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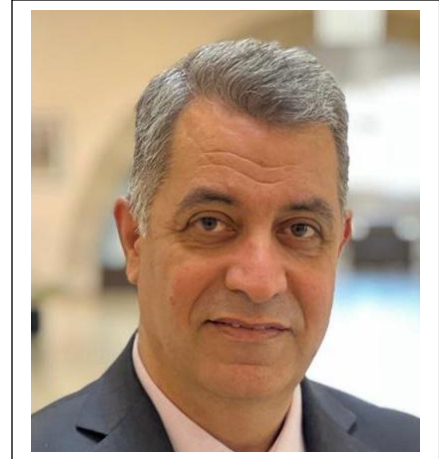
**Six months after the formation of the nineteenth government
Community Communication is essential to
reshaping the image of the nineteenth government**



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Mr. Jihad holds a master's degree in Political Science from the Faculty of Law and Political Science in Tunis since 1999. He has writes a weekly article specializing in Palestinian affairs and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. He is a co-author of the Arab Security Index Report, the Arab Reform Report known as the “Arab Democracy Index,” and a member of the main team for the Palestinian Integrity Index , and the Integrity Index in the Palestinian Security Sector. He also worked as a member of expert team supporting the work of the National Reconciliation Support and Development Group/Security Sector. He has numerous studies published in Palestinian and Arab research institutions and centers related to the Palestinian political system, good governance, parliamentary work, the integrity system, the security sector, and refugee issues.

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The center conducts various research activities, including preparing studies and applied research related to current Palestinian policies, conducting opinion polls on the political, social, and economic conditions of Palestinian society, providing institutional and programmatic consultations and assessments, as well as local governance and the private sector. Additionally, it organizes conferences, lectures, and briefings on current issues, among other activities.

THABAT Center for Research and Opinion Polls is committed to objectivity and scientific integrity, making optimal use of experts to oversee political, governance, economic research, and field studies conducted by experienced researchers in the field

This paper is the fourth in a series of policy papers issued by the center for the year 2024. These papers address internal and external policy issues relevant to the Palestinian community and decision-makers. It is worth noting that this paper is published in partnership with the Palestinian Association for Empowerment and Local Development—REFORM.

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Six months after the formation of the nineteenth government Community communication is essential to reshaping the image of the nineteenth government

Jihad Harb¹

Approximately six months have passed since the establishment of the nineteenth government, which issued the 'Performance Report of the First Hundred Days of the Nineteenth Government' at the end of July. This report included an overview of the work of government institutions in general, the services provided, and a presentation of the reform measures that were implemented. The issuance of this report by the nineteenth government is commendable and represents a significant step that demonstrates a principled commitment to communicating with citizens in its initial form."

The report included the achievements and challenges faced by the government in implementing its announced program, as well as any adjustments to this program based on the experience of the first hundred days. Although this report reflects the government's desire or vision to enhance transparency, openness, and clarity in its operations—especially given the difficult circumstances surrounding its formation, which are well-known—it places the government not only under the obligation to present this report to citizens, who have the right to oversee its actions, but also to establish and utilize various community communication and engagement tools. This includes listening, discussion, and dialogue, as well as debating issues of societal concern and explaining the government's actions, along with the subjective and objective challenges (both internal and external) and failures affecting its work to the citizens.

This paper presents an overview of the government's performance after six months in office, highlighting its constitutional authority as outlined in the Basic Law and its role as a central pillar of the Palestinian political system. It examines the political and social structure of the government, along with citizens' perceptions of it, while identifying necessary developments to activate community communication tools that can influence public impressions, attitudes, and opinions regarding the government.

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The paper also summarizes key points from the government's performance report during its first hundred days, aiming to establish communication channels that address citizens' interests in information and transparency. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of accountability by justifying governmental actions to citizens and proposes a mechanism for civil society organizations to participate in policy-making processes.

The Position of the Government in the Political System

The philosophy of the amended Basic Law of 2003 and its amendments aimed to enhance the capacity of the Cabinet and grant it broad powers by transforming the presidential system into a mixed presidential-parliamentary system, leaning more towards the parliamentary model. The constitutional amendment to the Basic Law on March 19, 2003, which established the position of Prime Minister within the Palestinian Authority, marked a significant development in the political system's structure. This change effectively separated the position of the Prime Minister from that of the President, leading to a duality in the executive authority of the Palestinian Authority, while also reinforcing parliamentary accountability.

The amended Basic Law grants the Prime Minister and the Cabinet the authority to manage the executive and administrative functions of the Palestinian Authority. This includes responsibilities for maintaining public order and internal security (Article 69), as well as the Cabinet's authority to appoint and oversee the heads of bodies, institutions, and authorities. They are also responsible for setting public policy within their jurisdiction, in light of the ministerial program approved by the Legislative Council, and for implementing the public policies determined by the relevant Palestinian authorities (Article 69).

