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The Briefing of the First Issue of Seyasat

Seyasat is the first publication by the Public Policy Institute (IPP) recently established in Palestine 2006 to enhance and promote research and studies in the field of public policies in Palestine. Public policy is a poor field in terms of research which the Palestinian academy paid little attention if any to during the last 15 years. Public policy is linked to the emergence of the state and thus as the state or the political entity is a recent phenomenon in Palestine, thus is public policy. As the introduction of the first issue of Seyasat says and in light of the above analysis, Seyasat and the other publications of the PPI is a contribution in the discussion around the Palestinian entity and the future and prospects of the Palestinian state in the larger sense.

The editor of chief of Seyasat, Dr. Atef Abu saif, who hold a PhD from the European university Institute in Florence, writes a long study entitled " the Dilemma of the Palestinian political system: a reading in the development of the Palestinian national movement". From the beginning, the researcher states that the 2006 was very rich in terms of events and development. It impacted heavily in the form and content of the Palestinian political system. It is for the first time since the inception of the modern Palestinian revolution starting in 1965, seems too much occupied with their internal problems and disagreements than on their national concern of liberating their homeland and establishing their long awaited state.

The researcher warns that the support that the Palestinians used to enjoy for the last 40 years among the nations of the world and the governments of some countries is likely to drop or it has dropped already. Much of this decline is due to the fragile Palestinian national unity and the internal disputes over issue that has nothing to do with their national dream. Since the Palestinian aspiration of state and independence is not materialized yet, the Palestinians are invited to think deeply of their future and to reflect more sensitive awareness of the risks surrounding them.

Dr. Abu saif says that we should not be simple to believe that the current dilemma of the Palestinian political system was born with the Fateh-Hamas quarrel on issue linked to the constitution or the authorities of both the President and the Prime minister, and the disputes between a Fateh-President and a Hamas led Legislative Council, or its due to Fateh refusal to deal with the results of the second legislative elections and Hamas inclination to boom its constitutional rights. There is something much deeper as Dr. Abu saif suggests. This what will lead to the Hamas military coup in the Gaza strip less than 6 months after the researcher wrote those words.

Dr. Abu saif suggests that in order to understand the current dilemma in the Palestinian political system, we have to read carefully the development of the Palestinian national movement and the position of the two big fractions and their role in this long history. He identifies four indicators which he claims vital for any understanding of the Palestinian context:

- (1) the two tendencies in the Palestinian political mind between "palestinizing" the national struggle or connecting it to a wider context be in Arab, Islamist or communist.
- (2) The Palestinian aspiration for a state and their efforts to materialize this aspiration. The researcher says that there is nothing affected the Palestinian political mind than the feeling among the Palestinians that if they had a state before 1948, they would not be expelled from their hometowns.
- (3) The dramatic shift that the Palestinian made in accepting the peaceful methods alongside with the military struggle as ways to achieve their national claims.
- (4) The Palestinian need for national unity as the only guarantor of the stability of the internal front and the marking rules of their inner relations.

After presenting these indicators, Dr. Abu saif discusses the position of Hamas in regard to them. He states that understanding the movement's position of those indicators and its perception of each one of them help in highlighting its current position concerning the internal dispute. This would help as well in finding the way out of the tunnel.

Dr. Abu saif reads in-depth the literature of Hamas to present its views and position. As he rightly concludes and despite the possibilities of future evolution of the conflict, the stability of the internal Palestinian relations should lead to a true integration of Hamas in the Palestinian political system. On the same vein, Hamas must reflect a genuine understanding to the dynamics that control this system and the national movement in general. In addition to that, a national consensus must be reached built on a common realization of the risks and challenges and not of partisan interest and demands. National interest must be above every other interest be it personal or partisan. The worst thing about the 2006 legislative elections is that it is to the first time, the Palestinian feel really that they are not speaking in one voice and that democracy is more than just going to the elections ballot. There much that the Palestinian needs to do to regain their political system.

In the second study in Seyasat, the Palestinian researcher based in Cairo, Besan Odwan, present a study entitled " Hamas movement: the national identity and the religious discourse". In its study, Besan reviews the development of the political discourse of Hamas over the last 20 years and tries to highlight how the movement bridged the national discourse with the religious one. This is what the researcher calls the pragmatism of the movement that characterized it since its foundation in the late 1980s. Hamas employed since its foundation a group of slogans, programs and political positions which in many time reflected its ability to maneuver politically and to accommodate with the surrounding changes. This was the case since the founding fathers declared the movements to their formation of the 10th Palestinian government.

However as the researcher notices that pragmatism is a general characteristic of most of Islamist fractions mainly those attached to the Muslim Brotherhoods, Hamas larger mother. Islamist movements are capable to adapt and to open their political and even religious discourse when needed to protect themselves against any crash form the regime sides. They merge the political and social in their grassroots activities to secure a social protection in time of conflict with the regimes. This is very much what Hamas was doing even before its foundation when it founded organizations and association through which it channeled its political activities and programs.

