

PEACE AND SECURITY

# GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL REFORM

Palestinian Perspectives on the  
Reconstruction of Gaza

**Alaa Lahlouh**  
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Rebuilding governance and political reforms are crucial for Palestine's reconstruction and have the support of the Palestinian public. However, reform efforts face significant internal and external challenges.



Internally, divisions between Palestinian authorities and the lack of political will in the Palestinian Authority hinder reforms, with corruption further eroding public trust. Externally, the Israeli occupation impedes reform efforts and donor pressure is viewed with suspicion.



To restore public confidence, the Palestinian Authority should address internal issues by uniting the Palestinian leadership, renewing political legitimacy and strengthening oversight and institutions. Key strategies include adopting fiscal policies, building popular support, and forming a coalition against Israeli annexation.

## GOVERNANCE AND POLITICAL REFORM

### Palestinian Perspectives on the Reconstruction of Gaza



Rebuilding governance and implementing political reforms are essential pillars of the reconstruction process. Palestinian calls for reform date back to 1997 and Palestinian society today is in favour of a range of reforms, including the holding of general and presidential elections, respect for the rule of law and an independent judiciary, and institutions that ensure transparent and accountable governance. Political reform efforts and recovery, however, face severe internal and external challenges.



Internally, reforms are blocked by the division between the authorities in Palestine. The Palestinian Authority also lacks legitimacy and the political will for reforms, due to high financial and political costs. The lack of integrity among the Palestinian Authority's elites have further diminished trust in decision-makers. Externally, the Israeli occupation hinders reforms due to its military and administrative control, restrictions on movement of people and goods and financial sanctions. Donor pressure, both financial and political, has indeed pushed the Palestinian Authority to adopt reforms. But these are often viewed with suspicion by Palestinians, as they are seen as favouring Israeli over Palestinian interests.



The Palestinian Authority's focus on external reform pressures while ignoring internal demands weakens public confidence in the government. Instead, it should adopt key strategies to address challenges to the reform process, which include restoring unity and ending division, renewing political legitimacy, empowering the government, building popular support for reform, strengthening the oversight bodies, adopting effective fiscal policies, forming a coalition against Israeli annexation, and learning from global experiences. This set of recommendations is capable of opening up a window of hope for the required reforms.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

<https://palestine.fes.de/topics/palestinian-perspectives-on-the-reconstruction-of-gaza>

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In cooperation with:



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German Institute for International  
and Security Affairs

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## 1

## BACKGROUND

Rebuilding governance and implementing political reforms are essential pillars of the reconstruction process. Successful recovery relies on establishing effective state institutions while promoting a sustainable, balanced and long-term economic revival. In the absence of these key elements, reconstruction efforts can be undermined, creating opportunities for external actors to disrupt the process and pursue their own interests.

One of the main challenges in this context is the division between the authorities in Palestine. It is split between the West Bank, where President Mahmoud Abbas and his administration govern, and the Gaza Strip, which has been under the control of Hamas since June 2007. The Palestinian Authority led by Mahmoud Abbas is currently facing one of its most difficult periods since the establishment of their government around 30 years ago because of its inability to meet Palestinians' needs, as well as a clear distrust in the Palestinian Authority and institutions.

The pressure on the Authority increased when the United States requested the creation of a new professional and non-partisan government. The establishment of a new government under Dr Mohammad Mustafa in late March 2024, however, created more divisions among Palestinians because of President Abbas' unilateral decision-making, which was rejected by most Palestinian political forces and parties.

The government's programme consisted of seven main tasks (BNEWS 2024):

- (1) Relief, reconstruction and economic revival, as well as social welfare in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.
- (2) Financial and economic reform and stability.
- (3) Institutional reform, eliminating corruption, improving services, reorganizing and uniting institutions, and digital transformation.
- (4) Rule of law: equity, protection, liberty, and strengthening the integrity of the financial sector.
- (5) Promoting resilience in Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, and vulnerable communities.

