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If outgoing Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad is just a technocrat or administrator, as is often claimed, why is his resignation causing so much commotion? Self-recrimination is running high in the United States, Israel and the Arab world over what is seen, in hindsight, as insufficient support for his agenda. International leaders and institutions are noting his accomplishments ^[1] and expressing their appreciation, with a discernible subtext of anxiety about what comes next. The Palestinian media speak of little else. Hamas is in an uproar. And public disputes have broken out among members of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's Fatah party, some of whom have been engaged in a vituperative campaign of public vilification against Fayyad.

The answer is that Fayyad is not merely a technocrat, but is also a singularly important Palestinian politician, although of a new variety. The idea that he was "just a technocrat" is misleading in two different ways. First, from the outset, he has been as much a politician as an administrator. Second, "technocrat" in societies that require building or rebuilding from the bottom up, is hardly a pejorative. In fact, Fayyad managed to combine the best features of technocratic competence and expertise with a growing determination to develop an alternative political vision and create a new Palestinian agenda. He has developed and begun to implement a dynamic, innovative vision for how Palestinian society should seek independence and govern itself, even in the run-up to statehood. He served with competence and integrity, and earned the respect of the international community. He was able to translate that respect into funding of his multi-year program of institution and state building.

The Palestinian public in the West Bank saw the results on the ground in real time. When other parties -- including Israel, international donors, and other Palestinian political actors -- allowed Fayyad's policies to proceed without disruption, they invariably produced positive changes on the ground. Moreover Fayyad has engaged in a brand of retail politics that is very familiar in the West but is highly unusual in the Arab world. No other Palestinian political leaders cut more ribbons, shook more hands, ran more miles, engaged in more grassroots activism or mingled with so many crowds as he reached out to the public in a direct manner. Indeed, few others in the Arab world ever even try this approach.

For most of his tenure in office, this combination of tangible results and continuous public outreach led to high approval ratings and widespread popularity for Fayyad as Prime Minister. However, his agenda was disrupted when the Palestine Liberation Organization applied to the Secretary General for full United Nations membership in September 2011. The matter was referred to the Security Council, where it was defeated without a threatened US veto. However, it did lead to a significant reduction in international, and particularly American and Arab, aid to the Palestinian Authority, and even more seriously, Israel's withholding of Palestinian tax revenues. A serious economic crisis ensued that repeatedly forced interruptions in the payment of public sector employee salaries.

In an effort to respond responsibly to a growing fiscal meltdown, Fayyad imposed an unpopular austerity program. The crisis, and his carefully calculated but painful economic stabilization measures, opened the door for a relentless and unfair campaign of vilification against the Prime Minister. He was personally blamed for the poor financial situation, and indeed all other pressing Palestinian problems and difficulties. Fayyad paid a heavy political price for this but continued to shoulder the burden of crisis management without either responding to vituperations in kind or placing the economic hardship at the feet of political decision-makers whose policies had caused donors to withhold their support. Eventually, as the coordinated chorus of criticism against him grew louder, more personal and more vicious, painting the world class economist as a reckless manager of the economy, a stooge of the United States and an agent of Israel's occupation, he decided it was time to resign.

In his parting weekly radio address ^[2] to the Palestinian people on Wednesday, April 17, Fayyad clarified several crucial misapprehensions regarding his resignation and intentions. The United States and others pressured both Fayyad not to resign and Abbas to refuse his resignation. And even after Fayyad resigned, American officials expressed hopes he would "stick around" as caretaker prime minister. But he flatly stated this was his last address in office. The only mention in his address to the reasons for his resignation was a mention of those who "persisted in issuing preconceived judgments," an unambiguous reference to some of his critics within Fatah. Were he to continue as a caretaker for an extended period, these same actors would be able to continue vilifying him. Fayyad would tolerate no more.

Fayyad has clearly had enough of being the scapegoat and whipping boy for all the challenges facing the Palestinians, including a number that can be laid directly at the feet of his fiercest critics within Fatah and Hamas. What he was saying is that the Palestinian people deserve, and can have, better.

Fayyad's Vision and Policies

But Fayyad also said that he intends to remain involved in Palestinian public life. Far too many of the assessments of his resignation, both in the Middle East and the West, have read like

political obituaries. To the contrary, however, Fayyad insisted that he is not leaving public life and that "stepping down... does not in any way mean giving up on being active." And he has already begun to outline his vision for the future and the contours of his own policies, which contrast with both those of Hamas and of Fatah.

Fayyad outlined a vision for governance based on "rebuilding hope and trust in the ability to perform and advance steadily towards consolidating institutions of the Palestinian state." The "core task" of these institutions, he said, "is to serve its citizens through the principle of citizenship based on justice, fairness, respect for rights and protection of freedoms." It is instructive to note that this vision of the state's core responsibility as responding to its citizens on the basis of their rights and responsibilities as citizens is strongly linked to the aspirations expressed in the so called "Arab Spring" protest movements and uprisings in various countries. Ironically, and counter-intuitively, of all Arab societies the Palestinians might have the best opportunity to create such accountable, transparent and responsive national institutions, because they mostly must be created *de novo*. Because they have few established institutions of governance and in many cases are starting from scratch, with the proper vision, leadership and public support Palestinians could get much further, much more quickly, than many of their Arab counterparts.

