

DIALOGUE

The Role of the Opposition *

Forward

Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah

In the past two years, the Arab Thought Forum has held seven meetings, which discussed the role of the Palestinian opposition. The previous meetings were not limited to each faction by itself. People affiliated with Hamas, or to the Islamic parties participated as part of a group of people from the various trends of the opposition. The five recent dialogues were specialized and included meetings with the secular opposition such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the Arab Liberation Front (ALF). In addition, an open meeting with a group from Fatah, which adopts positions similar to those of the secular opposition, was conducted. We also met with the parties participating in the Palestinian National Authority in order to know their position. It took several weeks to prepare a meeting with an important and unique trend in the opposition, that is Hamas because some of its leaders were being held in jail.

We will try in this meeting, as mentioned in the letter of invitation, to cover the subject through four major aspects in the form of specific questions.

1. The opposition between political groups and parliamentary structures.
2. The need and ways for institutionalizing the Palestinian political system.
3. How the opposition can play a positive role.
4. The role of the "Islamic Opposition," in particular Hamas, in the process of national construction during the current stage.

Ismail Abu Shanab

In the name of God the most merciful and benevolent. Many people heard about Hamas since the 1987 uprising. Yet, Hamas, which appeared during the uprising, is an

* Minutes of the eighth episode of the series of dialogues organized by the Arab Thought Forum. The episode was organized in Gaza city in 19/8/1998, with Hamas leaders: Sheikh Ahmad Yaseen, Dr. Mahmoud Al- Zahhar, Ismail Haneyeh and Ismail Abu Shanab.

extension to an existing and continuous movement since the Nakba (catastrophe) in 1948. The Movement of Moslem Brothers is the major movement on the level of Islamic action that presents the Islamic view to change reality. This movement spread through Palestine as an extension from Egypt. We, in Palestine have responded to the concept of establishing an Islamic State and Islamic Caliphate after the fall of the Caliphate era at the end of the Ottoman Empire. When the Nakba occurred in 1948, brothers from Egypt, Syria and the rest of Arab states even from Yugoslavia (now Bosnia and Herzegovina) used to fight in Palestine, thus giving the movement a popular dimension. Brothers in Fatah were convinced that the goal of the Arab state's was not liberation, so they established an independent entity which is the Fatah movement whose major cadres and nucleus received an education supported by the Brothers. The Moslem Brothers were those who supported Abu Ammar in heading the Palestinian League in Cairo in 1955. Abu Ammar himself received his military education and training at Moslem Brothers bases in Siweis and Isama'ilyah who were fighting to expel the British. Abu Iyad spoke of himself in his book "A Palestinian without an Identity, " I was considered one of this Islamic trend although I was not a part of it."

Since 1950 and until 1967, there were international projects to resettle the Palestinian refugees in Sinai. They were faced with resistance such as the operation by Mustafa Hafez. Until 1955, youths of the Brotherhood were part of that resistance. Several people such as Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad who were members of these groups led this work. After the occupation, the organization started to review its situation, thence establishing the system on two foundations:

The first: building an institutional base for the organization such as founding the Islamic Complex, the society and the committees. The second foundation: developing work towards resisting the occupation on a clear and direct basis. That is, we resist the occupation through an Islamic ideology and not a secular one.

In 1976, occupation authorities began to give freedom in establishing societies and unions. Consequently, the Union of Engineers was established in 1976. If you want the truth, that took place with the support of an officer in the interior department who called on us engineers at that time and told us: you engineers in this country, why you do not take your roles? We answered that there was no organization to bring us together. He said that law permits us to establish a union. We met at Haj Rashad al-Shawa's house and we started establishing the Union of Engineers. The same year, I personally obtained a permit for establishing an Islamic society and later we obtained a license for the Islamic Complex after some difficulties and harassment. However, finally the door was wide open, and Israel found no other choice but to grant the license for the Islamic Complex in 1977 and before that, for the doctors and lawyers unions. I think the idea, as we analyzed it from our own perspective, is that Israel at that time began to categorize the society and it wanted to know trends in the

Palestinian society. As evidence, it permitted national institutions to establish their own entities such as the Red Crescent. Later, the Workers Federation and other unions for engineers and Islamic groups were permitted. Of this combination, Israel aimed at categorizing the Palestinian society and it succeeded in this, since it then knew who was affiliated with each faction. Before that, it was very difficult to categorize the society according to trends or political affiliations. This situation could be linked to the conducting of municipal elections at that time. Thus, we can say that Israel wanted to create a new reality that would compete with the PLO inside the Palestinian society including the elected mayors such as al-Shakh'a, al-Qawasmeh, Milhem and Karim Khalaf. These personalities were elected on grounds that Israel paved the way for these elections so as to extract a leadership from the Palestinian people that would be parallel to the PLO.

