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Interesting reading.

From: Walles, Jacob
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Subject: Interview with Salam Fayyad

Interview with Salam Fayyad

To Act and Not to Fall

Yedioth Ahronoth (p. B4) by Nahum Barnea -- One of the few privileges enjoyed by an Israeli journalist is the privilege to drive to Ramallah in his car. Going to Ramallah is going abroad while remaining close to home. For Christmas and New Year, its main streets are lit with colored lights: Red, blue and golden. On Wednesday evening, the city was very quiet. The cars did not honk their horns. The muezzins did not issue calls for prayer. One of the members of the Fatah leadership called for a third Intifada in a gathering in Ramallah, but his words were carried away by the wind. This week belongs completely to Santa.

PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad had a vision: He would prove that the Palestinians were capable of governing themselves, instilling law and order, ensuring that their neighbors' security was not harmed and meeting international standards of governance, and from here it would be a short road to establishing a Palestinian state. In the interim objectives, Fayyad succeeded. The situation in Ramallah, and in Area A in the West Bank as a whole, stands in his favor. In the final goal, however, he has failed. The Palestinian state was supposed to be established in 2011. On Wednesday we sat in his office, in the gleaming building of the Prime Minister's Office in Ramallah. We took comfort in fresh dates, a gift from the United Arab Emirates. We knew one thing with certainty: It was not going to happen this year.

You have decided, I said, to shift from dealing with the vision to dealing with maintenance. Do I understand you correctly?

"You understand me well," he said. "We were in the right direction. Things did not happen as we thought they would—but in one sense we are in a better situation than we were. We have proved that we can govern ourselves. The world understands that we deserve a state."

You expected momentum, I said. This did not happen.

"That is correct," he said. "The expectations did not materialize. The Arab Spring captured part of the attention. This was not the time for long-term negotiations. A debate began over stability in the Arab world, over the nature of the regimes. People in Europe and America dealt with economic problems. You can understand why Palestine was pushed off the agenda."

What is the lesson, I asked.

"One issue has been erased," he said. "The doubt as to whether we are ready. Other issues remain. The rule of Hamas in Gaza weakens us. Hamas is also a good excuse for those who don't want us to reach a state.

"Yesterday was a day like all other days, but for me it was an historic day. I met with the advisory committee of our bureau of statistics. A year and a half ago I met with them and demanded that a uniform code be applied to all the data that we present. They said it would take them five years, no less. I said to them, one year. Yesterday we were informed that the International Monetary Fund was going to approve our data. It has only been a year and a half. We will be the 70th state that has received approval—and we are not even a state."

There is an ironic aspect here, I said. As you have succeeded in calming the situation in the West Bank, you have helped remove the Palestinian struggle from the agenda. You have become taken for granted.

"I hope not," he said. "What is the alternative, violence? Absolutely not. I believe in the immense power of non-violence. Violence is not only immoral, it serves no purpose.

"I say, let us ensure that the situation does not get worse, that it does not deteriorate. We have to act in order to keep from falling."

Like on a treadmill, I said.

"Exactly," he said.

He thought, what steps could Netanyahu take to prevent a deterioration without suffering political harm. In other words, he tried to put himself in Netanyahu's shoes. He has a list of five ideas. They are fairly modest.

"Firstly," he said, "Israel should act less harshly towards non-violent Palestinian demonstrations."

What do you mean, I asked.

He listed the cases: A 70-year old man who was hit in the face by a tear gas canister at a demonstration in Nabi Saleh two weeks ago. The elderly man was killed. He was visiting his family. Or the two people who were killed in Kalandiya by IDF fire on the first day of Ramadan.

"When a soldier mistakenly killed a settler south of Hebron, you changed the rules of engagement. The rules must also change for the Palestinians."

A debate is now being waged in Israel, I said, over the conduct towards right wing demonstrators. A demand is arising to impose tougher punishments. You are demanding more lenience.

"I am only speaking about non-violent demonstrations," he said.

The settlers were the second item on his list. "Israel should deal better with the settler violence," he said. "According to our statistics, it has risen steeply. Many Israelis say, why should we care. It is happening over the Green Line. And then it reaches you: You saw what happened in the mosque in Tuba Zangaria.

"On Friday I visited the village Burkin, near Ramallah. They tried to attack the mosque—an insane act. We immediately repaired the damage. I thought to myself, we will take revenge on them. We won't break our promise. Instead of destroying, we will build."

What we call, a proper Zionist response, I said.

"There are a few things we have learned from you," he said. "Netanyahu can use this to his advantage. He has moral justification."

He took action after the attack on the Ephraim Regional Brigade, I said.

"Very good," Fayyad said.

"The third point is that the IDF should stop its infiltrations into Area A," he said. "There is no military justification for these incursions. Anyone in the Israeli security establishment will tell you that the situation on the ground is better than ever before. When the IDF goes in, it harms us politically—it portrays us as contractors of the occupation."

There are more than a few Palestinians in exile who see you as a traitor, I said.

He smiled. "Our intelligentsia in exile is detached," he said. "This is their way of legitimizing the fact that they continue to live comfortably in London or Paris. I was in this situation. I know.

"The fourth point is to permit the presence of Palestinian police outside Area A. Netanyahu will not pay a price for this. The settlers will not even know.

"The fifth point is the transfer of funds that Israel collects for the PA. Previous governments made this a political matter. Netanyahu has gone beyond this. I know about at least three cases in which Netanyahu has gone to the security cabinet with proposals to freeze the funds, and changed his mind. He acts as if this were a game."

Not an Obstacle

Will a Palestinian unity government be formed soon without you, I asked. Are we approaching the end of the Fayyad era?

He hesitated whether to answer. "I have said repeatedly, I will not be an obstacle. Nevertheless, I am treated as an obstacle. Salam Fayyad is not the problem. He was never the problem."

Do Israelis have cause for concern due to the policy that a joint government with Hamas will adopt, I asked.

His response was enlightening. "It is true that Hamas is now willing to join the demand to establish a state, but there are differences of opinion between us on many issues.

"In my eyes, security has been and remains the number one issue. If a unity government is formed that is based on non-violence, this will be a good start. Without this, there will be no unity and no state. There must be a commitment to non-violence, both in the West Bank and in Gaza.

"First of all, it has to be ensured that there is one military force, one weapon. There will be no militias. This is the basic demand from Hamas. And we must unite with Gaza. Not only because I care about the fate of the residents of Gaza, but because without the participations of 1.6 million Gazans there is no Palestinian state.

"I expect an Israeli leader to stand up and say, if I am fated to choose between a Palestinian leadership that ensures security and a Palestinian leadership that says things that Israel wants to hear, I prefer security."

Don't you ever think, I asked, that we have missed the boat: The two-state idea is dead?
He sat up straight. "No," he said, "our national duty is to be optimistic."