



Mission not vision

an interview with [Dr. Mahdi Abdul Hadi](#)

bitterlemons: We have recently seen the creation of two new parties, one in Palestine and one in Israel. Beyond their names and the fact that they split from existing ruling parties, do they have anything in common?

Abdul Hadi: No. There are big differences between the two in terms of their backgrounds, agendas, personnel and what they promise for the future. Ariel Sharon is now a one-man party and his Kadima party will live as long as he lives. Hence the crisis regarding Sharon's health. No one knows what will happen after Sharon. This should be a warning to Israelis as well as those concerned about a two-state solution. Sharon has a very clear position. He wants a new line of partition with Palestine. This he is creating, one, with the wall, taking more land and more water; and two, by dividing what remains of Palestine into four cantons: Nablus, Tulkarm and Jenin in one, Ramallah another, Hebron a third and Gaza a fourth. Jerusalem is completely out of the equation. These districts will be connected by tunnels and bridges to maintain law and order and provide security for Israeli settlers. The Judaization of Jerusalem is at the top of his agenda, however, and he aims to empower settlers and the settlement project in the West Bank. Meanwhile, he is looking for an Arab solution to what is left of Palestine, i.e., Egypt through the security file in Gaza, and Jordan through the economic and social ties in the West Bank.

bitterlemons: So Sharon is now making his last play?

Abdul Hadi: In a way, but it's worth comparing it to Rabin's last days. It was unexpected when Rabin left the stage and it will be unexpected when Sharon goes. The problem when this happens, as when it happened before, is that the Israeli public will be left to choose between a divided Likud, a weak Labor, fragmented leftists and the rise of religious Zionism. This will take us through another transition period, and another painful process until a new leader arises. The absence of a system that can protect the agenda of a leader is the basic problem in Israel. We saw it after Rabin. Peres was a political hypocrite who could not deliver Hebron or anything else. The same thing may apply to Sharon's deputy Ehud Olmert.

bitterlemons: And on the Palestinian side?

Abdul Hadi: On the Palestinian side we are witnessing the election of the prisoners, appropriate to our culture of the prison. It's the insiders in a real sense, but not against the outsiders. These insiders are those who led the first and second intifadas, and who were too loyal too long to the historic leadership of the PLO. These prisoners have risen because of the exposure of the weak and fragmented old cardinals of Fateh after the death of Arafat, of whom these cardinals were the pupils and without whom they have no legitimacy. Legitimacy now can only come through elections, and these people behind Israeli bars, who have been resisting and continue to resist Israeli policies and practices in their own way, are more popular. They are not corrupt, but they are also pragmatic. Marwan Barghouti, for instance, signed the Copenhagen document for a two-state solution. They are looking to create a better future but with limited experience of governing.

bitterlemons: Would you characterize this as a split in Fateh, and do you see it as a maturing of the Palestinian political scene?

Abdul Hadi: This all goes back to the last days of Arafat when he refused to call for elections in Fateh, complaining that the young guard, i.e., the Aqsa Brigades, had been infiltrated by the Qassam Brigades of Hamas and other third parties, and that as such they were not disciplined. In addition, Arafat's office used to say that it was too early for them to take leadership positions because they lacked experience and didn't have the trust of the president. In the post-Arafat era, Mahmoud Abbas has realized that he needs new faces. His agenda is three-pronged: reform, democracy and security, and he cannot deliver without change in the parliament and on the ground. Thus he accepted primaries in Fateh, which everybody knew would favor the new generation. The primaries showed there was no confidence or trust in the cardinals of Fateh who have been meeting and talking but not delivering. The cardinals have lost their constituency, and they know it, as could be seen by the fact that most of the members of Fateh's Central Council did not seek legitimacy through the primaries, but were content with their historical legitimacy which is based on their role in the revolutionary movement from the 1970s. The young guard demanded legitimacy from today's society.

bitterlemons: So would you characterize this as a power struggle?

Abdul Hadi: It's a struggle for legitimacy. Where do we go from here? There is no revolution, there is no coalition with Arab states, there is no international pressure on Israel to help us. So how do we survive in the prison we are in? This parliamentary election is not for leadership, it is for representation; it is for mission not vision. As Marwan Barghouti has been saying, the vision will come after the election. After the legitimization of new representatives we will see new coalitions in the elected council.

bitterlemons: You are putting emphasis on the elections, but there seems to be some conjecture that elections may not take place at all...

Abdul Hadi: It is not in the interest of the Israelis to have Palestinian elections because they have concluded that Hamas will come to power.

bitterlemons: Without elections what are the consequences?

Abdul Hadi: This would totally cripple the PA. There is a crisis of funds in the PA to pay the salaries of 140,000 civil servants. If half a million Palestinians tomorrow have no income, there will be chaos. Elections will bring legitimacy to a new coalition government to implement Abu Mazen's strategy for reform, democracy and security and work with international donors and thus keep this body alive.

bitterlemons: Are you encouraged by what's happened in Fateh?

Abdul Hadi: I look forward with great hope and optimism to see how this election will legitimize a political agenda for political transformation in Palestine.-

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