In this context, I would like to ask: who issued the Shabiba, a work permit and who gave the student work committees and the Unity bloc their work permits?

The events of 8/12/1987 proved that the Palestinian street was being recruited by students and merchants who were burdened with taxes and by the entire society who had been repeatedly humiliated and insulted. These measures had increased more and more the last months before the uprising, and henceforth, the response of the masses. Here, I would like to note that the Islamic Group activated the popular uprising and we do not say it was created by it. **We do not claim that we were alone but had participated with other forces. However, we claim that we fired up the situation.**

At this time, the first leaflet of the movement appeared. It was signed by Hamas -- the Islamic Resistance Movement -- on 14/12/1987. Later, it was agreed that the uprising should continue after the orders issued by Israel to deport three Islamists and one member of the national movement. The Islamists were Khalil Koka, Mohammed Abu Samra and al-Kheiri. At this point, the Moslem Brothers office, which was an executive office headed by Sheik Ahmad Yassin, decided to continue with the uprising on a popular basis. Later, the process of choosing the name took place from among the previous names. The name: The Islamic Resistance Movement- Hamas was chosen, which I said appeared in the leaflet dated on 14/12/1987.

Abdel Rahman Abu Arafeh

This may have been a necessary introduction of the historic background of Hamas, its role and roots. Now, we have reached the following stage, which is the Oslo phase. Where does Hamas stand and what is its political understanding as an opposition movement to this stage and what is its role?

Ismail Hanieh

Hamas is at the heart of the principle opposition to the proposed compromise. This is not because of the conditions of the compromise or what it gives the Palestinians in terms of percentages or authorities, but it is an opposition that rests on Hamas' philosophy in leading the struggle on Palestinian land. Regarding the reasons for this opposition, they can be summarized in three basic issues:

The first point: the process of compromise depends on the recognition of Israel as a state and its right to have control over a large part of Palestinian lands. Hamas or the Islamic movement rejects this basis.

The second point - the option of resistance, which is in essence, a natural option for whoever is under occupation, is brought to an end due to this compromise, and the Palestinians are even obliged to pursue Hamas members on Palestinian land. This is also one of the basic principles rejected by Hamas since it gives Israel the legitimacy to be an occupying state with no right for the Palestinian people to resist the occupation.

The third point - the current compromise has caused a split among the Palestinian people inside and outside the homeland and has led to exclude Palestinians in the Diaspora from the compromise. This carries dangerous consequences for the unity of the Palestinian people. From this point, Hamas is part of the principle opposition to the compromise and not as part of the opposition to its conditions or the given shares allotted to the people or the Palestinian side.

Mahmoud Al-Zahar

The opposition in its contemporary political concept means that wherever there is a majority there is a minority, which usually takes on the role of the opposition. No general survey has been conducted, neither inside nor outside the homeland to prove that Hamas is a minority and therefore in the position of the Palestinian opposition in the political meaning. The other issue is that we have not run in legislative elections although there are some who say that the issue of opposition is in need of reevaluation.

