

# Palestinians Must Accept Accountability

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**P**alestinian reform is now on everyone's mind. President Bush has made it the litmus test for Palestinian statehood and for U.S. diplomatic engagement between Israelis and Palestinians. Europeans strongly favor reform. Arab leaders who have little interest in reforming themselves are enthusiastic about Palestinian transformation. And, perhaps most important, the Palestinian public not only favors reform but is insisting on it.

That is the good news. Now the bad: Reform is still a longshot for several reasons. First, if the terror does not stop, the Israelis -- notwithstanding initial moves now to ease curfews and restrictions on Palestinian movement -- will see little choice but to keep the Palestinian public under siege. Reform, elections and the creation of a new Palestinian order will not take place in an environment in which the Israeli military is in every Palestinian city. Second, Yasser Arafat, the quintessential survivor, is trying to seize the mantle of reform to avoid losing power. But as long as those trying to implement reform are accountable to him, there will be no prospect of real change. Third, the international community -- especially the key donors -- needs to stand united on reform, its requirements and the Palestinians we will be working with to ensure its implementation.

Already we see disagreements over dealing with Arafat. Does this mean the reform battle is lost before it begins? No, but it will take a concerted and integrated strategy to succeed.

To begin, we must address the security issue. Security won't come from simply calling for it. The rolling process of security performance and Israeli withdrawals will require working with the remnants of the Palestinian security organizations because they are the only ones with the capacity to act. We should not kid ourselves: Initially, they are likely to act only if Arafat says to do so. But that is not the end of the story. We should make it clear that there are specific steps to be taken in terms of acting against Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Al Aqsa Martyr's Brigade elements first in Gaza and then in different parts of the West Bank.

The U.S. should set the standards of performance and evaluate whether Palestinian forces are meeting those standards. Clearly, since this involves the prevention of terrorist attacks against Israelis, we will need to coordinate closely with the Israelis, and they will need to resume coordination with Palestinians on security matters.

Such an approach should not be limited to security. It should be applied to all areas, with accountability flowing to the outside, not the inside, in at least the early stages of the reform process. If Palestinians who are acting in the

areas of finances, rule of law, separation of powers, civil society, education and security are accountable to Arafat, little will change. Certainly, until new institutions governed by professional standards are truly functioning, accountability must come from the outside. The donor community has a right to demand such accountability, particularly given the money that will be required for reconstruction and given the Palestinian track record on fulfillment of promises.

Who should lead the accountability effort? While the effort will need to be multilateral, the United States does need to organize and lead it. Otherwise it is simply unlikely to happen. We should chair an oversight board. It can have subcommittees with different chairs related to areas of different expertise. But the overriding purpose is to provide oversight, evaluation and accountability. And it must be understood that donor money will stop flowing should performance stop.

The board and the subcommittees would deal with those Palestinians who had technical responsibilities for carrying out reform. Again, even if appointed by Arafat, these individuals would be answerable to the oversight board, not to him.

By dealing with them, one avoids the issue of dealing with Arafat. Moreover, should he seek to block steps taken by Palestinians trying to fulfill their responsibilities, the oversight board could announce that Arafat was seeking to undermine the reform process.

The oversight board would work with Palestinians on the timing of elections. While Arafat has called for elections for his office in January, it makes more sense to build institutions for a Palestinian state before electing the head of the Palestinian Authority. But municipal and legislative elections should be held no later than January and in any case should occur first. These elections make sense not only because they can be tied to institution-building but also because they will begin to create a legitimate political leadership. There is one other general point to keep in mind if reform is to work: Palestinians have to believe that the reform process will actually lead to a credible Palestinian state. In this sense, reform has to have a destination. It is commonplace to talk about the importance of giving Palestinians hope or a clear political horizon. In truth, the president did that. But, having spent time with a number of Palestinian reformers over the last week, it is fair to say that they were not persuaded by Bush's speech. It is not simply that they would have liked more content about what might emerge in a Palestinian state. Rather, it is that they want to see some indication that the U.S. has staying power.

It would also help them to see some signal of hope about the future from the Israeli leadership. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has always argued that the problem has been Arafat, and without Arafat, peaceful coexistence with the Palestinians would be possible. Palestinians doubt he has any such intention. If there was ever a time for Sharon to address his understanding of Palestinian needs and aspirations, this is it. ❖

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