(6) Promoting democracy, human rights, transparency, and empowering the media.

(7) Fostering Arab and international relations.

The government's statement covered a lot but there was no mention of unifying institutions in the West Bank and Gaza.

This brief aims to do two things:

1. Examine the difficulties and barriers that stand in the way of genuine reform, especially political reform and the efficiency of governmental institutions.
2. Propose recommendations on how to move forward on the reform process in all institutions of the Palestinian political system.

The drafting of the brief benefited from meetings with various Palestinian parties with knowledge of developments in the reform process, the results of public opinion polls conducted during the past two years, and a review of a number of specialised reports issued by various competent authorities. The brief concludes with an assessment of the prospects of Mustafa's success in overcoming the daunting challenges facing the reform process (Lahlouh 2024a).

## 2

## MANY CHALLENGES AND LIMITED SUCCESS

Calls for reform of Palestinian Authority institutions date back to 1997, when the General Audit Institution's (GAI) report on corruption in those institutions was issued. This report had great resonance in Palestinian society, as well as the institutions themselves. It was followed by a follow-up report drafted by a committee formed by the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) to study the GAI report and its claims of administrative and financial corruption in Authority institutions. These reports were followed by calls for reform. Externally, there have been several such calls, most notably the report issued by the Independent Working Group for the Strengthening of Palestinian Authority Institutions in 1999 (the so-called Rocard report).

Palestinian calls and efforts for reform have continued over recent years, as all previous Palestinian governments have adopted ambitious reform programmes that have been shattered by various challenges and obstacles that have prevented implementation of the reform agenda. These challenges and their sources vary. Some are external, such as the Israeli occupation and external pressure from donors, and some are internal, such as the absence of political will among the top Palestinian decision-makers, the absence of integrity in governance, the financial and political costs of reform, in addition to a diminished public trust in the Palestinian political system since 2010, when the terms of office of the parliament and the president expired.

Palestinian society demands a set of reforms, including the need to hold general legislative and presidential elections, respect for the rule of law, building effective governance institutions with accountability, applying the principle of separation of powers in the political system, ensuring the independence and professionalism of the judiciary, and implementing principles of transparency in the practice of governance and the management of public affairs and funds (PCPSR 2023).

### INTERNAL CHALLENGES

- (1) *Political division*: in June 2007 the political division occurred which developed into one of the major obstacles facing the rebuilding and reform of the Palestinian political system. This division had an enormous impact on the Palestinian political system, as well as in the social and economic domains. Since then the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) has not once come together in its entirety and was dissolved by the Constitutional Court in December 2018. The political division has harmed all sectors of Palestinian society, splitting the community and worsening social and economic conditions (Al-Jabour 2019). Aside from weakening the community, it has also damaged the system's ability to manage internal tensions and conflicts, face external challenges, and adapt to changes.
- (2) *Lack of a clear vision for political reform*: holding general elections is a top priority for political reform. But this option is not a priority for decision-makers in Palestine. According to the ministerial programme, section 6, which emphasises improving democracy, human rights, transparency, and empowering the media, states in the first point: 'Take all the necessary measures to construct proper internal conditions for holding legislative and presidential elections in the northern governorates, including East Jerusalem, and the southern governorates with respect for the law.' Even though this has been included in all ministerial programmes so far, general elections have not been held despite being overdue for more than 14 years.
- (3) *Lack of political will*: political will is the main pillar of any viable reform process. But it is clear that in the Palestinian case, such will does not exist on the part of the Pal-

estinian Authority leadership. This is reflected in the fact that throughout the years of the previous government there was no serious desire for reform. Had it existed, we would have seen it. What has been clear in the past is that reform comes only with external pressure. This absence is also evident in the fact that while the current Mustafa government was presenting its platform (which was based on the letter of assignment from the president), announcing the suspension of appointments in the public sector, several laws were issued by presidential decree to create new public institutions<sup>1</sup> and to appoint new advisers to the president.<sup>2</sup> The lack of political will has entrenched the absence of accountability and oversight in the entire Palestinian political system. Without a parliament since the split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in June 2007, the ruling elite in the Palestinian Authority saw a threat to its interests in any serious reforms. Therefore, the institutional reform plan proposed by the new government will most likely be derailed.