In relation to the position of the opposition among the political factions and parliamentary structures, I would like to say **first**, the Oslo process or Madrid were not originally a peace agreement. Madrid was only an opened door to the Arab world in order to enter direct and multilateral talks. The direct talks fumbled and came to a halt on the eleventh round, while the multilateral talks led to establishing relations. This was the first point of retreat against our program in Hamas. Secondly, I would like to say that other groups of the Palestine Liberation Organization were not consulted about Oslo. Even the Palestinian people were not consulted before signing

it and it was imposed as a new fact. Later, emerged the ramifications. Basically, the agreement was an agreement of security as Netanyahu said," Israeli security is the core of the Israeli concept to the agreement and the peace process" 'We are not ready to play the game of military confinement or guarantee security for Israel. Hamas is a movement which has organizations and its services are not factional, but for the sake of serving the general Palestinian cause. Hamas is working in institutions bigger than the Palestinian homeland. It is more widespread than any other faction because of Islamic sympathy in all Islamic states with Hamas since it is an Islamic movement. Maybe the visit of Sheik Yassin was surprising to every body because of the big reception he received on the popular and official level.

We have tried by all means to enter Palestinian institutions, namely the Palestinian National Council in order to work. We have used legal and democratic means. We said that if we count the election results which took place in the chambers of commerce in 1990 - 1992 and the students and vocational councils and societies etc., we could have found that we possess 42% -- this is admitted by others and no one denies it. We have said that due to this, the change in the structure of the Palestinian National Council should take place on this basis. 42% does not mean 51% but 42% only, yet, they wanted us to be a marginalized number, only 3 - 4% on the basis that our name will be symbolic in the National Council.

You may hear those who say that we have 5 or 6 persons in the Palestinian National Council, however, I would like to reaffirm that we have no representatives in the Palestinian National Council. It is rumored now that Imad Falouji is a member of Hamas but in reality he is not. We want to enter the Palestinian National Council while our program still contains points related to a means of activating the National Council in a way that it will represent all sectors of the Palestinian people. And we are still working towards that and we still face rejection. We have not entered the Palestinian Legislative Council for reasons we have mentioned and I would like to repeat that we do not have even one person in the council.

Due to our position, we have been subjected to the harshest thing a person can face. Frankly speaking, if any faction suffered less than what Hamas suffers by the Authority, it would attack and fight the Authority. There is a long history of that in Lebanon or Jordan. How many factions opened fire against the other! How many splits took place among the factions even within the same faction? We are still avoiding that since we are very patience because we are very convinced that one day they will realize what we have already concluded and what we have previously warned of that Israel will not change its language except by certain ways. As we see now, after 20 years they understand the meaning of resolution 425 pertaining to South Lebanon.

Ismail Abu Shanab

Concerning the ten factions, I would like to clarify what we have in common with them. We agree with them on the issue of continuing resistance against the occupation. This is the basic principal. We agree in principal, with any body who rejects Oslo since the agreement aims at eliminating the resistance. Consequently, there is a common factor that is supporting the continuation of resistance.

A second comment is related to the issue of democracy and representation of the Palestinian people and refraining from autocracy in Palestinian decision making. Fatah has dominated the Palestinian decision; even it recruited some members for the sake of saying that it is the majority. Yet, in reality there is no majority in supporting the decision.

A third comment concerning rejecting the agreement as part of the opposition. We say that we are against the agreement and other parties say that they are against the agreement. The difference is that we refuse it in principal while they refuse it from a structural aspect. Consequently, the word opposition joins us, yet, after that they have their own track and we have our own in this process.

Mahmoud Al-Zahar

We say that we agree with the factions and even with the Authority over some interim issues. For example, they are ready to establish a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. For them, they say that they will sign a document, which calls for two states: one Palestinian with Abu Dis as its capital and the state of Israel. We are ready to agree to this issue on the condition that we do not sign. We will consider this a first step in which we cooperate with them for achieving this goal. Afterwards, the following generation will follow up in the process. Concerning the other factions, there is cooperation between them and us on two levels. We share the particulars and cooperate with them over these particulars.

Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah

In general, it is clear that the opposition and all of its factions are on one side, and the faction, which adopts the peace process, is on the other. This faction has the ability to embarrass the opposition before the public on the basis that the opposition, and all of its factions, has been speaking for years about rejecting Oslo, yet, they have failed to unite themselves in one political framework, or even achieving a common program. Don't you think that it is a weapon against the opposition and all of its factions? The other side may use this issue in inciting the public opinion against the opposition. Doesn't that push the opposition to present a convincing alternative to the people?

