

The National Political Reference, a Necessity to Affirm National Achievements: The Dissociation between Performance and the Time Period

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The Importance of Evaluating Performance

The concept of the “new Israel” dominates our current political diagnoses of Israeli reality. We may not need to diagnose the causes or components of this new period and the direction that Israel wants it lead to, in order to feel that there are new, more restrictive rules of the game that are trying to influence our political behavior. This behavior that Israel, until recently, has described as a “strategic threat,” in response to the question, “What does it mean to have a Palestinian national project within a Jewish State.” This changed the political concepts between us and the State, regarding the independence of our discourse from the Israeli ceiling, but not from the context of the political struggle inside Israel, and the creation of a new state of awareness and morale among the Palestinians inside Israel.

We, as active political parties (National, Islamic and Communist), are interested in diagnosing these policies as they carry a political project for our people. We are also interested in clarifying our political project, that we are proposing to our people (and we do so with varying degrees of clarity). In contrast, we are not interested in assessing its political performance, its compatibility with the project it carries, and its compatibility with the requirements of the time period. This is no less important than the political gains that our people and political parties have achieved in previous periods.

This analysis is based on the premise that there is no effective struggle without reading the period, the nature of its challenges, and the delineation of clear goals. Nor is there an effective struggle without the accumulation of previous achievements.

The absence, or absencing, of assessment of the political performance of the parties, leadership and political discourse, allows us to always avoid presenting a political appraisal for ourselves and our people, about the weight of the political concessions we might make during our daily political activity. It also makes us indifferent, to increasing the weight of the “working routine” in the political sphere, at the expense of our political struggle. What is more dangerous, is moving away from the culture of evaluating our political performance firsthand, especially in the midst of successive political events and serious changes in Israeli policy towards us. This may lead us to turn weak performances, into a new political ceiling that is retrograde from the gains we have achieved in the past. It may also lead us to present any decline in our political performance as a “new opportunity.”

The Achievements of the Previous Period in Palestinian Eyes

The awareness of the impact of the “new Israel”, and what the Arab reality elicits of frustration, sense of helplessness, humiliation and loss of direction, makes us also have to answer the almost inevitable question: Has our struggle also entered a “new phase?”

In order to answer, we must build on a clear understanding of what we define as a previous period, and we can do so easily. In less than a decade and a half after the second Intifada, a political stage came into being that was considered an upheaval in the concepts of the relationship of political power between us, and the Jewish State. It was clear that there was a consensus among our people with the discourse and political performance of the political parties -in varying degrees- and with the elites’ discourse, as well as the discourse and spirit on the Palestinian street. They concur on clear aspects of a Palestinian national project, independent from the Israeli ceiling, facing, for the first time, the Zionist project, the Israeli institution and unanimity.

It was clear to everyone that the formulation of an equation in which we separate between citizenship and Zionism, while at the same time, accept citizenship, without its Zionist dimension. Thus, reconnecting the context of citizenship with the national dimension of the Palestinian national struggle against Zionism, is a political innovation. An innovation that has enabled us not only to confront the Right, the institution and discrimination, but also to use citizenship itself to face the entire colonialistic project with all its details, and face the full complicity of what is called the “Left.” This equation enabled us to transfer the question of “loyalty to the State” used by the institution and the “Zionist left” to examine our seriousness in citizenship, to the question of “loyalty to democracy” raised to the State and the “Zionist Left” to test their seriousness in citizenship. This new discourse began with a political achievement called the project of a “State of its Citizens.” It then moved to the street and to the elite (Future Visions). This achievement, which has been ramified and translated into many concepts and turns, could not have developed in this manner without releasing itself from the limitations of the Israeli ceiling, and mechanisms of control of the expectations of the Israeli street.

The “optimism of will,” and the vigor and power that characterized that period, were accompanied by the “pessimism of the mind” which saw, in the Hebrew State, the genetic material of the Zionist project in everything related to its relationship with us. This was in clear and sharp contradiction with the discourse of coexistence, bridging peace and Arab-Jewish fraternity, which was described at that stage, as naivety and political appeasement.

