

Naheda Sabbah

From: Hisham Ahmed
Sent: 27 July, 2005 12:56 p
To: Naheda Sabbah
Subject: FW: interview

-----Original Message-----

From: Omar Karmi [mailto:omar@palestinereport.org]
Sent: Wednesday, July 27, 2005 11:27 AM
To: Hisham Ahmed
Subject: interview

Apologies for the delay

Omar

Logic is the first victim

an interview with Hisham Ahmed

Published July 20, 2005 Volume 12 Number 5

This week Palestine Report Online interviews Hisham Ahmed, professor of political science at Birzeit University on the clashes between the PA and Hamas.

PR: Are we on the verge of a civil war?

Ahmed: Let's hope not. However, I think the domestic situation is quite critical and dangerous in many respects. At times of enormous changes societies sometimes indulge in internal strife, as is the case here in particular. In five years of an Intifada that has not achieved its declared objective, it is not unlikely that Palestinian society will begin to internalize the conflict.

There are precedents, in Palestinian history and histories. For example, after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982-83, and the ouster of the PLO, we had a situation in which there was fighting between Fateh and splinter groups. This fighting exemplified the profundity of frustrations at the turn of events following the Israeli invasion.

Now we are in 2005, and with massive forces, both externally and internally, at work, Palestinian frustration has perhaps reached a boiling point. I am afraid that what we have seen over the past week is in a way a preparatory phase for more serious clashes and counter-clashes within Palestinian society.

PR: We have two accusations, basically. One is from Hamas, that by delaying elections Fateh is trying prevent the group from taking a legitimate share of political power. The other is from the PA, that Hamas is acting as a parallel authority. What is your take on those?

Ahmed: Certainly there are powerful contending arguments from both sides. Hamas wants to maintain its level of popularity in society, i.e. after adhering to the calm, it wants to continue to engage in resistance in response to Israeli violations.

On the other hand, the PA feels the world is watching to see how the Authority will conduct itself after the eventual Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Therefore the PA wants to underline its power, its

27/07/2005

legitimacy and its unity as an authority especially in the Gaza Strip.

In this process, logic often becomes the first victim. I think we are all to be blamed, each and every Palestinians no matter his or her position is to be blamed, because this is a time when rationality and reason should prevail, whether it comes from Hamas or the PA. Everyone must see to it that things don't get out of control, because in that event we will be beyond reason and rationality. Our internal fighting has its own volatile chemistry, and could spiral out of control to a point where no one can any longer tell who is the victim and who is the victimizer.

PR: How can such chaos it be avoided?

Ahmed: While it is in the interests of the PA to demonstrate its power and its ability to maintain stability order and security, I think it would be in the best interests of everyone, including the PA, to take every necessary measure to preempt any possibility of any internal strife. The main loser, in a strategic sense, from internal fighting would be the Authority itself. Even if the PA succeeded to crack down or even crush Hamas, the Authority would really lose in terms of its popularity and in terms of its domestic acceptance.

Nevertheless, the PA, like any government, should not be provoked. Hamas too will have to exercise a considerable degree of care so things do not develop into more and more heated confrontations.

I think there must be voices from all quarters and directed at both parties to tell them that the prospect of internal war is absolutely unacceptable, and anyone who participates in such a war should be considered an outcast no matter what party.

PR: Do you think setting a firm date for parliamentary elections would help?

Ahmed: This would be a very concrete measure that the PA could undertake. Designating a date for PLC election would help lessen the tensions. That's one thing the PA can do.

Secondly, it needs to engage in more serious reforms to satisfy the needs and interests of all Palestinians, regardless of factional affiliation.

But the key could indeed be to set a date for elections. The postponement was something that triggered anger on the part of Hamas, and so to do away with the causes of these rising tensions this issue should be resolved in an amicable manner.-*Published July 20, 2005©Palestine Report*