



PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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“Building Palestine Under Occupation”

New America Foundation

1899 L Street, N.W., Suite 400, Washington, DC 20036

September 23, 2010, 2:00-3:30 PM

Yesterday the New American Foundation in partnership with the Palestine Note hosted Palestinian **Prime Minister Salam Fayyad** for a talk titled “Building Palestine Under Occupation.” Fayyad’s speech and the following question and answer session addressed a wide range of issues including Palestinian reconciliation, the ongoing peace process and development of Palestinians institutions. These POMED Notes will focus on the portions of the event that direct related to political developments inside Palestine.

Following introductions from *The Atlantic*’s **James Fallows** and Palestine Note founder **Fadi Elsalameen**, Fayyad began his prepared remarks by noting the this event comes at approximately the halfway point in the Palestinian Authority’s (PA) two year statehood-preparation initiative. The PA recently marked the milestone by publishing a new document titled “Homestretch to Freedom,” that describes the steps it will take in the coming year. **The goal of the initiative, Fayyad said, is to build effective state institutions so that when a political solution is reached, Palestinians will be prepared to govern effectively.** When the PA initially set the timeline in August 2009 they hoped that the state-building process would “dovetail” with the political process, not serve as a replacement for it, Fayyad added.

Despite early skepticism, the initiative has been a significant success. Fayyad described how over the past year the Palestinian people have been empowered. The defeatist sentiment inspired by the occupation—which according to Fayyad is at the root both of Palestinian submissiveness and belligerence—has lifted. **Palestinians have gone from being reactive to proactive, which is according Fayyad is “the best possible way to get closer to freedom.”** While some have speculated, both in and outside of Palestine, that the plan was actually conceived abroad, Fayyad said that is solely a Palestinian initiative.

Fayyad’s plan has since received a great deal of acclaim, but there are still those that doubt, he said. Critics cite the inability of Palestinians to reconcile and the expansion of settlements. Fayyad countered that they are missing the point. **There has been a fundamental shift in the Palestinian mindset; the process of building viable state institutions has been a “transformative paradigm.”** In the conclusion of his remarks Fayyad emphasized that this shift has also had a real effect on the quality of life in the West Bank and cited a recent report from the World Bank as evidence.

Amjad Atallah, Co-Director of the New America Foundation’s Middle East Task Force, who moderated the question and answer session, began by asking Fayyad what it means for Palestinians to be free in practical terms. In response, Fayyad said, “Think of being able to go on with your life...free of worry. Not only in a security sense but this whole political commotion.” The next questioner asked how Fayyad’s plan can succeed if Hamas and the PA remained divided. Fayyad agreed that this is a fundamental issue, but suggested that the differences between the two are not as big as many believe. For example, the PA has openly renounced the use of violence and Hamas, of late, has taken steps to avoid violence. Fayyad viewed it as a point of agreement: neither groups sees violence as a way build a Palestinian state.