

The Changing Face of Fatah?

Voices of a New Generation

Nov 6, 2003



Brief Analysis

A Ceasefire Proposal

A cycle of violence has dominated the scene since September 2000. One fact has emerged: Israelis cannot impose on the Palestinians, and Palestinians cannot impose on the Israelis. Strategies of violence have failed on both sides and are producing more victims. However, [although] the Palestinians have issued proposals showing a serious commitment to ending this cycle, no positive response has emerged from the current Israeli government. Abu Mazen [a.k.a. Mahmoud Abbas] tried to carry out a one-sided hudna [or ceasefire], but Israel undermined it by continuing its policies of assassination, siege, and occupation. This new ceasefire proposal is not a grand strategy, but simply a means to get back to negotiations and boost Abu Ala's [a.k.a. Ahmed Qurei] chances of forming and maintaining a new government. The proposal contains three parts: (1) a mutual ceasefire agreed upon by all Palestinian factions, under the supervision of the Palestinian government, and approved by the Israeli government; there should be some outside mechanism approved by both sides with the authority to monitor and enforce compliance with the ceasefire; (2) serious actions by the Palestinian Authority to combat any group violating the ceasefire, and to shut down missile factories, stop the armed protests, close the tunnels, and halt arms smuggling; (3) local and union elections, with the participation of militant groups, to increase representation, reform, and national unity in Palestinian society. Involving the armed groups in the political process gives them a constructive alternative to violence.

By continuing to build settlements in Gaza and erecting a wall that severs Palestinian land, the current Israeli government is eliminating the option of a two-state solution and coexistence between the two peoples. Instead, it is perpetuating the practice of living at the other's expense. There are three options for Palestinians and Israelis in the future: living one instead of the other; living one inside the other; and living beside each other. The only acceptable option is living beside each other as two peoples in peace. Fatah is committed to peaceful coexistence with Israel in a two-state solution because neither Israelis nor Palestinians can continue to suffer from so much killing.

QADURA FARES

Calls for Reform

The Palestinian Legislative Council considers government reform to be its top priority. Despite several internal attempts to cripple this process, much has been achieved lately, especially thanks to outside pressure. Progress has been made through legislation in the areas of institution building, judiciary empowerment, and increased accountability. The complexity of the political situation, however, has stalled the process and destroyed a lot of what had been accomplished. While Arafat is not democratic, the pressure and threats against him have damaged the cause of reform. Needless to say, government reform would be more feasible in a less hostile situation. Achieving a mutual ceasefire would provide a better environment to carry out administrative and fiscal reforms.

The Hamas Factor

The issue of Hamas's acceptance or rejection of a peace agreement has not been thoroughly considered among

Palestinian groups, primarily because no package peace deal has yet been supported by the Palestinian Authority and presented to the other Palestinian factions as a just solution. However, in internal Palestinian dialogues, Hamas has revealed itself to be a politically pragmatic movement, capable of accepting a fair political solution to the conflict with Israel. Still, even in the worst-case scenario, if Hamas did openly reject a peace agreement signed and approved by the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian Authority would fulfill its role as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people and take all measures and actions required to implement the agreement.

Arafat's Status

Given its dimensions and complexities, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict could never be controlled by a single person. Ultimately, portraying Arafat as the sole obstacle to peace is both inaccurate and misleading. While it is true that Arafat's leadership has not reflected democratic values, on a political level he remains one of the few Arab leaders who has given concessions and signed a peace agreement with the State of Israel. He not only signed Oslo and negotiated Camp David II, but was even willing to sign Camp David II had he been offered a more comprehensive deal. Moreover, Arafat's political fate is a matter for the Palestinians to decide and no one else. The Palestinian Authority has no right to refuse to negotiate with the Israeli government while Sharon is its leader. While they may prefer not to, Palestinians deal with Sharon as the representative of the Israeli people. Palestinians have every right to expect the Israeli government to treat Arafat similarly.

Geneva Accords

The Geneva initiative complements the Roadmap and reassures the Israelis and Palestinians, as well as the larger international community, that there is still a way out of the current situation, that peace and coexistence are attainable. While Sharon's government is threatening the two-state solution by building the fence and settlement activity, the maps drafted in the agreement constitute a comprehensive framework for the Palestinian people to achieve their state, and the Jewish people to achieve their state as well. Nevertheless, while the feedback was positive from the Palestinian side, Sharon dismissed the initiative and called its Israeli participants traitors. Although the Geneva Accords reflect the views of majorities of both the Israeli and Palestinian populations, there remains a desperate need for a partner on the Israeli government side, someone willing to negotiate with the Palestinian Authority in recognition of their mutual interest in achieving peace.

HATEM ABDEL KADER

Purpose of the Visit

This delegation's trip to the United States was planned at the request of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy and has already proven successful on several levels. The trip's main purpose was to exchange perspectives and try to halt the cycle of violence. The delegation met with Ambassador David Satterfield from the U.S. State Department as well as other administration officials and members of Congress from both parties. It also discussed development issues with members of several nongovernmental organizations. The delegation submitted a proposal on the ceasefire, which included a proposed enforcement role for the U.S. Although there has been no recent progress, and the U.S. has largely suspended active involvement in trying to resolve the conflict, the U.S. still has a crucial role to play in the process, a role no other country or international entity can play. Historically, the U.S. has proven to be an effective peace broker in the region, able to pressure both sides toward a final settlement. Still, the U.S. must resume dealing directly with Arafat as the legitimate leader of the Palestinian people rather than refusing to deal with him, which only diverts attention from the major issues fueling the conflict.

Fatah's Role

Like any other political institution, Fatah has its own divisions and problems. However, it represents a large segment of Palestinians who aspire to peace and coexistence with Israel. There is a remarkable movement within Fatah that

is lobbying for reform and democracy and should be supported. Achieving a ceasefire is the most immediate priority, though. Any such agreement must include a halt to armed demonstrations and protests, the confiscation of weapons, and the prompt arrest of anyone who violates the ceasefire. Majorities of both the Israeli and Palestinian populations are in favor of a peaceful solution, and leaders on both sides must work to achieve it.

This Special Policy Forum Report was translated and prepared by Joyce Karam.

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