In general, Islamists can compromise easily. They are ready to forget about some of their ideological statement in exchange for political recognition and political support.

However, Hamas has a peculiar position that distinguish the movement from the larger Arab Islamists movements in Egypt and Lebanon say. Beside being a religious movement that shares with the rest of the Islamist the tendency to employ Islamic discourse in its political program, it has to watch the context of the Palestinian situation and the peculiarity of the Palestinian national struggle against occupation. The movement, as its experience tells, is very conservative at the ideological level, but at the same time shows willingness to compromise over political issue which bypasses its religious identity.

It believes in the resistance / Jihad as the only way to liberate Palestine from the sea to the river and established an Islamic Palestinian state, and at the same time expresses interest in some political proposals to establishing a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip based on a secular and national foundations. Even the movement sometimes suggest that its is ready to limit the national resistance to those territories, or even stopping the resistance in general and holding a truce with Israel. Sometime, they talk about along truce for 40 years or so. It is ready to negotiate this truce with Israel indirectly through mediators or directly. Amazingly, after one year and a half of the

publication of Seyasat, Hams reached a deal on the true with Israel in June 2008.

Since its engagement in the Palestinian political field, Hamas undergone a continuous process of accommodation and adaptability in its political behavior. Its responded to most of the political developments that hit the region and reflected a good ability to adapt. The first of these signs was the actual establishment of the movement itself from the larger Muslim Brotherhood movement in Palestine and its use of military resistance against Israel after more than 40 years of refraining for doing so. The second large step was the movements acceptance to be part of the official political system when it run for the municipal and legislative elections as of 2004.

Besan Odwan uses the literature of the movement to reflect on those changes, namely the constitution of the movement written in 1988 and its election platform for 2006 legislative elections, in addition to the statements of its leaders and founding fathers. The main argument of the researcher is that Hamas managed to marriage its national and religious identity successfully so far.

Developing her argument, Besan writes down that Hamas from the very beginning tried to distinguish itself and its discourse from that of PLO. It worked hard to dominate the street and presented itself as an alterative to the national movement. This was clear even much earlier than the foundation of the movement when the Muslim Brotherhood posed a real challenge to the PLO in the eighties of the last century.

In general dramatic changes has happened in the discourse of the movement in the last months preceding the legislative elections in 2006. these changes were evident in the positions that the government of Ismael Hanya adopted and which can read in three main idea:

- (1) the movement's position concerning recognizing Israel.
- (2) The movements' position concerning Palestinian land as "Waqif territory"

(3) Its position concerning the peace settlement with Israel.

On a different but close vein writes Mamoun Swidan a study on "Coalition or national unity government for Palestine", in which he discusses the Palestinian government formed by the Hamas prime minister Ismalem Hanya after the movements victory in the 2006 legislative elections. Swidan suggest that the only solution for the Palestinians to get their government functioning properly is to having a coalition government based on the inclusion of the main actors in the legislative Council.

The study aims at clarifying the difference between the coalition government and the national unity government. It touches as well on some of the issues that affect the performance of the Hamas 10th government and the main reasons behind the failure of Ismael Hanya to form a coalition or even a national unity government despite the lip services paid from everybody in its favor. Finally, the study tries to conceptualize some ideas that help to think of a way out of the dilemma and which might be useful in helping the parties to form a national or coalition government.

the researcher discusses the concept of 'coalition government' and describes it as being formed from different parliamentarian blocks in which those blocks share the profiles in the cabinet. The main reason behind forming such government is that non of the parties represented in the parliament won a majority which qualifies it to form a government that can pass the vote in the parliament. This type of governments is familiar in the countries which election system is based on proportional representation. It rarely exists in the countries where the president has the right to nominate the prime minister. The countries which mostly have coalition government include Israel, Italy, Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands among others. After presenting the political system in those countries, the researcher states that coalition government is part of a genuine democratic system.

The he distinguish between the coalition government and the national unity government. Some countries might resort to the choice of national unity government in the time of war or crisis. For example, most the Israeli governments were coalition based except for six national unity government which were formed during the war or time of looming crisis.

In the Palestinian context, its was obvious from the very beginning that the failure to form a coalition government subsequent to the second legislative elections has nothing to do with the political program of the proposed government. The researcher claims that there are a group of reasons behind this failure

- (1) the absolute majority of Hamas in the Palestinian Legislative Council
- (2) the absence of actual and true political system in Palestine
- (3) the difference between the Parliamentarian blocks on the issue of PLO

Concerning the last point of PLO, the researcher explains that it was one of the main obstacles that deemed the efforts of the Prime minister Ismael Hayna to fail. Hamas wanted to avoid recognizing the status of PLO in the Palestinian political system as the sole representative of the Palestinian people. It asked that the role of PLO to be redefined and that its restructured. It also refused to accept the resolutions issued by the PLO institutes mainly the declaration of the state in 1988. This refusal for example, was the main reason way the PFLP preferred to stay outside the government.