- (4) *Failure to empower the government:* The Basic Law defines the prime minister's jurisdiction. But in the absence of the PLC, the Palestinian president has become the only source of powers and legislation. As a result, governments come and go without exercising real power and jurisdiction granted to them by the Basic Law and a vote of confidence from the parliament. Legislation, in the form of laws by decree, has in fact contributed to deprive the government of its constitutional mandate and weakened the provisions of the Basic Law, thereby weakening the government or depriving it of its powers in favour of the presidency, or institutions associated with the presidency. In light of this situation, the current government is constrained in its actions and unable to implement its reform programme. This programme, as noted below, may even be rejected by power centres within the Palestinian Authority and the ruling elite, if they fear that their interests and influence are threatened by it.

1 *Powers of the Prime Minister:* To form the Council of Ministers, to amend its formation, to dismiss its members, to accept the resignation of any member, to preside over and manage the sessions of the Council, to supervise the work of ministers and public institutions affiliated with the government, to issue decisions within the limits of his/her competences, and to sign and issue regulations. (Article 68). *Powers of the Council of Ministers:* To set public policies in light of the ministerial programme approved by the Legislative Council, implementing the established public policies, to prepare the draft general budget, following up on the implementation of laws and ensuring compliance with their provisions, to supervise the performance of ministries and other units of the administrative apparatus, to maintain public order and internal security, to establish or abolish bodies, institutions, authorities and other units of the administrative apparatus of the government, to appoint their heads, determining the competencies of ministries and authorities of the government, and to prepare and submit draft laws to the Legislative Council (arts. 69–70). Each minister is responsible for proposing the general policies of his/her ministry, supervising their implementation, supervising the progress of work in the ministry, implementing its budget, and preparing draft laws related to it (65).

2 Former ministers and officials were appointed as advisors to the president at the same time that the government announced a halt to public sector appointments.

- (5) *Financial cost:* Some administrative reforms require a financial cost that the Palestinian Authority is unable to provide, especially in light of the punitive measures imposed by the Israeli occupation and the decline in international financial support during the past ten years. For example, the judiciary needs to appoint judges and court administrators, in addition to building courts and other facilities that meet the needs of the justice system in many governorates. Reforming the civil service law, or retiring a large number of civil servants, would also entail significant financial costs. In light of the Palestinian Authority's fiscal deficit, it will not be able to carry out administrative reforms with high financial costs.

- (6) *Political cost:* The political cost of the reform process, meaning the potential harm to the interests of power centres, groups close to the main decision-maker, will pose a fundamental challenge to this process. In recent years an alliance has been established between the political class that leads the Palestinian Authority and the business class. Thus the regime has become unable to take decisions of an economic and social nature that would benefit the largest segment of the Palestinian public, in order to preserve the interests of businessmen linked to the interests of the political class. For example, the previous government studied the legal, financial and administrative conditions of 109 non-ministerial governmental institutions in order to ensure their integration in government work in a manner that ensures the agility, vitality and the productivity of these institutions (Palestinian Authority 2022). But it was able to achieve this in only 30 institutions and could not accomplish more in this area because of the financial and political cost and the association of these institutions with the centres of power within the Palestinian Authority. This prevented these institutions from being controlled by the Council of Ministers. Given this current reality, the new government will not be able to succeed in this particular issue due to likely resistance from other Authority actors, most notably the president's office and other power centres, such as the security services and the Fatah movement (Lahlouh 2024b). Clearly, the government can succeed only if it is granted full jurisdiction as stipulated by law, as noted above.

