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Fayyad's two-year plan

By Daoud Kuttab

There are so many ways in which the plan by Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad for the de facto creation of a Palestinian state can be seen as a brilliant idea that is hard to ignore or oppose it.

Fayyad's blueprint includes plans to end the Palestinian economy's dependence on Israel, unify the legal system and downsize the government. The idea, submitted by him after weeks of meetings with his ministers and staff, also involves building infrastructure, harnessing natural energy sources and water, and improving housing, education and agriculture.

An airport in the Jordan Valley, the reclaiming of the Qalandia airport and the creation of an oil refinery are some of the strategic ideas that are included in the Fayyad plan.

Talking to the press, the minister said that wanted the American president arriving in Palestine with Airforce One on an international airport, and not just on a small airstrip.

Fayyad told the Times of London that he made the plan public in order to "end the occupation, despite the occupation". The former World Bank official kept his positive and determined attitude in his talk with the British paper.

"We have decided to be proactive, to expedite the end of the occupation by working very hard to build positive facts on the ground, consistent with having our state emerge as a fact that cannot be ignored. This is our agenda, and we want to pursue it doggedly," he told the Times.

Previous Palestinian efforts required Israel to quit the occupied territories as a prerequisite for peace. This allowed the Israelis and the international community to declare hundreds of peace plans for which the Palestinian's strongest card was the power of saying no to anything that fell short of the publicly declared Palestinian position.

Unable to declare a counterproposal, the hands of negotiators were tied and the public image of Palestinians was that of rejecting peace offers.

Perhaps Bill Clinton-Ehud Barak attempt during the Camp David summit with Yasser Arafat stands as the most prominent example in which the Israelis boasted of their "generous offer" which was rejected by the Palestinian leader.

By taking the initiative and moving forcefully into the Palestinian state creation mood (rather than defeating occupation) the Palestinian prime minister has been able to keep the accepted Palestinian pre-June 1967 borders while appearing to all as a moderate leader. If the talk is about a de facto state declared by one side, Palestinians are not obliged to make border compromises. If the other side wants compromise, it must show serious intentions about peace in the negotiating room and not just in public declarations.

Fayyad stressed the idea of a de facto state rather than a unilateral declaration of statehood because of the existence of a congressional resolution (H CON RES 24) of the 106th Congress "expressing congressional opposition to the unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state and urging the president to assert clearly United States opposition to such a unilateral declaration of statehood".

Fayyad's two-year plan of a de facto state sounds much more realistic than Bush's Annapolis promise of an independent state within one year. By putting a two-year ceiling, the Palestinian leader

requires Palestinian institutions to work effectively and efficiently, but also puts the ball squarely in the Israeli court where lack of progress in the peace talks will cost the Israelis a heavy price, namely having to accept a reality on the 1967 borders.

Politically, it will be difficult for radical Palestinian groups, whether nationalist or Islamist, to oppose this plan. The Fayyad action plan doesn't compromise on Jerusalem or the right of return and is in line with the consensus issues agreed on by Palestinians.

The methodology of reaching statehood is also interesting here. Coming after the Fateh conference, shifting from armed resistance to popular non-violent resistance, the Fayyad plan provides a clear doable alternative to what President Mahmoud Abbas has opposed, namely the "militarisation of the Intifada and the 'senseless' rockets".

Even Israelis will have a hard-time publicly opposing this plan. It meets rather than contradicts Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's calls for an economic peace while exposing the futility of continuing any settlement activities in areas that are the focus of this plan for a de facto Palestinian state.

With this plan, Fayyad has clearly separated what is required of the civilian leadership (Cabinet) and what is expected of the political (presidency).

This is a brilliant plan that works with or without Israeli cooperation. If the Israelis want a negotiated settlement, the plan gives negotiators two years to reach it. However, if the Israelis drag their feet, a Palestinian state will exist in reality by then.

Once these tangible elements of a genuinely viable Palestinian state come into being, all that will be needed is the political will to declare statehood and enjoy worldwide recognition.

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