The researcher then moves to discuss the concept of national unity government. He states that the main motives behind this formation is when a nation passes through a very crucial moment in its political life or even existence. The different parties find themselves confined to unity in one cabinet.

Having this definition in mind, we find that the Palestinian different fractions did not get the point that the country is facing a very crucial phase. Worse than

this, it proves that they measure things according to their narrow partisan interest at the expense of the national interest. The history of negotiations between the fractions and the media war between them is enough to prove the analysis. Hamas puts a group of conditions which it wanted to see them materialized before accepting to share the government with Fateh. These conditions include releasing its representatives and ministers from the Israeli jails and having guarantees that after forming the government the siege imposed on the movement will be left. A long discussion was raised concerning the distribution of profiles as well. Of course Hamas realizes that President Abbas can not realize those conditions as he is not the one who imprison the legislators of Hamas.

Finally, the researcher sums up the reasons that led to the stake in the Palestinian national dialogue.

- (1) the structure of the Palestinian political system being both presidential and parliamentarian at the same time.
- (2) The problem in the wording of the Palestinian Basic law.
- (3) The unclear goals behind forming national unity government.
- (4) The foreign interventions
- (5) The nescient experience of Hamas in administrating the state.

Finally, as Mr. Swidan recommend, all parties must remember that we are a nation that is still under occupation and there is a long way to go in the liberation process and establishing our national state. They also must be keen to keep the national political decision independent of any foreign influence. Finally, national unity is an asset that must be watched carefully.

Seyasat devotes its symposium to talk about "national unirt" in the thinking of the late president Yasser Arafta. Around the table of Seyasat sat three of his closest aides: Mr. Yasser Abde Rabou, member of the executive committee of PLO, Mr. Ahmad Abdel Rahman, spokesperson of Fateh and member of its revolutionary Council and Dr. Saeb Erikat, head of the negotiation in PLO.

In the take that was administrated by the managing editor of Seyasat, Akram Musallam, three guests talked in details and appreciation about the experience of the most influential character in the Palestinian modern history.

The fist issue of Seyasat contains three articles. In the first writes Dr. Ibrahim Abrash of Al Azhar university (later minister of culture) an article entitled "the Palestinian elections and the path down to democracy/ Democracy outside the context". He discusses the dilemma of the Palestinian democracy given the Palestinian current context, in particular the fact that Palestine is not a complete sovereign state. Dr. Abrash talks about the different contexts and atmosphere surrounding the Palestinian democracy. These include the fact the nature of the Palestinian Authority that needs to run elections to gain popular support for its political project. Elections was conceived the best way to gain legitimacy.

Elections, however, is a methods or a tool of democracy but is not the whole process. In this vague context, Hamas decided to run for the legislative seats. It wanted to be part of the political system. Here lies the dilemma. Hamas disagrees on the foundations of the political system and wants to be part of its as well. There are a group of obstacles in the way to true and genuine democracy. The whole long discussion on legitimacy and authorities of the president and those of the prime minister is but a reflection of this dilemma.

Dr. Abbrash suggests that national unity and agreement on main principles concerning the national project and demands can be a good entrance to enhancing national democracy. This unity in turn will be enhanced the more democracy is stabilized.

Author, Hasan Kahder, writes an article entitled "the mind for destruction" in which he culturally analyze the mind of political Islam. He sees that there a way of thinking that destroys the morality of the society and create a situation that lead but to disunity, violence and mind closeness.

The third of Seyasat articles is devoted to Israeli affairs where writer Antwan Sholhat writes about the Israeli situation after the war against Lebanon in summer 2006. Sholhat the writer in Israeli affairs reads the speeches and statement of the Israeli leader to reflect on the Israeli politics.

In the international file writer Daowd Talhami writes a long study on the emergence of the left in Latin America. He believes that this is a big chance to the Palestinian to enhance their relations with the far reached content. There much that can be one in this regard. After reading the results of each country, he concludes of suggesting that the world politics will witness a new emergence of the left. Talhami who wrote recently about the left in world politics thinks that this ascendance is in favor of the Palestinians.

Naji Juma, the Palestinian author from Cairo, review the book of Samih Al Khbaldi and Hussain Aga "The Palestinian National Security" published I 2006 by Al Ahram Centre for strategic and political Studies in Cairo.

Seyasat as well presents a group of books that ahs been published recently both in English and Arabic and that touches upon the Palestinian or Middle East affairs. These include former Us President "Palestine: Peace no0 Apartheid", Helga Baumgartn's " from Liberation to the State: the Palestinian national movement 1948-1988", Benoit Challand "Palestinian Civil Society", Samih Shebab and Talib Awad "Palestinian political Parties and internal democracy", among others.