The adoption of this vision and the concepts and morale that accompanied it, and dealing with it as a political achievement, emerged through its public expansion, the partiality of the elites and the emergence of youth movements. It also emerged in the obligation for all the active political parties to interact with this new vision, and avoid anything that conflicts with it explicitly. This gave this discourse and political performance prestige and national dominance.

The Achievements of the Previous Period in Israeli Eyes

However, more importantly, is the recognition of the existence of this power and challenge, which came from the Israeli discourse and practice itself, that is, the recognition of the adversary. This is important in my opinion, even more important, because you should not always ask about the strength of your struggle and its impact in your opinion. Rather, you must first ask about the strength of your struggle in your adversary's view, and even his hidden appraisal. You should always reconsider, if you think the challenge is worthwhile, when your adversary doesn't. In politics, it is not enough how you identify your own struggle and its impact on your adversary, but rather, to know how the adversary has received this challenge and impact, and whether it is really significant.

In this regard, we do not care about the assessments of the Israeli populist discourse, which is always provocative, on the destructive work of political awareness and politicization. Nor on the work that carries a real project and challenge. Rather, we are particularly interested in the unconscious and uncontrolled official discourse to the Israeli street and its animosity. As well as to the Israeli Left and its arrogance. We are interested in the political and strategic research and studies, or academic analysis, and we are interested in the assessment of those responsible for the "Arab file" in the Hebrew State, headed by the Shin Bet.

All these bodies dealt with our discourse and our political performance, in the aftermath of the second Intifada, as a challenge and a new political situation that was surprising and even sometimes shocking to the Israeli establishment. This was because they came in contradiction to the Zionist citizenship plan, and were regarded as a "strategic threat" and as a state of release from the Israeli (official /strict) ceiling of our struggle.

There have always been two discourses toward the Palestinians in Israel. One that is not governed by calculations of restraint and control, but by hatred and instincts, which emits the poison of racist discourse and behavior without reckoning. While the other is more lenient and "liberal", and interacts with our demands. This other discourse emanates from calculations of restraint and control, and is always more responsible in calculating the degree of discharge and complacency needed, so that we do not rebel in full and shatter the rules of the game completely. The difference between the two is that the former has now taken over the government, as part of an extensive change of elites in Israel (gradually accompanied by our period of "pessimism of the mind and optimism of will" which we speak of), in what is known as the "new Israel." The other discourse's control over the relationship with us has decreased, and even the form of the relationship between the two has changed. As they both publicly clash not only on the power, but also on the definition of "Israeli nationalism," and the redefinition of the rules of the political game within the Jewish tribe itself.

A New Period of Reversion?

In light of all these changes in the Israeli arena, the spreading of an atmosphere of frustration and perhaps loss of meaning due to the deflection of the Arab revolutions from their path and recoil from logic. The massacres of children in full view, the involvement of all Arab countries, not threatened by uprisings, in the suppression of the revolutions and support of terrorist organizations. The failure of the Palestinian resistance project and the transfer of the Palestinian Authority into an agent of the occupation protected by it. Events raging in the

Palestinian arena within Israel, some, were manifested in a blatant Israeli aggression on us; primarily, the forced exit of Azmi Bishara from the country, and the outlawing of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement. In addition to widespread prosecution of the cadres of the National Democratic Assembly (Balad) and large-scale arrests of young people to prevent the recurrence and growth of the popular struggle and closing streets. While others were manifested in an ambitious political will, worthy of protection from deviation (and I tend to think that we underestimated and still underestimate the dimensions of all of them), such as the formation of the United List. With regard to all these changes and turns, we may have to ask: What stage are we living? What answer should we give? Is our current political performance reconciled with that answer? Is it based on and protected by the inherited political gains?