- (7) *Lack of integrity in governance:* AMAN's report (AMAN 2022) on the reality of integrity and anti-corruption in Palestine for the year 2022 presents a disturbing picture in which the ruling elite persists in adopting policies and procedures aimed at strengthening its power position, and acquiring additional centres of power. It does so by controlling appointments in public institutions without relying on the principle of transparency and standards of competence and eligibility, and by adopting policies and making decisions that serve its own political interests at the expense of the public interest. For example, the PA issued several laws by decree contrary to the rules of integrity in the government, including a decree amending the General Intelligence Law, a decree amending another decree on the judiciary of the securi-

ty forces, and a decree amending the consular fees law, which exempts employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and their first-degree relatives from the majority of consular fees without a clear justification, violating the concept of equality stipulated in Article IX of the Basic Law. These measures have weakened citizens' confidence in political officials and institutions, as well as in the statements and plans issued by them. This was clearly demonstrated by a public opinion poll conducted at the end of May 2024, in which 67 per cent of respondents declared that the government of Muhammad Mustafa would not succeed in reforming the institutions of the Palestinian Authority and 77 per cent stated that the new government would not succeed in combating corruption (PCPSR 2024).

(8) *The political system's perceived lack of legitimacy:* The Palestinian political system has been suffering from a loss of constitutional and popular legitimacy since 2010, when new elections were supposed to take place for the parliament and the president. These elections did not take place because of the internal split, at times, and due to the objections of the Israeli occupation authorities at other times. Additionally, the Palestinian Authority ruling elite has lacked a serious intention to hold elections. The regime's ruling class and the social forces benefiting from it have lost their legitimacy and public trust. Polls in recent years have shown a rise in dissatisfaction with the performance of President Abbas, who is the head of the executive authority but also serves as the legislature due to the absence of the PLC, with only 12 per cent expressing satisfaction with his performance and 86 per cent expressing dissatisfaction. On the other hand, the percentage of those calling for the president's resignation had increased to 89 per cent by mid-2024 (PCPSR 2024). General elections, leading to the renewal of legitimacy, would be the most important key to political reform as well as address the problem of the absence of an independent legislature.

(9) *Lack of citizens' confidence in the political system:* Citizens' confidence in the government and other public institutions has declined significantly over the past decade. This development has led to the creation of protest movements and strikes by professional groups and unions when the Palestinian Authority tried to implement reforms that were viewed as having the potential to harm the interests of certain groups. For example, the government of Rami al-Hamdallah failed to implement the Social Security Law due to the protest movement launched by groups and segments of society targeted by that law. These groups rejected the law because of their lack of trust in the government. An opinion poll conducted by the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research on the reasons for opposition, carried out at the time, showed that opponents were divided into three groups: (1) about half (49 per cent) said it was unjust and unfair; (2) nearly a third (32 per cent) said they do not trust the government and fear corruption, theft and *wasta* (or nepotism); and (3) 14 per cent said that

their current income is too small for any further deductions (PCPSR 2018). This is consistent with the findings of the public opinion polls over the past decade which have shown a decline in trust in the Palestinian government and a strong conviction in the corruption of PA institutions. At the end of 2023, 74 per cent said they do not trust the Palestinian government (PCPSR 2024a). The limited efforts made to combat corruption have exacerbated the crisis of distrust between the citizens and the Palestinian Authority. In light of the continued decline in confidence in the institutions of the Palestinian political system, including the government, one must not assume that the public will rally around the new government's reform steps.

(10) *Poor government performance:* Palestinian governments have suffered from poor performance, especially in the financial sector, as these governments have failed to address a number of basic public concerns, such as the Social Security Law, and failed to preserve the funds of the public employees' pension fund when they were unable to transfer the contributions of employees during the past twenty years or more. The findings of the most recent Arab Barometer survey, conducted at the end of 2023, show that there is great discontent among the majority of Palestinians regarding the government's performance in terms of delivering basic services: 64 per cent said they are dissatisfied with this performance in general. A substantial majority of 79 per cent believe that the government is not very or not at all responsive to what people want. These findings show a decrease in satisfaction compared with the seventh Arab Barometer round, which was conducted two years earlier (PCPSR 2024a). In light of the Palestinian public's dissatisfaction with the performance of successive governments, the reform steps that the government plans to implement will be viewed with suspicion and may be met with popular rejection, as happened when the Palestinian Authority attempted to implement the Social Security Law several years ago.