Mahmoud Al-Zahar

This means the Authority, Fatah or the opposition? This is untrue since each of us works according to his own program. We can say the same thing to Abu Amar and to tell him that the opposition cannot meet under one program, because the opposition consists of various factions. You cannot even unite Fatah under one program and you talk in the name of the Palestinian people while you cannot unite this people under one opinion. The argument cannot be presented in this way. They work on the ground and we also work on the ground and each has his own work.

Ismail Abu Shanab

I believe that the comparison is not in its right place. In other words, the Authority cannot benefit from the Arab and international support in order to practice autocracy in the solution. Later, if it cannot reach a solution, it will tell us where our place is on the ground. We have realized an apparent and frank option on the ground, which is continuing the resistance. Consequently, we have no problem, yet, inside the ten factions there is a dispute over what we should do in the coming phase in light of our crisis with Abu Ammar, and our crisis with Arab States and with Israel. Therefore, we are demanding him to resolve the issues because he is the one who complicated them. We demand freedom of democracy and respect for the people's decision by conducting a survey. Afterwards, we will respect the decision of the people and will continue with the program of resistance if the people decide this.

Salah al-Sakka

We have heard about the meetings in Nablus [referring to the National Dialogue meetings] and we also heard that these meetings achieved nothing. Then, what is the position of the brothers in Hamas regarding these meetings?

Ismail Abu Shanab

Unfortunately, we discovered after becoming involved in these meetings, with good intentions, that they only had to do with tactics and boasting, nothing more. We, however, wanted to reinforce national unity on the basis of common factors. Also, we wanted to work on what we agree upon and then make the Palestinian position steadfast and concrete in the face of imminent challenges that have gone beyond the problem of Oslo. These are the problems of settlement expansion and the issue of Jerusalem. Moreover, we wanted to unite the Palestinian platform so that the enemy will not induce any part of our people to be a tool for him. We used to say that these are the three basic elements, which we attempted to concentrate on during the

meetings. Moreover, we didn't want the Authority to be swayed to the extreme by the occupation, and then we wanted to make the Palestinian position stronger and to practice and reinforce national unity that is very vital to our people.

Mahmoud Al-Zahar

Regarding the issue of dialogue, the scientific concept for it, is dialogue to solve a problem. First, I clarify what the problem is and what I want on paper and you put what you want on paper then we start to discuss the issues. If we agree on certain subjects, there will be an agreement, and if we disagree on other subjects we present them to the concerned parties for the sake of finding a solution. Otherwise, the dialogue will fail if there is no agreement reached on the discussed items. In reality, there is no scientific concept for the dialogue that took place and there was no agenda to start with.

The sole scientific dialogue that took place was in Cairo where they wanted to pass two things: first, to allow the Palestinian Legislative Council elections to pass without any attempt to frustrate them. The other issue was respecting the Authority's agreement and halting military action. Therefore, when we talk about dialogues or national dialogue projects, we say that there has been no project for national dialogue at all according to the concept of genuine dialogue.

Ismail Abu Shanab

During what was called the Nablus dialogue there was no agenda, but in exchange. The meeting produced an agenda that was obstructed by the Authority. A higher coordination committee was formed and headed by Tayeb Abdel Rahim and with members of the factions; work aspects were formed but were obstructed by the Authority.

Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah

If a dialogue took place between the ten factions, what are the points of disagreement and agreement? Is there a common agenda?

Ismail Abu Hanieh

After Oslo the opposition was formed as a consequence of this agreement and the ten Palestinian factions before Oslo were united in principle and had a common framework. Also there were factions from inside and outside the PLO. There are also

common factors mentioned by the Moslem Brothers, however, on the other hand, there are complications which hindered our work on the ground and we can view these complications in several points:

The first point - the political platform: we in Hamas reject this compromise in principal. Yet, some factions of the opposition see in their political program that they differ with what is proposed in terms of balance of power and conditions. However, their final stance is with the compromise and the establishment of a state within the borders of 1967 and the establishment of an Israeli state on the remainder of Palestine. For example, they say that we have to stop negotiations if the settlement policy continue. So does that mean that you will progress with negotiations if settlements stop at what they are now?

