

Seyasat Magazine Edition (19): English Summary

This edition of *Seyasat* focuses on two main issues: First, the Arab Spring and its future and second, Palestinian reconciliation and the prospects for its success.

Dr. Walid al-Shurafa, Head of the Media Center at Birzeit University, examines the religious and political discourse of Islamic groups as a means of consolidating their position in the post-Arab Spring order. He argues that these groups refer to certain historical interpretations as well as Islamic texts to claim exclusive legitimacy for their positions. In this context, the eternal, written word is attributed with a higher value than political and social reality, with the spiritual realm being superior to the worldly. By selecting convenient historical and religious references, Islamic groups apply an exclusivist approach to explain the Arab transformations and to justify their right to guide the Muslim community. Shurafa's study *Islamic Groups and Dualism Phobia: Policies of Leadership Bargaining in the 'Fake' Arab Spring* claims that Islamic groups constrain public debate and discourse by giving the spiritual sphere precedence over worldly realities.

In his study entitled *The Arab Revolutions and Transformations in Conspiracy Discourse: From Absence to Presence*, Ayyad al-Batniji analyzes the conspiracy discourse employed by several autocratic Arab regimes to defend their legitimacy in the face of the democratic upheavals. Batniji argues that these regimes misuse particular references to Arab history in order to cloud and distort the consciousness of the population, thereby de-legitimizing the people's rightful demands. Moreover, he claims that the harmfulness of the conspiracy discourse lies in the externalization of domestic problems by the autocratic rulers in order to distract from their governments' severe shortcomings. Eventually, Batniji attempts to answer two central questions: First, what is the nature of the social realities that gave birth to the conspiracy discourse? And second, what are the intentions of the respective regimes to employ such a discourse?

Dr. Imad al-Beshtawi, Head of Political Science at Hebron University, discusses the impact of the Arab Spring on the Palestinian cause. This is a question of concern to many Palestinians hoping for change in the policies of Arab countries with the arrival of new regimes. The Palestinian situation will be influenced by the future course of the Arab revolutions; whereas the real impact will become evident only after the new regimes stabilized. Yet revolutions need time, before internal conflicts between the new and old centers of power are resolved, and even differences inside the new centers of power may need to be settled.

The question that Palestinians need to answer during the interim phase is whether it is possible to maintain favorable relations with the emerging new regimes on the same basis as before. However, an alternative scenario for the Palestinians would be imaginable, in which an adaption of political strategy and conduct might be necessary in order to establish closer links with the new powers.

This issue of *Seyasat* also focuses on Palestinian reconciliation by having included two articles on the matter - contributed by Ma'moun Sweidan and Bassam Darweesh, respectively.

Bassam Darweesh believes that each time the reconciliation process moves one step forward, it automatically moves two steps back afterwards. After reviewing progress in reconciliation and the failure of the Doha Agreement in particular, Darweesh analyzes the reasons for the Agreement's failure. He argues that internal differences inside Hamas prevented implementation of the Doha Agreement, while the other Palestinian forces and factions failed to form a lobby to accelerate the implementation of reconciliation and wholly oppose attempts to gap the divisions. Palestinian factions also failed to mobilize Palestinian opposition at grassroots level against the continuation of the divisions. The author concludes that counting on popular action to extricate Palestinians from the quagmire of divisions and impose national reconciliation results from a conviction that some influential circles in the national dialogue are the ones that created and benefit from the divisions.

Ma'moun Sweidan's contribution entitled *Reconciliation Lost in Hamas Reservations and Internal Differences* argues that the Doha Agreement signed in the Qatari capital on February 4, 2012, gave rise to a wave of serious differences between what can be termed Hamas abroad and Hamas in Gaza. Several Hamas leaders in Gaza objected to the idea that President Mahmoud Abbas would preside over the new government. Sweidan states that several factors have a direct impact on the Palestinian national reconciliation process. One of the most important aspects relates to the potential result of Hamas' internal elections scheduled for the end of April. Concerning the possible reshaping of Hamas, it is difficult to predict the political outcomes: Sweidan either expects the consolidation the power of Khaled Mash'al or a strengthening of the influence of Hamas' Gaza leadership, which takes a more extreme stance on reconciliation. Another factor relates to Egyptian politics and the potential result of the presidential elections. Until the political situation inside Hamas and in Egypt is not consolidated, the reconciliation process will remain obstructed and subject to regression.

Seyasat devotes three articles by Arab writers to the discussion of the future of the Arab Spring. Egyptian politician and journalist Fareed Ajaj writes about the Egyptian presidential elections: he

analyses the position of each candidate, their potential policies and the opposition that they might face if they win the elections. Ajaj states frankly that the future of Egypt depends on the results of these elections and on the need for parties to accept the results instead of struggling with each other about supremacy - a potential scenario that he discusses in detail.