Furthermore, the Cabinet has the right to propose draft laws to the Legislative Council, issue regulations, and take necessary actions to enforce laws (Article 70). The Cabinet is tasked with establishing the administrative apparatus, designing its structures, equipping it with all necessary resources, overseeing and monitoring its operations, ensuring the enforcement of laws, and taking appropriate measures for compliance. They also have the authority to create or dissolve bodies, institutions, and authorities, or similar administrative units within the executive apparatus of

the government, and to appoint and supervise heads of these bodies (Article 69). Additionally, the Cabinet is responsible for preparing the general budget to be presented to the Legislative Council (Article 69) and for maintaining public order and internal security (Article 69).

The Prime Minister has the right to select members of the Cabinet and announce the names of the government formation (Article 65). He also has the authority to modify the Cabinet, dismiss any member, accept resignations, and fill any vacancies. Additionally, the Prime Minister can appoint a deputy from among the ministers to carry out his duties in his absence (Article 68). He has the right to refer any of the ministers for investigation (Article 75) and supervises the work of the ministers and public institutions affiliated with the government. Furthermore, he presides over Cabinet sessions (Article 68).

The Social and Political Structure of the Nineteenth Government

The social composition of the Nineteenth Government, headed by Dr. Muhammad Mustafa, shows that the average age of the ministers is 60 years, with the oldest minister being Mr. Hani Al-Haik (71 years), followed by Dr. Muhammad Mustafa (70 years). The youngest minister is Dr. Abdul Razak Al-Natsha (42 years). Women represent only 17% of the government, with four female ministers, while two Christian ministers hold ministerial portfolios (9%), compared to twenty-one Muslim ministers (91%).

Regarding political affiliation, four ministers out of the twenty-three are from Fatah Movement (members of the Revolutionary Council or candidates on Fatah's list for the 2021 elections). Three ministers have held positions as heads or members of local councils, while the remaining sixteen portfolios are held by economic and academic competencies. Two ministers (Dr. Muhammad Mustafa and General Ziad Hab Al-Raih) have previously held ministerial positions (9%), while the other twenty-one ministers have not served in ministerial roles before.

Regarding residency status, there are seven ministers from the Gaza Strip (30%), while the remaining ministers are from the West Bank (16 ministers). The government members are distributed by governorate as follows: five ministers from Gaza, four from Ramallah, three from Hebron, and three from Jerusalem.

Additionally, there is one minister each from the following governorates: Bethlehem, Jenin, North Gaza, Tulkarem, Rafah, Salfit, Tubas, and Nablus.

Looking at the professional backgrounds of the ministers, ten of them (44%) come from the private sector, whether as employees or businessmen. Seven ministers (30%) are university professors, while three have worked in the government and three others in international institutions. Regarding educational qualifications, nearly half of the ministers (48%) hold a PhD in various fields such as engineering, sciences, economics, mathematics, and management. Six ministers (26%) have a bachelor's degree, five others (22%) hold a master's degree, and one minister has a diploma (4%).

The academic qualifications of the cabinet members indicate a diversity of specializations: seven members specialize in economics, business administration, and financial sciences, seven hold degrees in engineering, two have degrees in law, and one is a doctor.

Citizens' Impressions and Attitudes Toward the Nineteenth Government

The majority of citizens are pessimistic about the government's ability to bring about change on issues they prioritize. Notably, impressions, attitudes, and expectations among residents of the West Bank are more negative compared to their counterparts in the Gaza Strip regarding the new government's success in fulfilling its duties. This sentiment is reflected in the results of Public Opinion Poll No. (93) conducted by the Palestinian Center for Political Research in September 2024, approximately five months after the formation of the Nineteenth Government.

The vast majority (69%) of citizens indicated that Dr. Muhammad Mustafa's government would not succeed in implementing reforms that the previous government, led by Muhammad Shtayyeh, was unable to achieve. This pessimistic outlook extends to expectations regarding the government's ability to improve citizens' economic conditions, with 72% believing it will not succeed in enhancing the economic situation in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In the political realm concerning internal reconciliation, 75% of citizens believe the government will not succeed in promoting reconciliation and unifying the West Bank and Gaza. Additionally, 73% say it will not succeed in holding legislative and presidential

elections, while 71% believe it will not succeed in aiding Gaza and rebuilding it in the future.

Government Performance: “Unsteady Steps”

A quick review of the performance report for the first hundred days issued by the government reveals the extent of the actions and measures taken during its initial period. The report demonstrates that the government continued to provide various essential services and initiated multiple efforts to improve and enhance government performance. It also outlines future plans related to relief efforts in the Gaza Strip, despite the political, economic, and financial challenges it faces.

The government also made several reform decisions and financial and administrative measures to rationalize spending in government departments. These included regulating the movement and use of government vehicles, specifying travel duties and government contracts, renting government buildings, and halting the purchase of new furniture and government cars. Positions, including senior roles, were to be filled based on competition and transparency, ensuring the application of equal opportunity principles.

The government emphasized the implementation of the president's decree to stop extending service for civil and military employees over the age of 60, ambassadors over the age of 65, and judges over the age of 70, while suspending all exceptions and ceasing contracts with retired government employees—unless absolutely necessary and provided that at least two years have passed since their retirement.

