenda at the expense of national priorities. The new income tax law enacted once again without the approval of the Palestinian Legislative Council/Parliament is a recent and telling example. This law gives additional waivers to the rich and their companies and punishes the middle classes and the poor. Citizens are not stupid, and sooner or later start to feel the inequality gap, both in terms of income and opportunities. There is now a self-evident and 'scary' gap between a place like the city of Ramallah, the new Paris of the Middle East, with its bubble economy and the Jenin refugee camp, southern Hebron, or even the villages outside Ramallah, not to mention areas C. The inequality in the high levels of poverty and unemployment, could easily be the spur which drives the poor and the poorest of the poor who suffer from daily social injustices and indignities, to rebel.
4. **The unjustifiable increase in the cost of living in the West Bank will hasten revolt.** It is not only land and real estate that has witnessed a dramatic increase in prices, but also very basic goods such as food and drink. Take two basics - tobacco for Shisha (Mu'asel) enjoyed by thousands of youngsters every night in the cafes of the West Bank, and chicken. The price of tobacco for Shisha (Mu'asel) has recently increased from around £1.4 per 250 grams (8 New Israeli Shekels-NIS) to around £4.6 (25 NIS); while the price of chicken leapt from £1.6 (9 NIS) to around £3.2 (18 NIS) per kilogram. The bread prices crises in Jordan and Egypt provide clear lessons. Revolutions do not need grand reasons to occur.
5. **The settlers' harassment and the new crimes committed by Israeli military forces in killing innocent peaceful protestors.** Palestinians have adopted almost an exclusive peaceful resistance to the occupation for a few years in the West Bank particularly under the Fayyad/Abbas leadership. The Israeli forces have met this resistance with the killing and arrest of protestors, both local and international. Crimes such as those that occurred in [Al-Nabi Saleh village](#) [12] near Ramallah have raised anger among the protestors against the brutal occupation. Israeli settlers, meanwhile, who live in settlements in the West Bank that are illegal according to the international law, are arranging themselves in military non-state groups or gangs and over the last few months have attacked the many mosques, schools, universities, stores and houses of many Palestinian citizens. This can only fuel the justifiable anger of the Palestinians.
6. **The battle of civil society and Fatah against the 'normalization' meetings and joint activities** as practiced by the Palestinian Authority leadership. In recent weeks, meetings designed to discuss a long list of joint activities between Palestine and Israel such as those in sports and commercial agreements, journalism and the arts have been boycotted, criticized and derailed by protestors led by a vocal Fatah. Fatah itself has sponsored and encouraged such activities over many years. So is this a new Fatah strategy or a mistake that they will regret? The accompanying civil society actions, particularly in Jerusalem, have sent a strong message that a true peace is the bottom line, which means the acknowledgement of Palestinian rights, an end to occupation and to the apartheid system it creates and dignity and freedom for the Palestinians.
7. **Finally, youth activism on the ground is still fragmented, but eventually it will**

**unite.** The recent [Palestinian Freedom Rides](#) [13] and the Civic Registration for Direct Elections of the PNC, [bear witness](#) [14] to newly-emergent activism on the ground. The [Palestinian Freedom Rides](#) [15] protest against the settler-led colonial occupation of Palestine, while the civic registration initiative aims to revive and reform the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and its Palestinian National Council (PNC) as the sole representative body of the whole Palestinian people in al-Watan (those living within Palestine) and al-Shatat (the diaspora community), to achieve our national unity and legitimate representation.

Raising these seven issues will require Palestinian youth to move beyond discussion and debate on their Facebook pages, towards a real implementation on the ground. The seeds of the Palestinian Spring planted over the last few years will blossom soon, maybe very soon.

**Country or region:** Palestine

**Topics:** Civil society

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 About the author

Alaa Tartir is a Palestinian PhD candidate in Development Studies and Global Governance at the London School of Economics, researching the role of good governance in state formation in Palestine. His research areas include international aid and development, non-governmental organizations, public policies, and politics. He is also a research fellow at the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute-MAS.



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