Syrian Kurdish opposition activist Juwan Yousef, member of the Syrian National Council, writes an article entitled *I am a Human Being and Not an Animal*, in which he reviews the situation in Syria and the future of the Syrian revolution. Juwan is critical of the Syrian revolution in many aspects; it has failed to unite the people, while the emergence of sectarian differences threatens the unity of Syrian society. The worst scenario would imply a polarization of the population concerning ethnic and religious affiliations, which could eventually result in a civil war. In this case, Yousef promotes the idea of international military interference.

Syrian activist Shireen Hayek writes about the ramifications of the Syrian revolution on Syrian society and the need to address community issues, since there are concerns that the Iraqi and sectarian background embedded by the Assad regime to support his rule might prevail. The rights of different sects should be taken into consideration and need not be buried under the pretext of preserving identity and popular revolution.

Seyasat devoted its roundtable seminar to a discussion of the future of the Doha Agreement. As soon as the agreement was signed, media accusations appeared from both sides and the Agreement became precarious. The various arguments and opinions that emerged obstructed the implementation of the Agreement, which became just another facet in the series of efforts to overcome divisions among Palestinians. What happened? What brought the substantial progress achieved to a halt? How can all this be understood in light of the internal organizational and factional aspects of Hamas and in light of regional developments, whether in Israel or regarding the increasing influence of the Muslim Brotherhood? What are implications for the achievement of national goals?

Seyasat tried to answer these questions in a roundtable dialogue comprising a group of academics and political science researchers. Politicians and decision makers from the factions that participated in the national dialogue were not included for fear that their differences might reverberate on the unemotional and far-reaching discussion. The guests were Dr. Ayman Shaheen, Head of Political Science at Azhar University; Dr. Adnan Abu Amer, Professor of the Palestinian Issue at al-Ummah University; and Dr. Ayman Abul Ata of Al Aqsa University.

In the Public Policies section, *Seyasat* presents two studies. Ra'ed Awashreh analyzes the process of polarization and appointments in Palestinian institutions. The researcher conducted dozens of direct interviews with directors and employees in institutions and reaches profound conclusions that may prove useful in understanding employment policy and the dangers of poor management of the recruitment process on the performance and efficiency of institutions.

According to the study, the roots of the term 'polarization' in the Palestinian context are related to political and trade union action by political factions, i.e. prior to the establishment of the PA. The study illustrates the impact of polarization and the recruitment process in increasing productivity and profitability in an organization and in securing the core of institutionalization, which is linked to governance. The study combines the administrative concepts relating to institutionalization and sociological concepts pertaining to the impact of social capital on the process of polarization, selection and appointment. The study covers three sectors: the PA bodies, the private sector – joint-stock companies, and the NGO sector.

In the second study, Zakaria al-Sarhad discusses *Disciplinary Penalties in Public Posts in Palestinian Legislation*. He commences by discussing the right to assume public posts as prescribed in Palestinian legislation. He then moves on to analyze the concept of disciplinary penalties in a theoretical context. Furthermore, he examines disciplinary penalties in Palestinian legislation at an administrative level, the legal framework for disciplinary penalties in public posts, and legal guarantees against their arbitrary use. Al-Sarhad explains that Palestinian legislation includes provisions that provide relative guarantees to protect civil servants from the arbitrary use of disciplinary penalties.

In the International Relations section, the Chief Editor of *Seyasat*, Dr. Atef Abu Seif, authors a study entitled *The US, the EU and the Arab Revolutions: Democracy or the Regimes*. The writer analyzes the positions of the US and EU in their capacity as the largest international players in the Arab region as well as the closest allies of the overthrown regimes. He also examines the positions of the major world powers, especially Russia and China, which will have crucial roles in deciding the direction of the international communities' dealing with Syria. Abu Seif's main premise is that it is impossible to ignore the external dimension when trying to understand the Arab transformations and their future in general. In fact, he claims that attempts to downplay the importance of the external dimension are a miscalculation and misreading of the nature of the Arab transformations and their regional and international impact.

In the Books section, *Seyasat* presents *The Diary of Mujahid Abdul Rahman al-Farra, Mayor of Khan Yunis*. Abdul Rahman al-Farra made a daily record of his activities during his period as

mayor from 1936 until 1962. Thus, al-Farra recorded the development of Khan Yunis, and its population. His accounts reveal the political incidents that hit Palestine during the era of the British Mandate, as well as a detailed description of the relations between Mandate and Palestinian people. He describes the events of the Nakba and how they affected Khan Yunis as a city.