The Palestinian political map, as well as the official Israeli reading and even the Israeli Right itself, concur that the religious and settler Right have increased in strength. They are trying to change the definition of the rules of democracy, in order to fully endorse the expansion of settlements, confiscation and appropriation, extending of Israeli sovereignty over the settlers, and trying to suppress the possibilities of popular struggle. In addition to conditioning civil rights (budgets, land areas, combating violence) with loyalty to: civil service, police recruitment and house demolitions. The last six years have seen rash legislation of about 50 racist laws and amendments, which is equivalent to at least 80% of the laws passed by the Knesset in the first 62 years of its life! (See Madar's 2017, second report on racist legislation, prepared by Barhoum Jaraisi, covering part of the period). Israel has also taken an unprecedented step in trying to make a real change to our political map, by directing a kind of blow to one of the country's most important political movements, the northern branch of the Islamic Movement. In addition to conducting large scale prosecutions among the cadres of the National Democratic Assembly (Balad) Party, moving from the stick and carrot stage, to the gallows and carrots. Thus, the Israeli establishment is determined to actually make radical changes in the map of the political forces active on the political scene, strengthening what it defines as "forces of moderation" and obliterating what they diagnose as "hotbeds of rebellion."

It is theoretically possible, if we overlook the depth of the existence of the Zionist project as the only political project that still effectively controls the Israeli parties' programs. (This means that it is not possible, even theoretically). That this situation would strengthen the alternative offered by the non-Right in Israel, deepening its political identity as a serious and complete alternative to the fascist atmosphere of the Right. While understanding, that there is no difference between the fight against fascism, and the fight against the State of hostility to the Palestinians, not only as citizens, but also as owners of the homeland. However, the opposite happened cumulatively and slowly, more silently and less dramatically; the Labor Party completely renounced the malicious propaganda of its "love for the Arabs" or its "leftness." It even changed its name to prove it, and became the "Zionist Camp." Furthermore, the opinion polls, which are worthy of arousing alarm, show a similarity between one third of the voters of the center or non-right parties, and the voters of the Right with regard to political attitudes toward the Palestinians (inside Israel). This is a clear indication of one of the reasons and results of the insistence of the leadership of these parties not to distort their image as "Arab lovers." The above-mentioned Madar report indicates that the "Zionist Camp" Bloc showed a greater deviation toward racist laws and those supporting the occupation and settlement. In the past two years only, it has initiated 5 racial laws and has

participated in the submission of 37 racist law proposals. The same report indicates that 22 of the 24 members of that Bloc participated in the initiative to enact racist laws. In addition, the Zionist Camp supported around 18% of the racist laws, objected to only 36% of them, and abstained in at least 44% of them.

This historic stage may be the most awaited for the Palestinians to present their political alternative, which they have delineated, protected, embraced, and boasted of, during the previous stage. We may be in the midst of a historical moment that is most accommodating - if not sympathetic - for understanding what we had put forward in the period of pessimism of the mind and optimism of will: a State of its citizens with all its dimensions. A State confronting the Jewish State, and the colonialist project which created it. A State confronting the contradiction between Judaism and democracy. A State confronting the adoption of the Zionist project by all sectors of Israeli society, and the competition among the sectors for a role within, and to benefit from it. A State with Palestinian political unity within a Palestinian national project that is open to solidarity by all who agree with it.

The stakeholders of the pessimism of the mind and optimism of will cannot find a better historical moment than the celebration of fascism in Israel, to present, with might, their clear democratic national moral project. They also cannot find those who are aware of the power and meaning of that opportunity, better than the union of the Arab electoral lists in a single List. A List that was formed for the first time in the history of this people, who sometimes know, to a shocking degree, how not to read, or how to be afraid of their own power.

This was, and still is, not only the convincing answer, but the only answer against Israeli fascism that the world now sees in its clearest form, and also understands at this moment. However, this needs leadership, and leadership is the one that reads historical opportunities and uses them well, but this historic moment has borne those who cannot play this great role.

We did not capitalize on this fascist stage, which produced a single Arab List, in order to strongly present what we have. Rather, we looked at clear political retreats that passed unnoticed, without criticism, without attention or registration.

How can a political “leadership” attempt (if only try) to emerge from a state of political parity it acquired with difficulty, and return to a state of political subordination to the expectations of the Israeli street? A situation where there is crowning of concepts such as “not to anger the Israeli street” or “not provoke it?” What street are we talking about? Who is the Israeli we do not want to anger? Where did the fresh gain of the political concepts of a “State of its citizens”, which is supposed to block the argument of anyone who accuses us of extremism or “refusing to live with the Israelis” go? Where is the psychology of getting rid of the question of loyalty and extorting the test of “coexistence” and goodwill?

