

FOR THE RECORD

This week Palestine Report interviews professor of political science at Birzeit University Hisham Ahmad on the current negotiations.

PR: Do you think that an agreement will be reached soon?

Ahmad: I strongly believe that there can be no Palestinian-Israeli agreement in the foreseeable future. The Israeli government, led by Ehud Barak is deeply entrenched in its hostility towards the Palestinian people and against any logical reasonable agreement to be arrived at. This government, especially Barak as he is heading for elections, wants to give the impression to the international community and to the peaceniks in Israeli society (and unfortunately, also to some segments in Palestinian society) that he is working towards peace, while in actuality he is working towards war and committing more and more crimes against humanity.

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PR: In terms of the American proposals, particularly on Jerusalem, how much do you think the Palestinians are willing to concede?

Ahmad: I, for one, do not understand at all the reasoning behind Palestinian participation in the negotiations at this stage. After all, the negotiations as a method of resolving conflict can be worked with, but it too has its bases. It has to have a strategy. I don't understand what the bases are at this stage

That [US President Bill] Clinton says that he wants to leave the White House having achieved something in the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations is not convincing in any way. I believe that the Clinton administration worked diligently to rescue the failing Barak government just prior to the elections

There is nothing new in the American stand or in the Israeli stand on the question of Jerusalem or on the underlying issues in the final status negotiations. Therefore, the fantasy that Israel and the US want to, as they put it, "try to stop acts of violence on the ground," really means that they don't want Israelis to be killed while the Barak government continues to engage in further killing and in further massacres against Palestinians.

Secondly, I believe that the US and Israel are interested first and foremost in pacifying the Palestinian people, in aborting the Intifada and in tranquilizing any attempts at resistance against the Israeli occupation. In no way are they sincere, sincere or even capable - to put it bluntly - of arriving at an amicable, reasonable and just settlement for the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on the upholding of all Palestinian rights, namely the dismantlement of all settlements constructed after 1967, consideration of Jerusalem as the Palestinian capital, the exercise of the Palestinian Authority over all Palestinian land and the exercise by Palestinian refugees of their legitimate right to return and compensation.

PR: If an agreement is reached, how do you think this will effect the Palestinian situation on the ground in terms of the Intifada?

Ahmad: Already the sheer fact that a Palestinian delegation has attended another dreadful negotiating session in Washington has created immense frustration, anger and despair among the Palestinian people. In other words, the path that the people carved up for themselves since Sharon's violation of the Aqsa mosque has been a path of resistance and to do away with the occupation.

If some type of a settlement were to be arrived at, which we don't think it will, that will deepen the frustration deepen rifts within Palestinian society or lead to untold results. Particularly that no agreement by Barak is acceptable by the people. It is not that the people do not want a peaceful settlement to the conflict, but they have become fully aware that the Barak government, especially at this stage - as Barak is heading towards elections, as Clinton is leaving the White House - no legitimate agreement can be arrived at through these negotiations.

PR: Regarding the negotiations taking place in Washington - what do you think is the Arab role in light of reports that the US proposal is a combination of Moroccan, Egyptian and Jordanian, US and French proposals?

Ahmad: This is a serious part of the tragedy. Several Arab heads of states have seriously interested themselves in aborting the Intifada and seeing it come to an end. They have become concerned about their political status and

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position in their respective countries.

Therefore, in continuation of the adherence to American terms and conditions they have succumbed to new pressures exerted on them by the US in order to stimulate the Palestinians to go afresh for another sequence of negotiations. But the fact of the matter is we already see the destructive results of this negotiating session held in Washington at this stage. We do see that international efforts to intervene on behalf of the Palestinian people due to Israeli intransigence and barbaric offensive against the Palestinians have been really ruined.

Look what happened in the Security Council a couple of days ago regarding the resolution that would call for sending an international monitoring force to come to the occupied territories. Even France, even Russia, who sent signals to the Palestinians that they might vote in favor of such a resolution voted against it, in addition to the US and Britain. The rationale they gave was that they don't want to complicate or rupture negotiations before they take place.

PR: The refugee issue seems to be the major obstacle between the two sides. Who do you think will give in to the other?

Amjad: Frankly, this is the time bomb of all suspended issues for the negotiations. The question of Palestinian refugees is a most complicated issue. It is absolutely doubtful that the Israelis will give in on this issue at this stage. Therefore it is equally critical and dangerous for the Palestinians even to entertain the thought of conducting any compromise solution on this critical issue in any way. -Published 20/12/00 (c)Palestine Report

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