The second point - we agree with the opposition that the resistance against occupation should continue and not stop. The discussion which took place between the Sheik and Farouk al-Share' [the Syrian foreign Minister] confirmed this issue. This is the common factor between us, however, in practical terms we find a problem in putting this option into effect since the other factions do not give this option what it deserves and consequently, Hamas sees that it alone can lead and practice resistance on the ground.

The third point - the issue of our relationship with the PA in the new reality - we are against confrontations with the Authority, the principal of dialogue is the only way with which Hamas seeks to solve the problem. The problem of coordination with the opposition in this direction lies in the fact that much of the opposition, especially the parties in the PLO, have found themselves in high jobs in the Authority. So, how can we coordinate with them on the issue of corruption or embezzlement in the Authority? Some of them have high positions in it and some of them are part of these problems.

Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah

We are establishing a political system for ourselves and up to now it would be very difficult to describe it. Yet, some of its characteristics are that Abu Ammar is a major personality and Fatah is a major stream. There are also other less important streams acting as if they are just a political "spicing". Are these the characteristics of the system that we want? Despite the description of this system, you as active political parties, what will your precise role in it? Is it to wait or is it to participate in making a positive change from now on? This in turn poses another question regarding the possibility of taking advantage of this interference to make a positive influence in the peace process from a geographic aspect.

Mahmoud al-Zahhar

What is present now is a framework which has been spoken of for 25 years in the name of the Palestinian people while the Palestinian people have not participated in electing it, and despite the fact that it enjoys, at some times, the support of the entire Palestinian people as an example. However, from the constitutional and procedural aspects, the Palestinian National Council emerged in a certain way and continues in this respect. Fatah imposed itself on the Palestinian people and the PLO imposed itself on the Palestinian people, therefore Fatah and the PLO have become the same thing. This is in addition to what is called the political spices. Yet, what is our own understanding on this subject?

First: some may not think that we are subjected to the current balance of power. We confirm that Islam should not be forced on anybody. Our mighty God says: “no force in religion” and says “he who wishes to believe, let it be and he who wishes to disbelieve let it be.” Consequently, we are not forcing what is more important than policy, which is the human being, the base on which the political, social and economic system rests.

Second: Almighty God says “we circulate these days between the people.” Even if Islam succeeds and rules, we know that one day the conditions will change. These are rules and laws that have occurred before, thus, this concept restrains our behavior. Therefore, it should not bother or make us sad if a person dies, is replaced or changed, although it is considered an issue of fate for some people.

The most respectful people to the project of institutionalization are the Islamists as long that this institution is respected and not connected to a person but to law or the institution itself. We support pluralism even if they are Communist or athiest factions or a collaborating faction which says that it is a collaborator with Israel -- we will not force it to change, yet, it should not force us to refrain from educating the people against it or against its mistakes.

In order to achieve this position regarding the law of circulation and pluralism we should adopt the following measures:

1. Issuing laws according to a written and agreed constitution to control our social, political, economic and moral conduct.
2. Respecting the institutions and laws of the country.
3. The just commitment to the justness of this law.
4. Identifying authorities and appointing their responsibilities.
5. Respecting the principal of separation between authorities namely respecting the

legal decisions.

6. Approving the principal of punishment and accountability.

In short, the basic required system is a familiar social pattern where the boundaries of what is permitted and prohibited are known. Concerning this issue, we would nearly have formulated the basic features without getting into details.

Ismail Abu Haniyeh

There are some simple points in relation to the subject of the required political system:

First: I believe that any political system, which respects itself in any part of the world, should include three principles in order to become a system reflecting the situation of the nation. The principles include respect for the rule of law, respect of the constitution and peaceful exchange of authority.

Second: the current system is characterized by the apparent reinforcement of the concept of practicing autocracy in all aspects of life whether they be the political, economic or social. This is indicated by the formation of the latest government.

There is a clear intertwining of authorities and the nature of the leadership meetings is evidence of this. Leadership meetings are basically a combination of the PLO Executive Committee, the negotiating team with Israel, ministers and all of the security apparatuses all under one framework.

The other issue is that we have an economic problem that can be divided into two types:

The first type: related to the economic agreement with the Israeli occupation since the economic conditions are dependent on the Israeli economy. The Paris Economic Protocol is destructive to the Palestinian economy and its independence. Consequently, we find that the people do not enjoy economic freedom neither in importing nor exporting and not even in opening factories or companies and this is a serious problem.

