

# The Need for Accountability

Jul 23, 2002



Brief Analysis

Citing a recent speech given by Yasir Arafat to the PLC on the importance of reform, Abu Amr said, "For the first time, he acknowledged that there were mistakes, but he takes responsibility, something I personally did not like because this meant from the very start, suppressing the process of accountability and actual reform. The idea of the president was, 'Okay, there were mistakes. We close the files. We start afresh.' That was not acceptable."

PLC Response

"We asked for a change of government. We asked [Arafat] to sign the Basic Law. The Basic Law was not then signed, and we asked him to sign all pending laws, and not only to sign laws, but to make sure that these laws are implemented because signing laws is one thing. Implementing them and respecting them is another. And all along, we have been having a problem of not implementing laws or respecting the rule of law.

"With regard to elections, the president did not issue a decree . . . with specific dates, and we need specific dates, and we need a decree because there is a great deal of work that needs to be done, if the elections are to be conducted in January. Time is running out."

Broadening Palestinian Electoral Participation

"There is a main bloc. Seventy percent of the [PLC] members at least are from the ruling party, and no matter how much they differ with Mr. Arafat every now and then, . . . this is the ruling party. And in order to allow for the formation of parliamentary blocs, we need to open the system and allow for the participation and representation of political groups who have so far been excluded.

"This is bound to create a meaningful opposition, and if we have meaningful opposition, then the president will no longer be able to co-opt the Council the way he has been able to do all along. The opposition elements in the Council are few, and if you have a majority, then, you know, the president does not care much about the Council.

"We should allow for the participation of all groups, including the opposition, and including the Hamas movement. First of all, Hamas opposed the previous elections because of the word 'Oslo.' Now, this time, we have to take care of this political obstacle. I suggest by saying that we will carry out elections under a political framework that we all subscribe to, and it is understandable here that people would make way for one another. So, if the word 'Oslo' is bad, it is an obstacle, we do not have to mention it . . . when we talk about the . . . political framework for election. If we include the groups like Hamas, this does not mean that the system is shifting towards radicalization. It is the other way around. And I think it would be construed and understood by all that Hamas would be shifting towards, or drifting towards modernization. Being part of the system has a logic of its own, and when we talk about a system, we talk about not only the participation in the decision making process, but also being liable and accountable."

Changing the Cabinet

"We asked the president to form a new government within forty-five days. And also, to restructure the security services, to reform . . . the public finance, and to exercise some accountability. So these were the broad guidelines in

our document of reform.

"When we looked at the cabinet, we found that out of twenty-one ministers, or portfolios, sixteen came from the old cabinet. . . . [T]here were [only] five new appointments. We told the president we want new blood, new people, efficient, capable, with expertise, with integrity. People who would enjoy public consent, and of course, these criteria were not taken into account when the president formed his new old cabinet. So, we wrote him a letter, and we told him, 'Please, bring your government to the Council for a confidence vote.' So, he answered back, and he said, 'No. I am not going to send the government to the Council. I am only going to send the five new appointees.'

"It was not a new cabinet, but even if he says that it is a reshuffle, in essence, it's not because we have five new appointments, and we had eight members of the old cabinet assuming new portfolios. When we gave them confidence the first time, it was for different portfolios. Now, they are assuming new portfolios. We have, all in all, about thirteen new portfolios out of twenty-one. He is going to have a very hard time getting a confidence vote.

"This is not the kind of reform or change we asked for, we aspired for. We realized that you do not do reform, meaningful, radical, substantial reform overnight, but people wanted to see [a] convincing and good beginning.

"Also, how do you do reform without accountability? In eight years since the establishment of the PA, not one single Palestinian senior official was questioned or held accountable, or tried for failures, misdoings, abuse of public funds, public office—you name it, violations of the law. And we demanded that this time, we want accountability. We are not going to let people come and become new ministers or accept the new government without exercising some accountability.

"We had another very big disappointment when we, in the Council, not the Americans, not the Israelis, requested that there was no need in the first place to have seven or eight, or eleven, or ten, I do not know how many, security services. And maybe these services should be reduced in number, and also held accountable. And also, it was made clear to him, not in the document, but verbally and otherwise, that maybe it is a good idea to get rid of some of these faces who have been known for their misdeeds and violations of the law, impingement on public property, private property, public liberties, private liberties, and extortion."

#### Impediments on the Road to Reform

"[There is a] serious and responsible debate . . . going on in the Palestinian society, and among all Palestinian groups. Nobody is excluded.

"If the Israeli tanks are in every Palestinian city, then the talk of reform becomes luxury, political luxury, and people like us would be embarrassed. We have to shift gears and go and talk back about facing the occupation, ending the occupation.

"Yasir Arafat is important. He bears the primary responsibility perhaps, but the Palestinian people are diversified. There are, for instance, individuals, groups, interests, power centers who oppose reform and change because it hurts their interests. And that is across, outside, inside, old generation, new generation, people from all types. So, if you draw a list, or an inventory list of the corrupt and inefficient, you will find them coming from all of these sources. We have a camp in the Palestinian society which is opposed to the rule of law and which is opposed to the reform process. As I said, that would take away from their influence, interest, privileges, and there are those who are proponents and supporters of reform.

"At this point, talking about the balance of power again, I think the opponents to reform, although they may be numerically less up till this moment, I think they are more powerful and more influential. It is going to be an uphill battle."

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