## EXTERNAL CHALLENGES

The Israeli occupation and donor pressure are additional challenges that constrain the reform process (Lahlouh 2024b), although donor pressure can sometimes be a driver of reform (Lahlouh 2024c). The Israeli occupation still imposes its military and administrative control over the largest area of the West Bank, Area C, which constitutes 62 per cent of the territory. Israel separates the two parts of the PA territories in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip from each other, in addition to controlling the crossings and commercial movement of imports and exports, and thus collects Palestinian taxes to be transferred to the Palestinian Authority. In recent years, however, it has imposed various financial sanctions on the Authority (Wafa 2024), plunging it into an escalating financial crisis that has exacerbated its inability to meet its obligations to its citizens. The Palestinian Authority cannot carry out many economic reforms related to the tax



system or modify them in line with Palestinian conditions due to the restrictions of the Paris Agreement signed between the Palestinian and Israeli sides in 1994, which made the Palestinian economy dependent on Israel's.

Over recent years, donor pressure has been imposed on the Palestinian Authority to carry out reforms within its institutions. This pressure has varied between financial and political. Most donor reform demands have been linked to political developments, with Israel raising suspicions among the Palestinians about the real agenda of the donors. These reform demands were seen as the donors' means of evading responsibility for pressing Israel to implement its own commitments (Lahlouh 2024d). Western demands for reform emerged following the end of the original interim period of the Oslo Process in 1999 and intensified during the Second Intifada. Steps that Israel was required to take were occasionally linked to reforms that the Palestinian Authority was required to make despite the fact that these reforms were not part of the Authority's commitments under the various peace agreements with Israel. Nonetheless, despite the politicisation of the reform process by donors to appease Israel, donor pressure has sometimes succeeded in forcing the Palestinian Authority ruling elite to embrace the reform agenda, especially when donor pressure coincided with growing internal pressure on the same agenda, such as the approval of the highly significant 2003 amendments to the Basic Law. On the other hand, the Palestinian Authority's response to external reform pressure while ignoring internal demands demonstrates its weakness towards its citizens and contributes to the undermining of confidence in it and its institutions.

## 3

## CONFRONTING THE CHALLENGES HINDERING THE REFORM PROCESS

Some 30 years since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority it has become necessary to confront these challenges and overcome the obstacles to the reform process in order to build strong and accountable institutions capable of advancing the interests of Palestinian society. Only in this way will Palestinian society be able to cope with the Israeli occupation, in both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Mustafa government should explore the following measures today:

