**Mahmoud Abbas should step down**

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With all due respect to his years of service, it is time for Mahmoud Abbas to step aside. He should not run for office in the upcoming Palestinian elections and he should cede the reins of Fateh to others. I say this not because of his age—that doesn’t trouble me; nor will I make accusations of corruption—since I have no evidence of that.

What concerns me most is his increasingly anti-democratic rule and the damage it has done to the Palestinian national movement, in general, and Fateh, in particular. I am also troubled by his absence of a strategic vision which has left Palestinians despairing for their future.

I can sympathise with the enormous burden of leading an “Authority” that has so little authority. It has the responsibility to provide salaries for the families of tens of thousands of Palestinian civil servants and funding for a range of essential services. And it must do this without a secure economic base.

[Security forces kill one terrorist in South Waziristan](https://nation.com.pk/13-Apr-2021/security-forces-kill-one-terrorist-in-south-waziristan)

To be sure, it is not Abbas’ fault that the Authority has become a dependency on international largesse and the whim of the Israeli occupation. Ruthless Israeli policies have strangled independent Palestinian economic growth, denied them access to over 80 percent of West Bank land, and restricted their movement within the ever-shrinking portions of the territories left to them. Even in the areas under the Authority’s nominal control, Israeli occupation forces have free reign—invading, arresting, and killing Palestinians at will.

In the face of this, the best that Abbas has been able to offer are hollow and tedious appeals to the “international community” to recognise “legitimacy” and return to a “peace process” that can lead to a “two state solution”—all of which no longer have relevance in the context of the Apartheid reality Israel created.

To make matters worse, the Authority has become intolerant of internal dissent, criticism, and emerging civil society leadership that seeks creative non-violent ways of challenging the Israeli occupation. As a result, Fateh, once a dominant force in the Palestinian national movement, has become ossified and removed from the popular struggle. It is kept alive mainly by a system of patronage.

[Japan decides to release Fukushima wastewater into sea](https://nation.com.pk/13-Apr-2021/japan-decides-to-release-fukushima-wastewater-into-sea)

Polls still show that Fateh retains more support than its main competitor, Hamas. That is a very low bar. Our polling demonstrates that Hamas, the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, lost significant support because of its own problems with authoritarian rule and the way that its horribly misguided approach to “resistance” has repeatedly played into Israel’s hands, bringing ruin to the Palestinians in Gaza.

Our polling also has told us that Palestinians very much want unity. But, recalling the words of Egyptian nationalist, Saad Zaghloul, unity between Fateh and Hamas in their current state is like “zero plus zero equals zero.”

The danger for Palestinians is that if Abbas keeps his tight control over Fateh and runs against competing slates of leaders he expelled from the movement, this election could very well be a replay of the 2006 election disaster.

The conventional wisdom was that Hamas won in 2006 because voters rejected the corruption of the Fateh-led PA. This was simply not true. Our polling made clear that voters felt that both parties were equally corrupt, albeit in different ways. There were two reasons for Hamas’ victory: a divided Fateh with competing slates and voters, in effect, saying to Fateh, “you’ve been in for 10 years and no progress toward peace, let’s give the other guys a chance.”

[TLP protest causes gridlocks across country](https://nation.com.pk/13-Apr-2021/tlp-protest-causes-gridlocks-across-country)

Adding weight to this observation was the answer voters gave to this question: “If you thought that peace was possible, for whom would you vote?” Almost three-quarters of Hamas voters answered that they would switch to Fateh. The point was that they didn’t believe peace was possible and so they voted to, as we say in American politics, “Throw the bums out.”

The results, as we know, were a disaster. The winner had two jobs: run the Authority, which amounted to administering the occupation, and providing leadership and vision for the people. Hamas had no interest in meeting the requirements of the former and the “vision” they projected and strategy they pursued brought ruin.

Fifteen years later, Fateh has another chance with the entry of a slate assembled by former foreign minister, Nasser al Qidwa, and charismatic prisoner and former Fateh leader, Marwan Barghouti. They have entered the race to provide a dynamic alternative to Abbas’ control over the movement and to present a programme for change. Al Qidwa’s proposals are smart and visionary. And Barghouti’s entry has generated excitement. This is what Palestinians need right now and it’s why Abbas must release his death grip on the movement and step aside.

[Protest held against makers of counterfeit cigarettes](https://nation.com.pk/13-Apr-2021/protest-held-against-makers-of-counterfeit-cigarettes)

I was part of the Carter Center election monitoring team in 1996. I was in Deir al Balah refugee camp. The lines were so long we had to keep the polls open hours after closing time. People had the feeling that they were on the verge of momentous change. They were voting, a state was within their grasp, and the eyes of the world were on them.

Twenty-five years later, those feelings have evaporated, that state is further away than ever, and most voters aren’t even sure what this election will accomplish—other than merely ratifying the same old leadership that has led them into the deep hole in which they find themselves.

By themselves and with one election, Barghouti and al Qidwa won’t miraculously get Palestinians out of the hole. They will stop digging it deeper and they offer the promise of a change in strategy, a new vision, and restoration of hope. That is precisely what Palestinians need and what Israelis fear most.