Additionally, a special committee was formed, chaired by the Minister of Justice and including representatives from relevant government sectors and civil society, to review Law No. 10 of 2018 on electronic crimes, assessing its alignment with the rights and freedoms outlined in the basic law and related legislation. The executive office for reform was also established, along with the ministerial committee for reform. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance resumed publishing monthly reports on public revenues and expenditures.

On the other hand, it did not abandon the policies of previous governments regarding a lack of transparency in its operations. The government did not fully

publish the decisions made during the cabinet meetings, and it presented its reform plan at the donors' conference held in Brussels from May 26 to 28, 2024, without disclosing the contents of this document to the Palestinian public. This plan, which includes financial, security, and administrative reforms, was not shared or published in a comprehensive manner for the Palestinian people, who are the rightful owners and supposed beneficiaries of these reforms.

The announcement by the nineteenth government regarding a competition to appoint several deputies for some ministries was well-received by observers of public affairs, as it aligned with the principle of equal opportunities stipulated in the Basic Law (Article 26) and the citizens' aspirations to open competition for high-level positions. Conversely, the continued spending by the nineteenth government without the existence or issuance of a public budget law in July constituted a violation of the rule of law and reflected a weakness in the government's commitment to ensuring that its actions and expenditures were consistent with the Basic Law and the integrity of financial procedures related to spending and revenues.

The Government's Community Communication Weakness

Government community communication policies are based on its vision of the relationship with citizens, the communication mechanisms it employs, and the media strategies it uses for both informing and engaging the public. These policies also reflect its perspective on how community participation can contribute to the success and reshaping of its policies in the eyes of the public.

The government's first decision was to abolish the Ministry of Information without justification from the government or its prime minister. This occurred despite the government's lack of control over official media outlets such as television, radio, and the news agency. In addition, during its first hundred days, the government refrained from publishing its decisions, including even the main headlines. The absence of a designated spokesperson for the government further hindered its ability to explain its actions and respond to the needs of the fourth estate—journalists, media professionals, influencers, and activists. This weakened the government's communication functions, which are essential for ensuring the flow of information to citizens, raising awareness, and engaging them in managing public

affairs and finances. This lack of communication aimed to alter the public's perception of the government.

The current state of the government suggests that communication with citizens through various media channels has not received the attention it deserves, and the importance of its public image has not been a central focus. This has led to a perception of the government as isolated. Despite the Prime Minister and several ministers emphasizing the importance of partnership with civil society organizations through wide-ranging meetings, the government has relied solely on these meetings over the past six months. It has not adopted a clear policy for collaboration with civil society organizations, nor defined the nature and mechanisms of such partnerships through a "White Paper" that would regulate the relationship and methods for contributing to policy formation and discussing necessary legislative projects.

This lack of a structured approach has hindered the establishment of accountability frameworks for the government to explain its actions and ensure that policies align with citizens' needs. Civil society organizations can serve as experts in their respective fields, act as communication channels with various community segments, and sometimes assist the government in delivering services to marginalized areas where it struggles to meet demands.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the success of any government relies on investing in community communication and interactive media as essential tools to clarify its image to citizens. This investment is equally important for the government itself to understand areas of weakness and foundations of success. Additionally, it enhances its ability to reach citizens, respond to their needs, understand their perceptions, and address them effectively. Moreover, it helps change the stereotypical image of the government and influences community behaviors, encouraging civic participation and shared responsibility. This is particularly significant given that citizens are aware of the challenging circumstances under which Dr. Muhammad Mustafa's government was formed, including the ongoing Israeli aggression on Gaza, the worsening financial crisis, and the deteriorating security situation in the West Bank due to occupation.

Therefore, the government needs to adopt a communication policy with the community and its various sectors based on transparency in managing public finances and affairs, as well as openness towards society. This will improve its ability to present its positions on local and international political, social, and economic issues that concern the Palestinian community, through:

(1) Reassessing the Government's Communication Policy with Media:

Informing is the easier part of communication, while interactive media engagement is often weaker in an era of vast information exchange and data. The required media approach is to open up to citizens, engage in exchanging opinions, explain actions, justify decisions, and present the government's positions on political, social, economic, and financial issues that matter to the public. It should also clarify the state's institutions' stances on regional and international matters and outline their relationships in line with Palestine's interests and values. This requires a daily communication platform in public life for those seeking citizens' trust and involvement, transforming the government from a bureaucratic entity within the Palestinian political system into an interactive and responsive government. There should be an active presence to address pressing issues, supported by a communication plan, media tools, and government spokespersons who engage in interactive communication rather than merely informing.

(2) Developing a Partnership Policy with Civil Society Organizations: This involves adopting a formal "White Paper" that outlines the government's approach to collaboration and partnership with civil society. The document should define coordination mechanisms, the nature of relationships, and the rules of engagement in the process of developing public policies and discussing legislation. Additionally, it should establish a framework for public oversight and community accountability regarding government performance and its areas of work.

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