The second type: there is a monopoly of the Palestinian economy resources and the people are not given the freedom of implementing economic political activities. There are restrictions in the area of freedom for the Palestinian human being. There is a monopoly of the Palestinian economy, which is in the hands of the ruling authority.

The Islamic Movement may become part of the state and the political system which in effect depends on the constitution and the separation of authorities, through a program which considers the fact that we are a people under occupation. However, it rejects participation in striking historical rights. Consequently the supposed system to prevail should be based on finding a national program approved by all forces of the Palestinian people. So as to be qualified to protect this program and this system and so that no one will come one day and say that this system does not represent me because it is based on a platform which is totally contradicting with the interests and rights of the Palestinian people.

Ziad Abdallah

I believe that the issue of national harmony is important and received a careful attention in the presentation you provided regarding the nature of the current and future political systems, particularly regarding the formulation of general and agreed upon rules governing it. In general, the elements you presented are correct and represent acceptable principals that receive consensus by every one who believes in establishing a democratic system. The real test however, is your acceptance of laws organizing the activity of this society. Laws passed by the Palestinian Legislative Council that in itself is an outcome of a process you reject in principle. Do you seem to have adopted a contradictory position? I encourage and support this trend, yet, I wish that you would explain how you could solve this issue from an ideological perspective? Since you are saying that you oppose this agreement and its ramifications while on the other hand you say that you support and will participate in formulating laws to organize our political and social life.

Ismail Abu Shanab

Due to the fact that we are an opposition and despite the fact that we have rejected the agreement and its consequences in refraining from participating in the Palestinian Legislative Council, this does not prohibit us from recognizing that the Council is authorized to issue laws. However, there are laws, which clash with the Shari'a (religious teachings) and we cannot accept them. Consequently, is the issue a red line? Yes, it is so. However, when the Council sets a system for the citizen's relationship with the Authority, or in organizing life or in setting the parties law or opening institutions etc., all of these are daily life regulations, even if we disagree with them, we accept them and we try even from the outside to assist in them.

Mahmoud al-Zahar

This is a partial Palestinian legislative council and not a fully-fledged legislative council. It is part of the Oslo Agreement and is ruled by agreements. In other words, it

is not permitted to legislate what is contradictory to the agreement. Knowing that the ceiling of any legislative council should not be limited. It says what it wants and it can cancel agreements. An example of this, is the Israeli parliament, which cancels agreements, complicates others and annexes lands. Consequently, what we have is not a legislative council but a partially legislative Palestinian council.

Ahmad Syyam

At the beginning of your speech, you mentioned that we will reach a certain stage and that the generation to come will continue the process. My question: what are the points that we may all agree on, as a minimum? I mean politically, specific points such as Jerusalem to be the capital of Palestine and the return to 1967 borders? Which are the points of agreement that enable joint work?

Mahmoud Al-Zahar

I am convinced that the negotiations will not give us anything, so how do you want us to agree and to shake hands? Either I am fooling you or either you are fooling me! Let me say that I agree with you on four items which the agreement is based on which have not been achieved so far. I agree with the Authority and with everybody on these items and I am prepared to cooperate over them: Jerusalem, settlements, right of refugees to return and the independent state.

The first issue - the right to return. This subject is not restricted to family reunification, but to be able to return freely since it is your right; and that our borders should be open with Jordan and Egypt without any interference or Israeli supervision. This point is the first step and afterwards comes the issue of the right to return to lands occupied in 1948.

The other issue is Jerusalem. Nobody disagrees over this issue, yet, I want to differentiate between Jerusalem and Abu Dis. Belin's project did not speak of Jerusalem but of Abu Dis. If you are talking about Jerusalem and you have in mind another area, which you consider as Jerusalem, I do not agree with you. Yet, if you want us to agree and to reach Jerusalem and to return even one inch of it, this is a good thing and our right in it still remains. For us, it is a closed issue without saying our rights in Jerusalem since we demand all of Palestine whether now or later. Consequently, I say frankly that I will cooperate with you in the most complicated and ambiguous issues, on condition that you will demonstrate to me that we are in the same cage and even if I am carrying the entire national project which you used to carry earlier as the PLO and you willingly conceded. Therefore, do not force me now to compromise my level for a lower one since the scope of my view and my strategic

and doctrinal principles are much higher than what is proposed and which is still the proposed project in the Palestinian Charter.