Obviously, the occupation remains by far the largest obstacle to Palestinian self-governance. The whole point of these policies is to end the occupation, and replace it with a viable, sovereign, independent, transparent, accountable, democratic and pluralistic Palestinian state. In his radio address, Fayyad explained how the vision he was outlining reflects the indisputable national imperative of establishing an independent, sovereign state. Fayyad stressed the concept of "steadfastness," which he defined in terms of "the ability of the child to go to school, of a farmer to remain on his land, or an individual to remain steadfast for another day, and then the day after that, until we achieve all of our national objectives." What Fayyad was saying is that his policies of state and institution building, even under the onerous conditions of occupation, simultaneously prepare for successful independence and, by improving their quality of daily life, allow Palestinians to persist in their individual efforts to develop themselves, their families, communities and society.

Fayyad is capitalizing on his record as an institution-builder and reformer by emphasizing narratives stressing self-empowerment rather than victimhood. He laid down a clear challenge to his successors, and the international community, about the role and nature of governance in Palestine, both now and after independence. It is to serve the people, to ensure their rights as equal citizens and demand from them the responsibilities that go with that empowered status. It reframes ordinary Palestinians as individual agents of change in their own lives and for the benefit of the national project as well. It suggests that society is as much an agglomeration of small and individual parts from the bottom up as it is a grand, unified vision from the top down. His vision of government, as he has described and practiced it, seeks to unleash individual and small group energies in the service of broader social, economic and national development, and, in this case, eventual independence. Fayyad always intended his institution-building program to be an inspirational and empowering tool for individual Palestinians to build their state through their own efforts from the ground up. His goal was to replace a culture of dependency with one of empowerment. This ultimately proved to be a heresy that the beneficiaries and enforcers of the status quo would not forgive.

Fayyad also insists that the only way to end Palestinian political divisions is through free, fair and open elections. This implies skepticism about the current Hamas-Fatah bilateral reconciliation process, and reflects widespread fears that, at best, it could produce merely the

illusion of unity without real substance. Elections can only be meaningful in the context of a fully developed democratic process. That requires multiple competing political parties with open campaigns, free debates, clear platforms, and the freedom of expression and association without government or any other form of intimidation. The rest of the world, particularly the donor community, has an interest, and indeed an obligation, in helping to ensure that the process of preparing genuinely competitive elections is as free and fair as the voting process itself.

The Future for Fayyad, Palestine and the Two-State Solution

The Palestinian political crisis, of which Fayyad's resignation is only the latest symptom, is not just about unity and elections. Its broader challenge is how to attain good governance by engendering a meaningful debate about ideas and values in an enlarged political space. This requires an empowered free press and the ability to organize and assemble without fear. It means moving beyond the closed entrenched Fatah-Hamas binary, towards achieving an accountable system of government with separate executive, legislative and judicial branches bound by a constitution and body of laws that protect the rights of every citizen.

Whether such an agenda can gain traction in a society whose traditional leadership has ruled by practicing confrontational grandstanding and sloganeering remains to be seen. The Palestinian public is becoming increasingly ambivalent about the possibility of progress on multiple fronts. The occupation appears as entrenched as ever and the diplomatic impasse in negotiations with Israel does not offer much immediate hope for independence. The economic crisis in the West Bank persists, stymieing the proper functioning of government and paralyzing the institution-building process. The West Bank and Gaza remain divided between Palestinian Authority and Hamas rule, and the political division shows no sign of abating. The entire Palestinian polity, including existing parties and institutions, is threatened by this sense of stasis and drift. More importantly, the prospect of anything better in the future is called into question as Palestinians lose confidence in their various political leaderships, institutions and social frameworks. To restore their sense of agency and revive their civil society and economy requires opening up of the political sphere. Otherwise, it is hard to imagine what could cure the growing Palestinian malaise.

From the outset, Fayyad has consistently reminded everyone that no one else will, or can, create a governmental, social and infrastructural framework of a Palestinian state other than the Palestinians themselves. His policies not only challenged Palestinians to channel their energies towards developing their own society in preparation for successful independence. They also bluntly and directly challenged Israelis to step aside and allow them to do that. And they offered the international community a way of investing not merely in the Palestinians but in a program to build the future Palestinian state and the two-state outcome. Now that Fayyad is moving his agenda beyond the Prime Minister's office, new challenges and opportunities for sustaining and expanding it are almost certain to emerge.

If they are going to succeed in their national program of ending the occupation and establishing an independent state alongside Israel, Palestinians will need to utilize every resource they have. And all those committed to achieving a two-state solution will have to help, or at least allow, them to do that. Fayyad's unquestioned technocratic expertise and proven record in government earned him unprecedented international credibility (almost certainly unique for any Prime Minister of a non-state). This credibility itself is an enormous asset to the Palestinian people, and their future and cause. It remains to be seen whether it can be connected to, and associated with, a vital social and political agenda.

Fayyad will soon have to decide how to pursue this vision in practice. Can he turn his credibility into votes and electability, assuming elections are held? Can, or will he be allowed to, build an independent political movement, assuming he wants to do that? Can he create a coalition of those who yearn for a new approach, or will the existing order stifle dissent and push innovations aside? How will others respond to this vision? What degree of success can he have in winning over swing constituencies, particularly among Palestinians opposed to Hamas and, above all, former or current Fatah supporters who are alienated by their party's inability to rejuvenate itself? And if Fayyad does not succeed in, or is blocked from, building a large Palestinian constituency for his agenda, or finding a new national role in which to pursue it, what is the future for the vision he has outlined and the institution-building policies he has pioneered? The answer to these questions could have a significant impact on the future of the Palestinian national movement, and, perhaps even, the two-state solution itself.

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