

The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy
MIFTAH



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The failure of dialogue leads to a return to the people

Introduction:

The occupied Palestinian territories are currently living a state of frustration and tension and have a sense that the national project has reached a dangerous impasse as a result of the growing phenomenon of infighting, security chaos and overall militarization of society. There has been an increase in the appearance of local armed groups, an absence of the rule of law and a loss of any sense of security. This comes in tandem with political pandemonium and the issuing of contradicting statements accompanied by the absence of Palestinian media rhetoric directed to the outside. There has been an increase in killings and assassinations in addition to an almost total collapse of institutions in the private and public sectors and an absence in the role of basic institutions such as the Legislative Council in holding the government and others accountable. In addition, there is a clear dysfunction in international relations in general and an exodus of Palestinian capital and capabilities along with a number of other negative factors. This necessitates attention from all those loyal to the Palestinian cause to expedite finding feasible solutions with wide scale popular consent and which would be able to reshape internal conditions, break the isolation surrounding the Palestinians and lift the siege imposed on them.

This paper deals with the crisis of the Palestinian political system, with emphasis on the responsibility of the President, the government and the opposition. The paper will propose practical steps that will enable a way out of this crisis, especially in light of indications towards the holding of early elections.

The failure of dialogue and the national unity government

Mechanisms for handling differences basically depends on the principle of dialogue, aimed at finding a way for various parties to coexist. This can happen by creating mutual formulas that would clarify the consented points and methods of implementation on the one hand, and by specifying differences and methods to handle them on the other. If the parties are not able to adapt to the proposed formulas for specific reasons and when the dialogue reaches a dead end, the only democratic way out might be to agree on renegotiating with the people and accepting the opinion of the majority and its proposals– that is, holding early elections.

It seems the results of the national dialogue sessions failed because of the dispute between Hamas and Fateh, which seemingly revolved around the distribution of ministerial portfolios (Finance, Foreign, Interior and Information ministries). Still, to confine the dispute to this one issue is to underestimate the problem. The real reasons for the ongoing failure of the dialogue sessions over the past three months are attributed to adopting the strategy of postponement and stalling and not showing any flexibility over reaching an agreed-on government program that would respect the international commitments of the PLO and former governments. Another obstacle to

achieving a national unity government is the adopted style of dividing up shares, as if the matter were about divided gains.

Hence, the dialogue might continue for years without generating any results in light of the prevalent negotiating mentality. In this regard, some believe that reaching an agreement with Hamas in the short term has become more or less impossible because any agreement would be based on the principle of either preserving the government or the collapse of the PA, which would increase the splits and division.

From another perspective, some believe that Fateh and the Presidency bear a part of the responsibility for the failure of national unity government talks based on the Prisoners' Document and respect for PLO commitments. Finally, some consider that other reasons for the failure of the dialogue is the intervention of mediators, especially those who are driven by personal motivations and who issue statements from time to time, which only intensifies the crisis.

Furthermore, some believe that if early elections are not held, there will not be another opportunity to hold them in the next three years. However, any considerations on holding early elections must necessarily be accompanied by the inclusion of people who are not Fateh or Hamas followers. Some also believe that the option of elections without a referendum is tantamount to a declaration of civil war. In the case a referendum is not held, there should be a rational decision agreed on by all the factions, which is part of a clear national consensus. In the context of holding early elections, practical steps for the President and the opposition have been discussed.

Position of the President

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) is in a unique position, given that he is empowered to make the decision to hold early elections while trying to avoid the outbreak of civil war in the area. Therefore, he is looking for any way out that would not push him into a confrontation.

Some say the President bears responsibility for part of the current crisis when he agreed to the government even though it did not announce its consent to the letter of commission. Some also believe the dialogue is being conducted between the Presidency and Hamas without referring back to Fateh. Hence, given his administration of the crisis and because of his procrastination, the President is perceived as being in a weak position while Hamas appears as intransigent.

The opposition

The Palestinian opposition must first define itself, its role and its positions, which are supposedly based on intellectual ideologies. Throughout this current crisis, the oppositions' behavior could best be described as improvisation, which lacks coordination and clear planning. Some elements of the opposition felt it was their duty to oppose Fateh or both parties equally. Perhaps the most important point the opposition must agree on is the nature of the current crisis. Is it a crisis over power or over ideology? What is the role of the opposition in this regard?

Furthermore, Fateh is also enduring a severe internal crisis, which it has not yet been able to overcome. It has not learned its lessons in order to regain the confidence of the people and the other factions, which perceive Fateh as a movement that does not have a clear strategy or even knows what it wants as a movement. It is lacking accountability, reform, and self-evaluation in addition to being preoccupied with pressing issues related to confronting the occupation, such as the annexation and expansion wall. Moreover, the opposition considers its relationship with Fateh as one of exploitation where an agreement between them is absent.

Recommendations:

In order for the Palestinians to find a way out of the crisis, the participants recommended the following:

- Determining the nature and components of the crisis in order to reach a consensus over a program and plans to overcome it.
- Formulating a joint strategy, which includes specific actions to confront pressing issues such as settlements, the wall and the exodus of qualified persons.
- Forming a serious coordinating leadership for the opposition that would serve as a pressure tactic. This endeavor is aimed at rectifying the relationship between Fateh and the other opposition factions in a way that would guarantee that this cooperation would not be on the basis of exploitation but on the basis of equal partnership.
- Reactivating the Legislative Council so it can carry out its role in holding the government accountable and convincing the Palestinians of this government's shortcomings since it is the body that grants or withholds confidence votes. Hence, certain PLC members should not be allowed to evade their obligations.
- Renewing our media rhetoric on a continuous basis at the level of external relations.
- Reactivating the international relations campaign led by the President's office and not confining it to relations with the US consul, Olmert's office and certain European representatives.