

After the national unity government

Attendees (without distinction):

Haniyeh Al Bitar, Naser Abdul Kareem, Tufeeda Jarbawi, Jamileh Abed, Daoud Talhami, Mazen Ghneim, Zahireh Kamal, Abdel Qader Hussein, Yasser Dijani, Siham Barghouti, Hani Al Masri, Saleh Ra'fat, Ghassan Khatib Salaam Fayyad, Mamdouh Al Aker, Azmi Al Shuaybi.

MIFTAH participants: Hanan Ashrawi, Lily Feidy, Bisan Abu Ruqti, Mousa Qous, Ruba Hasan.

Introduction:

The signing of the Mecca Agreement on February 9, 2007 between Fateh and Hamas came on the heels of an extremely difficult period in the Palestinian arena. Following the meeting, which entailed the commissioning of President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh to form a national unity government that respects agreements signed by the PLO, the announcement of this government was made. It gained the confidence of 83 PLC members as opposed to three members that cast no-confidence votes during a special session held on March 17, 2007.

The 11th government is considered the first to include such a wide political participation, which encouraged some to defend its existence given their hopes that it could prevent the shedding of Palestinian blood, protect the unity of the Palestinian people, and break the siege imposed on them. At the same time, others do not consider this government to be a true national unity government since it was created in response to the personal agendas of Hamas and Fateh, which would make it a coalition government.

An analysis of the framework in which this government was born shows that it served as a tool for escaping the tragic cycle of confrontation and infighting in Gaza between Fateh and Hamas in addition to avoiding a civil war, which would be devastating for the Palestinian social fabric. The birth of this government came at the expense of priorities, qualifications and performance. It includes some ministers who lack experience and expertise in the running of public institutions. Furthermore, the dozens of victims who lost their lives during the unfortunate clashes between the two rival parties constituted a high price the Palestinian people were made to pay for the creation of this government.

Still, the current government may be the most suitable structure for Hamas, in that it provided it with a cover and gave it Arab legitimacy. It also suits Fateh, which is seeking to return to power. Furthermore, it gave the presidency complete authority to carry out negotiating tasks and contacts with the Israelis, even while conditioning this with presenting any agreement reached to a vote by the new national council.

The government program:

The current government announced it would strive to achieve a number of issues, which can be summarized as follows:

Politically: Ending the occupation, respecting international legitimacy, rejecting a transitional state, reaffirming the right of return, working towards liberating the prisoners and confronting Israeli measures. It will also work towards forming a higher committee for Jerusalem affairs in coordination with the PLO to support the steadfastness of Palestinian Jerusalemites and to confront Israeli policies in the city. It also reaffirmed the right of resistance against the occupation in all its forms including popular-based resistance. It will also strive to solidify and expand the calm in exchange for a halt to Israeli measures. The government also confirmed the responsibility of the PLO in negotiations.

Security – The government gave priority to regaining control over the security situation and working towards forming a higher national security council in addition to restructuring the security services on professional and legal bases as well as setting a plan to end the chaos and lawlessness.

Legally – To work towards reinforcing the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary and combating corruption.

Economically – To work towards ending the siege and reassessing the Paris Protocol; protecting the economic sectors, endorsing national products and encouraging economic growth; reassessing investment laws to end monopolies in addition to supporting the agricultural sector.

Reform – Adopting a program of administrative and financial reform; setting a plan to supervise government expenditures, combating corruption and promoting transparency and integrity.

Palestinian values – The government committed itself to reinforcing national unity and reaffirming the unity of Palestinians inside and abroad. It will also stress on the principle of nationalization, equality in rights and duties and social justice. It reaffirmed political pluralism, the freedom of opinion and press, supporting women's rights, promoting political partnership, developing the educational system and giving attention to the youth sector and the sports movement.

International Relations – The government will seek to reactivate its role at the Arab and Islamic level and also with regional and international institutions; it will promote relationships with friendly countries and permanent member states in addition to establishing friendly relations with the American people.

Analysis of the program

An analytical reading of the government's program reveals that it is comprehensive and ambitious and includes everything one could think of without it containing any realistic

goals. Hamas was seen as presenting hasty political steps, which supports the belief that it may follow these steps with others during the Arab Summit conference in Riyadh. However, Hamas is perceived to have offered these concessions without getting anything in return from the Israeli side, except for remaining in power and being granted Arab legitimacy. This constitutes a comedown for some of those in the higher political echelons who hung their hopes on Hamas to raise the Palestinians' political negotiating ceiling.

In addition, the program includes a concern for the political dimension and conciliation between Fateh and Hamas, which is at the expense of social justice. This is because the program lacks any organization according to priorities, the necessary action plans and mechanisms of implementation. For example, in terms of women's rights, the program does not focus on equality and does not set any mechanism for achieving this equality. Neither does it portray the characteristics of the future towards which we are heading on this level, especially amid the overall feeling today that women are absent from the Palestinian political scene. The same applies to the resistance, which needs clarification over its nature and the most successful form it should take. This should then be adapted and mechanisms set for it.

Concern over lack of implementation

Hence, there is a concern that the current government will not be able to implement its program and that its reading before the PLC in the most recent vote of confidence session was the last reading before being neglected. This is because it lacks any practical or intellectual methodology amid a fear that the ministries (public institutions) will be turned into strongholds for the faction from which the ministers allocated to them belong.

