

Resenting reform

By [David Heim](#)

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One of the few things Western observers of the Middle East tend to agree on, regardless of whether they lean toward the Israelis or the Palestinians, is that Palestinian prime minister Salam Fayyad has done an excellent job as administrator of the Palestinian Authority.

The Western-educated Fayyad has laid what foundation there is for a Palestinian state. He has forged a functioning bureaucracy, a legitimate police force and an infrastructure that can support economic development. He has moved Palestinians away from patronage and violence. He is the Mr. Clean of Palestinian politics.

New York Times columnist Tom Friedman once [wrote](#) that “Israel’s best defense is to strengthen Fayyadism”--that is, to encourage pragmatic Palestinian leaders like Fayyad and show Palestinians that Fayyad-style governance is where the future lies.

It’s illuminating, then, to read Ben Birnbaum’s lengthy [essay](#) on Fayyad in the latest New Republic, which exposes how fragile Fayyad’s position is. “Resentment of Fayyad has become one of the few things on which many Hamas and Fatah officials can agree,” Birnbaum reports.

Why do both Palestinian factions resent him? Fatah resents him because he taken on its patronage network, Hamas because Fayyad is “everything they hate: secular, pro-Western, abhorring of violence and accepting of Israel.”

It’s an important article for understanding the region--a place where Fayyad’s practical accomplishments earn him few rewards from Israel and lots of resentment from Palestinians.