How can we jump from what we are supposed to have overcome by severing our subservience to the “Zionist left”, and dealing with it as “a Zionist force entrusted with our guardianship”, to the concept of an alliance to “strike” fascism, in the form of a “democratic camp?” Why do we retreat now with fascism so strong, from the concept of democracy confronting Zionism, which we seem to have established? Why do we not affirm the true standards of democracy and deal with everyone according to the degree of commitment to

them? Do concepts such as the state of Israeli fascism or the decline in the morale of our people (Israel, the Arab world, Syria, and all that is not us) really serve to justify this?

This article asserts that the opposite is apt to be true, to the same extent, which means that the context does not justify and is not sufficient to interpret the result. As long as the context itself is suitable for producing conflicting results: the State of fascism can be a historic opportunity to present your project in full force.

This article argues that we must look for the cause of this upheaval in two things: the transformation of the unity of the Arab lists from a factor of strength into a factor of weakness because of a completely subjective issue. This is due, on the one hand, to the attempt to dominate it without returning to a political reference (the Joint List originally failed in its set-up). In addition to the absence of a supreme political reference for our political parties and movements that consolidates each achievement and makes it irreversible, on the other.

National references and unity in politics not only regulate performance, but they also invest sacrifices and make achievements and gains irreversible. Those who lose their national reference or do not carefully build them, make themselves vulnerable to loss of sacrifices and gains.

Unity is Strength

If, the most prominent political variable on the Palestinian political map inside Israel, is the establishment of the Joint List. If, the Joint List received this amount of acceptance, public expectation and Israeli vigilance, Israeli and international media, public and political attention, in a way Arab parliamentary representation has never had (regardless of how to invest it and the unbearable ease of aborting that power). If, we believe that the joint parliamentary framework between the active political parties can be invested in the development of the political debate between the parties and deepen the national consensus among them, while restricting personal whims. If, “unity is power,” then we will understand why the analysis of performance of the Joint List is central to the analysis of Palestinian politics inside Israel and its directions.

Moreover, without the power inherent in the Joint List, it seems that the weakness of our policies is that parliamentary work weighs heavily in the political sphere. As, it is the discourse and performance of the Arab Knesset Members with its challenges, moderation, presentation, depth or superficiality, that reaches both the people and the institution. From this, you can read the policies of the parties and their impact on our people. This weakness lies in a direct relationship with the extent of the Israeli institution’s restriction and incitement of the Arab Knesset Members. This may be the stage in which the institution tries to subjugate the Members of the Knesset themselves, strengthening the mechanisms of their subordination to satisfy the Israeli street, and realizing they are successful to some extent. This may be the stage where there is the greatest need to strengthen the popular and public party action versus the parliamentary bloc on the one hand, and to strengthen the mechanisms of partisan accounting of the parliamentary, work on the other.

The most important summary of the first experience of the Joint List, (we want the List to continue, but not in the same line it is now), indicates our failure to create a clear and

consistent political reference based on the achievements of the previous phase. This leaves the decision to adhere to the program of the Joint List (which reflected the gains of the “optimism of will” stage; a stage considered to be advanced in degrees, compared to the current political performance) to the subjective convictions of the List’s components. Not only that, but this lack of reference has led to an apparent volatility, even to clear contradictions. In one of our statements issued recently, we stressed that “the vote of the opposition blocs and the “Zionist Camp” to the side of these racist laws reveals the wide gap between the statements they make about peace and human rights, and their actual political behavior, which is no different from Netanyahu's extremist government.”

Acceptance to participate in the Herzliya national conferences, which, as Israel itself acknowledges, aim to draw a strategy of control over the Palestinians. Therefore, it invites politicians to “disclose our intentions,” talk about the “democratic camp” or accept participation in a demonstration in Tel Aviv with the participation of the Zionist Camp, while neutralizing the National Democratic Assembly (Balad) Party. In addition, acceptance to make a speech at the anniversary of the assassination of Rabin (and then those who resemble Netanyahu come and refuse to participate). Making public statements on withdrawing from not participating in Peres’ funeral and considering it a mistake. All these individual performances also seem completely contradictory with the Joint List’s program and with its statements. The vast gap between program and performance is not justified by the atmosphere of fascism, nor by the “new Israel.”