1. *Restoring unity and ending political division:* Efforts need to be made to end internal division and rebuild and unify the two parts of the Palestinian homeland by making compromises on both sides. Both parties, Fatah and Hamas, must accept and respect each other, and try to figure out solutions to eliminate their differences. No party should force its beliefs on the other, such as demanding that Hamas recognise the Quartet's decisions and Israel as a precondition of joining the Palestinian Liberation Organization. It is unacceptable to tie the unification of the Palestinian people to demanding that one side abandon its principles and values. Unification would help restore public trust, increase social resilience and enhance the Palestinian negotiating position. In this vein, there should be a national action programme fully (or almost) agreed upon by all Palestinian forces. Such a programme could draw a roadmap for the Palestinians' future, including unification, ending division and taking on board necessary reforms of the Palestinian political system. All of this will go towards restoring the community that has been damaged by division. Hamas, for example, could heal the split by joining the Palestinian Liberation Organization and preparing for elections, giving the process more credibility and robustness.
2. *Renewing the legitimacy of the political system:* Renewal of legitimacy can naturally be achieved only through holding general elections, legislative and presidential. Due to the Palestinian Authority's inability to hold elections today because of the war in the Gaza Strip and the destructive consequences of Israeli aggression, a national programme must be proposed that can achieve the greatest level of consensus from all Palestinian social and political forces, including those responsible for the continued Palestinian division, Fatah and Hamas. Every relevant stakeholder in Palestinian society, be they political parties/movements, civil society organisations, trade unions or other relevant groups, must take decisive action to drive governmental changes in line with this conclusion. As the head of the executive branch and chair of the Palestinian Liberation Organization's Executive Committee, the Palestinian president should use consultations, especially with political actors that were against the appointment of a prime minister, such as Hamas, to decrease doubts and questions, no matter how small and narrow, about the government's independence and reliability. This would foster the renewal of legitimacy and open the door for greater consensus in the future. It might also demonstrate to the public that Mustafa can and will confront the most basic of challenges, namely the absence of political will and of integrity in governance.
3. *Empowering the government:* The Basic Law, which clearly details the mandate and jurisdiction of the various authorities in the political system, must be adhered to. It provides a detailed description of the functions and responsibilities of the two institutions of the executive authority, the presidency on one hand and the prime minister and his council of ministers on the other. Sadly, since 2007 the presidency has usurped the powers of the government granted to it by the Basic Law, which has made the government lose its effectiveness and ability to work independently. The Palestinian government derives its legitimacy from the constitution and parliamentary majority, not from the Palestinian Authority president, who does not have the constitutional right to determine its policies. The amended Basic Law granted the government almost total independence and far more powers than those of the president. To achieve the required empowerment, the Mustafa government must demonstrate, by words and deeds, its independence from the Palestinian Authority president. It must ensure that his council of ministers has the final say without submitting to the dictates of the president. In this way, Mustafa may then be able to take the first baby steps toward a meaningful reform process, especially if by that time he has already begun to forge a consensus among various forces with regard to his government's reform programme.

4. *Forming a popular coalition to support the reform process:* Even under the current circumstances in which the government has little or no popular legitimacy or trust, the Mustafa government can build a coalition with civil society groups in support of its reform agenda. Azmi Shuaibi, a consultant to AMAN, has proposed such a coalition as a stopgap measure to help the government and the prime minister gain some much needed public support (Lahlouh 2024d). There is no doubt that the reform process will affect the interests of many groups in society, and in cases of conflict, the government usually seeks a mandate from popular representatives. But in the absence of a functioning PLC, the government must seek the cooperation of the largest popular base available in an attempt to overcome the loss of legitimacy and trust. Weighty community forces representing the various components of civil society can participate in this coalition and form a public body from various sectors of society that participate in the initiation and debate of reform priorities based on expert reports. Public opinion polls can also be used to help determine such priorities. A secretariat should be formed for this proposed body, made up of a group of experts in various fields. It should be tasked with one mission: debate and make recommendations to the government, monitor performance and report to the plenary, thus obtaining the greatest possible participation in an attempt to compensate for the absence of a legislature. To enhance this coalition's chances of success, the prime minister should personally work to build trust, not only with civil society leaders, but also with ordinary citizens and their elected local representatives, wherever possible. To gain credibility, the prime minister must take concrete, bold and transparent steps in the fight against corruption, even if it affects former and current senior officials.
5. *Empowering existing Palestinian Authority audit and oversight bodies:* To confront the dangers inherent in the lack of integrity in governance, the government needs the assistance of existing Palestinian supervisory bodies, both official and otherwise. Among others, these could include the State Audit and Administrative Control Bureau, the Independent Commission for Human Rights, and the AMAN Coalition. They can be mandated to submit to the government and simultaneously make public periodic reports containing assessments, findings and recommendations of steps that the government can take to ensure compliance with existing laws and the requirements of good governance. By following transparent procedures in addressing these findings and recommendations, the government can demonstrate its responsiveness and gain greater public trust.
8. *Adopting more effective fiscal policies:* On the fiscal side, the government must work on two fronts. First, it needs to press on with its efforts to raise funds from donors while continuing to improve its performance in tax collection, which is not easy. Second, it needs to take tangible measures aimed at reducing government expenditure. It goes without saying that the government should adopt more transparent practices in all matters related to the use of public funds. It could start by publishing full details of the Palestinian Authority budget, as required by law. It is worth pointing out that the government has not been forthcoming on this issue during the past four years; it has not published the budget, leading to further loss of public trust and reinforcing public perceptions of corruption in Palestinian Authority institutions.
7. *Forming a regional and international coalition to confront Israeli annexation measures:* Having secured greater public and factional consensus on its reform agenda and after demonstrating its independence and building a broad civil society coalition, the Mustafa government can exploit the current global shift in support of the Palestinian cause to work jointly with the PLO on forming a coalition with neighbours and friendly countries, and even unfriendly countries committed to upholding international law, not only to stop the war in Gaza and provide immediate assistance, but also to tackle the increased efforts imposed by the current extremist Israel government to diminish the Palestinian Authority's jurisdiction while creating its preferred 'facts on the ground' to consolidate the creeping annexation of the West Bank and destroy the possibility of a two-state solution through the consolidation of the Israeli settlements. The purpose of this coalition should be to enforce international law through the effective use of sanctions.
8. *Learning from international experiences:* The Palestinian Authority can learn from global experiences in reconstructing state institutions, especially from European countries that benefited from the Marshall Plan after the Second World War to rebuild their institutions from the ground up. Palestine needs to harness the efforts of all its talents and experts in the service of reconstruction, while needing a Marshall Plan to overcome its current state, encourage economic growth and provide a better life, which would, in turn, overcome divisions and encourage the economic growth that could in turn enhance the peace process.