Ismail Haniyeh

Hamas practices the extreme degree of opposition with a minimum degree of friction. The understanding of this is that we are basically in one home and that I am not living on another planet or in another world. I would like to say that these are your laws and not mine and I am far from them. On this basis, I will deal with all the ratified laws by the Palestinian Legislative Council on the basis that they are laws that come in direct contact with the reality of my life. We ourselves have sought from the beginning to have laws and formulate rules. If these laws are 40% good we will deal with them completely and not with the part which gives concessions. Consequently, we will try to develop the 40% in order to become 56% or 80%, which will be congruent with the correct view of the society.

Abdel Rahman Abu Arafah

There are two comments before moving to the third aspect:

The first relates to the national versus the religious projects. Sometimes you feel that there are differences over whether there is a Palestinian political rhetoric or not? There are those who say that there is no Palestinian political rhetoric. I am among those who say that there is Palestinian political rhetoric and it is clear, specified and receives total consent. This rhetoric is summarized in the declared Palestinian goal, which calls for the establishment of the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

The second comment - is what I was surprised to hear in the presentation of some brothers and their comprehensive understanding regarding the link between the Palestinian political system and the economic system. This issue did not appear in this form or in this clarity in previous dialogues.

Now we return to the third aspect. What is Hamas' conception of the role of the opposition? The major title of these dialogues is "the opposition between the positive interaction and the negative paralysis." In other words, the role of the opposition between debating, critiquing and waiting on the sidelines until a change takes place and between direct and active participation in correcting the process. How do you see the role of the opposition and the role of Hamas in this?

Ismail Abu Shanab

Our understanding of the opposition is the positive opposition, which should be the conscience of the nation and monitor the behaviors of the Executive Authority within the context of the society's system and laws. The Islamic opposition adds that, by opposition, it does not mean absolute opposition. In other words, it means that you can support the government in a certain subject if it is for the public interest. To always say no and be the opposition, this is not our concept of the opposition at all, but it is to guide and direct the society's track or the track of the executive authority and the political track in a way we see as correct.

Specifically, if you want the opposition to have an active role, three components should be provided:

1. The first component: is possessing the courage in the opposition, politically, and not to talk in a muffled voice but with full courage since there are a lot of Palestinian people who are subjected to measures from this apparatus or those who aspire to lift this oppression.
2. The courage to confront the occupation. Here, the opposition should practice the role of resistance from its positive option.
3. The power in adopting the general issues of the society with all of their details including activating the performance of its institutions since every faction has its own institutions. Therefore, these institutions should be activated.

Mahmoud Al-Zahar

I will not support the opposition! Yet, I want to identify some obstacles confronting it as if diagnosing illness before prescribing treatment:

First: many components of the opposition have non-Palestinian connections. This is an apparent issue and the person who is living in Syria has a different relationship than someone who lives in Lebanon, Jordan or the USA etc. this is an apparent issue and is a part of equations being put together.

Second: there are ancient intellectual remnants since a large number of Palestinian factions at certain stages have been categorized as leftist due to its ties with a strategic alliance or due to adopting the principal of Arab nationalism while religious movements were described as reactionaries namely in the Arab countries. Yet, today nobody dares to call Islam reactionary.

Third: the current relations between some called opposition factions and the Authority. You are the opposition on the level of seats yet you are responsible in this structure and responsible in its negative and positive aspects. When you talk about security offenses for example, you have a colonel or brigadier and officer and you have a person who pursues Hamas and another person gathering information about Hamas? Therefore how can you coordinate with Hamas at the same time?

Fourth: the extent of the strength of connections with the street. There are factions, which do not have enough members on the ground to fill one bus and call themselves a faction or an opposition party. Outside there are strong factions, which do not have any members on the Palestinian ground like the Popular Front - General Command. It is a big Palestinian faction, which has large military bases. But they have no supporters in Gaza.