Moreover, we are dominated by the obsession “not to provoke Israel.” This has been our judgment following any speech or behavior that causes a stir in the Israeli street, even if it reflects a performance that was a natural part of our national political performance during the previous stage. We do this, instead of insisting, as we have done in the past, on the performance, which the Israeli street soon deals with as a normal part of the political scene.

We add to this confusion, when we, in the Joint List, choose to maintain complete silence and tranquility when we are prevented, in a historical precedent, from entering the Al Aqsa Mosque. When we refuse even to seriously propose freezing our parliamentary work after the outlawing of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement. We are oblivious or unaware that a serious threat in politics, generates results that are just as important as implementing the threat. Likewise, opening all the scenarios always increases your strength, thus reducing the likelihood of making you predictable, and increases the power of choice of the Joint List, which is no longer implicit.

Therefore, we should not be surprised by the opinion polls of the Arab street, which indicate a serious decline in political positions. Furthermore, this political performance is the most conducive to the emergence of a non-political, populist and superficial model. A model that builds its popularity on a decline in the national and democratic political positions of our people, and on a reduction in the level of political debate and awareness.

Return to Optimism of Will

The manifestations of this performance are a departure, not only from previous achievements, but from the Joint List’s program. This program, which speaks practically of a State of its citizens and the need to organize ourselves nationally, that is, the product of the achievements

of the previous stage. In other words, when we judge our performance in the Joint List, we must not remove it from the context of its creation, or restrict this context to the issue of passing the threshold. Its deeper context is the sequence of development of the concept of self-organization of the Palestinians inside Israel and disengagement from subservience to the “Jewish Arab” frameworks. Even when we do not underestimate the importance of the claim that the Joint List is originally a group of parties with different positions, and that the differences between the National Democratic Assembly (Balad) Party and the Democratic Front for Peace and Equality (Hadash) Party – the most ideological components of the Joint List – remain and will remain as is, and therefore, we should not expect a strong political performance. We have to diminish this claim as an argument that leads us to an unavoidable inevitable outcome. This is due to the following main reasons:

Firstly, this allegation springs attentively or unintentionally from the fact that the Joint List is also a product of the sequence of the development of the political power of the Palestinians inside Israel. This is one of the products of the “optimism of will” stage and the release from the custody, expectations and approval of the Zionist non-right parties and the Israeli street in general.

Secondly, unity is always between those who are different, but this did not prevent it from establishing the concept of “unity is power,” unless we use it in a game of domination and building internal influence.

Thirdly, the enthusiastic pursuit of understandings with “those who proved that they are no different from Netanyahu” (instead of efforts to establish a political reference for the Joint List, and at the expense of establishing a political reference). This wagers on the Joint List’s power as “a third parliamentary power” rather than on its weakness “only as a coordinative tool.”

Consequently, is the Joint List apt to be an attractive force in the process of understandings with those “who resemble Netanyahu”, while being unsuitable to be an attractive force in the Arab street to develop a Palestinian national project that is open to anyone who wants to be in solidarity with it?

The absence of a national political reference, not only leads to the repudiation of our people’s political achievements and allowing some people to revert on them. It also enables some of them to present these retreats as an “opportunity”. While unaware that the Israeli establishment itself regards them and their performance as an “opportunity” to affirm its plans and to strike our national struggle and strengthen them as “forces of moderation,” and we know what Israel has meant, since the Nakba, with the forces of moderation.

The current phase, crucially needs to delineate a national consensus led by the active political parties, the National, Communist and Islamic, in which we affirm our political achievements and prevent their discharge by the atmosphere of fascism. We also need to understand that the morale of our people and the public opinion polls are a compass we steer, and are not led by. At this stage, we must compound our caution at the temptations of “influencing the other,” which is sometimes exercised on us as members of parliament. As we tend to believe in a hypothetical power game, in which we imagine our ability to influence, without realizing that this relationship is likely to be counterproductive.

Furthermore, this stage requires increasing the weight of party, public, popular and youth work (and this should be placed at the center of the next stage's attention) within the general political sphere so that the parties can protect their parliamentary and struggle performance from incitement and exclusion laws, or temptations of hypothetical influence.

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