

## **\*The Foreseeable Future of the Palestinian National Unity Government**

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Whenever I attempt to visualize the future of the Palestinian National Unity Government, a dark hue conceals my mind. I am not a pessimist per se; however, these feelings of cynicism are often created whenever I think about the challenges that face the Palestinian government. These challenges, both internal and external, need to be addressed immediately if there ever will be a Palestinian National Unity Government.

On January 25, 2006 the Palestinian Legislative Council Election took place with HAMAS gaining majority votes; and henceforth, forming the Palestinian Government on March 29, 2006. Needless to say, the Palestinian territories began witnessing dramatic changes as the National Liberation Movement of FATEH had been their forerunner ever since February 1969. The FATEH leadership did not want to admit their defeat in the election but the problem lay much deeper, as HAMAS was unable to step up to the responsibility of its new role as a leading government.

An Arab saying claims that one of the most serious threats that could occur to an individual, so to speak, is “to be an enemy to one’s self or to have an enemy in one’s own home”. Ever since the inauguration of HAMAS as the new Government, FATEH has been reminiscent of their long-gone glorious days; and has been eagerly awaiting HAMAS’s failure. HAMAS, on the other hand, intends to solely prove that it is capable of being a political leadership without dismissing the option of military resistance against Israel.

After the passing of *al-shaheed* Yasser Arafat, the people voted for HAMAS as a sign of retaliation against the flawed practices of the new FATEH leadership. The confidence between the two main parties became stagnant as they both struggled to accomplish their agenda. This is where a tinge of grey begins to appear in my mind because if a backbone of trust does not exist between the two parties, then the proposed Palestinian National Unity Government will be threatened with paralysis before it is even born.

Also notable is the fact that Israel has always been hypocritical when dealing with any previous Palestinian Government, constantly hindering peace negotiations at critical moments. When Yasser Arafat was in power, the

Israeli Government claimed that he was an “obstacle of the peace process” and that Mahmoud Abbas, the prime minister at the time, was in fact the “man of peace”. When Abbas became President, however, they claimed that he was a powerless leader and refused to continue negotiations with him unless he took full control in dismantling the infrastructure of terrorist organizations in the Palestinian territories. Now, with the existence of HAMAS –which Israel considers a terrorist group –this gives them yet another pretext to keep the current situation in a stalemate.

Israel claims that HAMAS has deteriorated whole regions but ironically enough, Israel has retaliated with killings, arrests, harassment, house destructions, and the complete closure of Gaza and the West Bank. They have even gone to the extent of arresting dozens of HAMAS Ministers and Members of the Legislative Council, holding hundreds of millions of dollars –of Palestinian revenue and taxes –under alleged claims that these funds should not reach “terrorist” groups.

It is also worth mentioning that out of a population of nine and a half million Palestinians, four and a half million are living in the territories of the Palestine National Authority (West Bank and Gaza), and five million in *Diaspora*. Therefore, any solution must include the return or the compensation of these refugees, according to the United Nations Resolution 194.

Also, since the populations’ fertility rate is high, both Palestine and Israel face problems from both sides of the equation. For Israel, it fears the risk of fading into a large Palestinian demography –therefore threatening the very existence of Israel; and as for Palestine, the Government will find itself in front of a serious demographic problem which will then require an efficient means to absorb the influx of these new returnees.

Another challenge which faces HAMAS as a Government; is the stance of the United States Administration which blindly follows the Israeli perspective, as well as the stance of the impotent European Union –which up till now has been unable to liberate itself from the clutch of the American hegemony. The Quartet (United States, Russia, European Union and United Nations) has subsequently stopped all contact with the Government and imposed sanctions unless it agreed to abide by the following three pre-conditions: a) The Government [HAMAS] has to recognize the right of Israel to exist, b) denounce all kinds of terrorism, and c) honour all signed

treaties between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). These pre-conditions, however, touch the very principle and election platform of HAMAS, and threaten its existence as a militant and political movement.

As nothing seems to improve for the Palestinians and their suffering hitherto continues to intensify under the brutal Israeli occupation, my thoughts are concealed with ambiguity and the visions in my head slowly creep into complete darkness. For that darkness to clear, mutual efforts of all concerned parties must focus, both externally and internally, on the real obstacles that face the Arab-Israeli conflict.

On the External Level, the Israeli Government must: i) stop the ongoing harassment of Palestinians -killing, arresting, house destruction and closure policy –and must release the Palestinian Ministers/Parliamentarians as well as the estimated 10,000 Palestinian prisoners, ii) show practical steps of its willing to maintain a durable and comprehensive peace, iii) abide by the advisory ruling of the International Court of Justice and demolish what has been built of the Separation Wall; and iv) accept the idea of the Two-State Solution and guarantee the borders permeability, as well as the contiguous territory of the future viable Independent State of Palestine.

On that note, it should be mentioned that the futility of war and the racist Separation Wall was proved a total failure by the last Israeli War against Lebanon and Hezbollah. As well, if Israel loses the opportunity of achieving a comprehensive and durable peace according to the Road Map and Arab-Peace Initiative –adopted on July 23, 2002 at the 14<sup>th</sup> Arab Summit in Beirut –there is no guarantee that such an opportunity will recur in the upcoming future.

As for the Internal Level, a few pre-requisites should also be completed. In order to achieve economic development, good quality of life and social well-being, the Palestinian Government should ensure: i) a bridge of confidence between the two main parties [HAMAS & FATEH] is built; ii) legitimate and good governance according to the rule of law and democracy, as well as a significant decrease in corruption is applied, and iii) adequate security – among both Palestinians and Israelis alike –is reached.

Such achievements in the post-Yasser Arafat-era are almost impossible whether it is a HAMAS Government, FATEH Government or National

Unity Government unless certain issues are also dealt with on the International Level. Therefore, sincere cooperation and coordination needs to exist between the Palestinian Government and the Arab, Muslim and friendly countries. The Quartet must also adopt a policy away from the American domination regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict; and finally the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other donor countries have to resume their investments and financial assistance, regardless of the type of Palestinian Government –as long as it is democratically elected.

I cannot be sure of what will ensue with the future of the Palestinian National Unity Government but what I do know for certain, is that at this point, the image in my head remains gloomy. All aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict –be it from the Israelis, International Community or even the Palestinians –indicate that not one has even remotely begun to positively contribute in solving this crisis. Instead, weak solutions are being used to temporarily sedate the problems at hand; as each and every attempted resolution has always led to nothing but crippled political initiatives.

Thus, I do not see a ray of light unless sincere and tangible efforts are made to address the root of the problem. Solving this perpetual crisis will not only make it clear to distinguish between ‘terrorism’ and the actual struggle for freedom but will also substantially contribute to International peace and stability, and will outline a brighter future for the generations to come.

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\*The opinions expressed in this article are entirely those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the views of ISIS.

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