# 4

## CONCLUSION

Can the Mustafa government overcome the reform challenges addressed in this brief? The current government has no popular support, no factional mandate, no meaningful public trust, and has not received a vote of confidence from a parliamentary majority. So far, it has not articulated a clear vision for moving forward, one characterised by a willingness to take the initiative or boldness in facing the reform challenges. Without such attributes, the Palestinian leadership will not be able to face the various challenges, first and foremost political division and the lack of political will for reform. Rather, the government continues to operate as if it derives its powers and legitimacy from the president, whose electoral legitimacy expired fourteen years ago, and not from the constitution, as it should. Other than lip service, there are no signs of serious change on the part of the president or the new prime minister regarding the introduction of serious reforms. Neither the prime minister nor his ministers have indicated any desire to challenge those who appointed them to office, even to demonstrate their independence or to affirm their loyalty to the Basic Law that they have sworn to uphold.

However, we should not give in to despair. This brief has presented a set of recommendations capable of opening a window of hope for the required reforms. Even limited success today can allow progress towards greater and more vital tasks in the future: providing critical support to the residents of the Gaza Strip, reunifying state institutions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on a professional basis, preparing for general elections, and moving toward an inclusive political future for the Palestinian people in organising their relations with the international community. To get closer to such goals, the government not only has to exercise its full powers and jurisdiction in choosing its course of action, but also obtain the popular support it needs through accountability and oversight over its actions.

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT

»Palestinian Perspectives on the Reconstruction of Gaza« is a joint project carried out by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) and the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), the German Institute for International and Security Affairs. The papers published within the framework of this project focus on Palestinian needs and priorities with regard to a range of topics linked to early recovery and reconstruction of Gaza after the 2023/2024 war.

In this context, they do not regard the Gaza Strip as a separate entity, but as part of the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967. They also hold that all approaches, be they short or long term, should be compatible with the principle of Palestinian self-determination. The objective is to highlight key insights from Palestinian experiences and expertise and introduce them into the international debate. Papers cover aspects such as security arrangements, governance, the role of women and urban planning for recovery and reconstruction. They reflect the author's views only.

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