It is expected that the first six months of the new government will be for "catching its breath." It will be a difficult period at the security and financial levels especially after the accumulated government funds delayed since 2006, which are estimated at approximately \$2.7 million. This is in addition to the seized Palestinian tax revenues and the continued international siege. There have been hints that this siege will soon be lifted after the initiative from the Norwegian government, which sent its foreign minister to meet with the President. This was followed by Sweden announcing its intention not to boycott any member of the new government.

There is a fear that some Hamas members of the government will continue to be boycotted, which could lead to the paralysis of almost half of the government. This necessitates a unified and solid Palestinian position not to allow the international community to isolate half of the government and insist on being dealt with as one unit.

It is important to note in this regard that merely meeting with this or that Palestinian official is not considered an achievement in itself. What is more important are the practical measures to life the siege and boycott imposed on the Palestinian people in order for them to rejoin the international community. Most likely, at the beginning, the government will turn to the Arabs to help it in meeting its financial obligations. Still, it

will definitely be the government's performance that will guarantee the expediting of any change in international positions towards lifting the siege.

Internally, the government should proceed on the path of reform, especially neutralizing public positions, which should be filled according to qualifications and professionalism. This should come hand in hand with reinforcing the sense of the employees' professional dignity and job security, in addition to reinforcing monitoring and accountability of the government's performance, especially by the civil society, which should assume its role in this regard. It should be noted that government employment is suffering from tremendous inflation whereby the overall number of employees hired by the 9th and 10th governments is around 15,000 people, which inevitably increased the salary bill.

In light of the moral collapse seen today in the Palestinian arena regarding concepts of citizenship and responsibility, the creation of an enlightened society based on the values of pluralism and tolerance has become one duty of the current government. Therefore, there should be programs and plans that aim to invest in the Palestinian individual, especially the children and youth sectors since they are the backbone of the future.

Future of the government

In spite of the Palestinians' experiences with previous governments, whose life spans ranged from 9 to 10 months, the life of this government is largely linked to developments of the events in Gaza and what it can achieve there. If the two sides succeed in deciding to put an end to the security chaos and reinstate and implement the rule of law on everyone without exception including bringing those involved in the recent events to justice, then this government could last for several months. If the government fails to work towards gathering the weapons of militias, factions and families, restructuring the security services and dissolving the militias, there is a fear of renewed clashes, especially since there are reports about various parties preparing for a new round of fighting. In light of the fact that the only alternative for this government is to hold early elections, we must ask ourselves if the period for the current government is enough to prepare the atmosphere for general elections.

Rebuilding the PLO

It is dangerous to apply the principle of dividing shares on the restructuring of the PLO and its various institutions. At the same time, it is wrong to depend on one election process and to take this as a basis for restructuring the PLO. We must also mention that the style of delegating designated shares began with the establishment of the PLO, which failed to transform into a national liberation front.

In order for the process of rebuilding the PLO to be successful, elections should be organized according to the principle of complete proportional representation in whichever way PLO factions agree on to both inside the homeland and abroad. This is, of course, if a way is found out of the problem of holding these elections in Jordan. Until these

elections are held, Hamas and Islamic Jihad could be considered as observer members in the PLO.

National Security Council

Even though the Mecca Agreement called for a restructuring of the national unity council, the new appointments approved by the presidency drew reservations from Hamas. Its politburo chief released a statement saying that all decisions should be made in agreement between both movements, as if the issue of a partnership committee is only between the two movements. This is dangerous because it cancels out the opinions of the rest of the Palestinian people and disregards their rights.

In this regard, we must emphasize the importance of forming the national security council since it contributes to the promotion of unifying mechanisms and unity of the leadership according to that stipulated in the Basic Law regarding the division of security authorities between the president and the prime minister. If there is an empty slot for the position of General Commander of the security forces, it is best that the prime minister mandates someone to take this position in order to reinforce the principle of accountability.

Recommendations:

- In order to close the gaps in the government's program, which should be separated from the programs of the factions, action plans and programs and mechanisms for implementation for this program should be set.
- So that civil society can participate, a mechanism for monitoring should be activated by the civil society so as to create balances; the government must also close the confusing gaps in its performance, which are leading it in dangerous directions, in addition to maintaining its role in raising the public's awareness towards various issues.
- The formation of a national council for education, culture and science that would work towards promoting the principles of intellectual pluralism, democracy and respect for the opinions of others; it should fight the phenomenon of factionalism in the Palestinian education system.
- Establishing a national council to follow up on women's issues and to work towards formulating plans, programs and mechanisms to protect women's rights and to work on expanding their participation in the political and negotiating process.
- Demanding a dissolution of the partnership committee between Fateh and Hamas and replacing it with a national committee for security, administrative and financial reform with a legal mandate, which would also have authorities created by credible and professional people.
- Reaffirming the inadmissibility of canceling the right of resisting the occupation; making popular resistance a daily course of action for citizens.

- Working towards neutralizing the employment system on the basis of competencies and job qualifications rather than factional qualifications in order to preserve the dignity and security of civil servants.

- To work towards independence in the financial field as much as possible and to gradually and slowly eliminate dependence on foreign aid; this has turned into a means of pressure on the Palestinian people in terms of the siege and impoverishment imposed on them.

- Encouraging cultural, political and thought forums, which can contribute to reinstating consideration for the Palestinian cause and raising the bar for the Palestinians at all levels; they also work to set the Palestinian national path straight and advance in the field of Palestinian development at all levels.