



PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

The Lies of Saeb Erekat: How Palestinian Propaganda Warps the Truth and Undermines Peace Efforts

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: An incendiary propaganda document replete with blatant lies and utter distortions of history penned by Saeb Erekat, recently sent to foreign media, exposes the futility of the Palestinian mindset, and reveals just how far the Palestinian leadership is from accepting the premises necessary for true peace with Israel.

Saeb Erekat is a unique phenomenon in the Palestinian orbit. For years, he has played the dual role of negotiator-in-chief for Palestinian-Israeli peace talks and propagandist par excellence for the regimes of Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas. His record of lies and dissimulations is legion, and he seems to be getting worse as he ages. History will yet record his abysmal diplomatic role in the many mistakes of the Palestinian national movement.

Certainly over the past two years, Erekat has been a central factor in the Palestinian Authority's abandonment of peace talks with Israel and its move to confrontation with Israel in international forums.

In advance of the fateful and fruitless meeting in the White House between Mahmoud Abbas and President Obama in March 2014, Erekat authored a critical document, entitled "Study Number 15," which set the stage for the failure of the meeting in Washington.

Rejecting the "Kerry Framework" and any prospect of compromise with Israel's minimal expectations on security and mutual recognition, Erekat's document advocated the hostile course of action ultimately chosen by Abbas:

A spate of unilateral accessions to international organizations and a bid for reconciliation with Hamas. The results of those dreadful choices are in, and they did not serve the Palestinian people well.

Now Erekat is at it again – spreading more lies, issuing more rejectionist declarations, advocating more unilateral and ultimately violent Palestinian actions – while counseling the international media to hate Israel.

Earlier this month (Nov. 5), Erekat's "Negotiations Affairs Department" of the "State of Palestine – Palestine Liberation Organization" in Ramallah issued a media guidance document called "Key Points to Remember when Reporting on Occupied Palestine." Erekat's office distributed this document to foreign media based in Israel and outlets worldwide.

This incendiary document deserves to be deconstructed word for word, in order to understand the futility of the Palestinian mindset as seen through the fervid mind of Saeb Erekat. The document, analyzed below, reveals just how far the Palestinian leadership is from accepting the premises necessary for true peace with Israel. Beyond the bravado and mendacities, the document also discloses a great deal of Palestinian discomfort with the facts as reported by the media.

Erekat's Point 1: *"Israel occupies the State of Palestine."*

No, it does not. To use Lincoln's old adage, even if the UN calls his tail a leg, a cat still has just four. Israel is no longer in occupation in Gaza (nor does Abbas' writ run there). As for the Palestinian Authority, it has never been a state, and it was not from the PA that land was conquered in 1967. The PA can only become a true state through a negotiated agreement.

Erekat's lead sentence is "This is not a conflict among equals." This is true, by now. But the other side of the coin is the realization that had Israel been the weaker side – in 1948, 1967 or ever since – there would not have been a Jew left alive. Israel's "belligerent military occupation" in the West Bank (as Erekat terms it) may sound unpleasant; but this is in fact a neutral legal term describing a situation arising after Israel's war of self-defense in 1967.

The conflict is to be resolved by negotiations, which the Palestinians have foiled again and again. In these negotiations, Palestinian freedom and self-determination have been very much on offer. So to say that Israel "has systematically denied the inalienable rights" of the Palestinians is yet another lie.

Things get worse. The PA/PLO propaganda document aimed at the media says that "Israel imposes a policy of forced displacement of the indigenous Palestinian population and replacement with *foreign* settlers." Except that no such policy exists. Witness this month's decision to assign a synagogue for demolition and relocation by order of the Israel Supreme Court, since it turns out that it had been unwittingly built on private Palestinian land!

In any case, whether or not the 'Palestinians are "indigenous" (– there may be good reason to doubt that they have been there "from time immemorial"), Jews are certainly not "foreign" in their own land. This systemic and desperate effort to apply the language of colonialism to the Zionist endeavor is very much at the root of the tragic Palestinian failure to acknowledge that Palestinians have been fighting a legitimate national movement – the Jewish/Zionist movement – with which the Palestinians will have to compromise for peace.

Erekat's Point 2: *"The main issue is the Israeli Occupation."*

By this, we can presume that Erekat means that the main issue is not the Palestinian mindset that sends teenage boys and girls on murderous terrorist excursions. Clearly, there are aspects of current Palestinian conduct that Erekat would like the world media to ignore and/or avert its gaze elsewhere.

According to this media guidance document, it is the Israeli Government which "attempts to shift the focus away from its colonization enterprise and illegal occupation" – not the Palestinians, who through continuous acts of murder are trying to force the world to listen to their claims about Israel's alleged crimes.

Erekat alleges that the "colonization enterprise and illegal occupation" is the "root cause of the continuous uprisings of the Palestinian people who have for decades endured an Apartheid regime". Here are four lies rolled into one sentence!

1. "Colonization"? The League of Nations mandate authorized, indeed encouraged, Jews to settle in the land of their forefathers. The term "colonization" is an attempt to tar Israel with the brush of European colonialism.
2. The occupation, as already indicated, is not "illegal" (as former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan once had to admit after he misspoke), but a condition arising from the defeat of Arab attempts to wage war.

3. The "continuous uprisings" presumably include the outburst of Palestinian violence in 2000-2004, which was not an uprising in any sense (despite the misnomer "Second Intifada"), but a terror campaign led from above. Tom Friedman rightly called it "Mr. Arafat's War." Abbas admitted in 2002 that the "militarization of the uprising" was a mistake.

4. "Apartheid Regime" is an absurd slur, aimed at a country with Arab Muslim judges and ambassadors, not to mention a group of vociferous Arab members of Knesset. It is also an effort to imply that Israel will be, as Apartheid has been, a passing phenomenon. Indulging this lurid fantasy would amount to consigning the Palestinians to a long and futile struggle. Israel is not going to vanish!

Erekat continues: "Though Israeli spokespeople have claimed that the main issues are Al-Aqsa and 'Palestinian incitement,' the fact of the matter is that Israel continues to systematically deny Palestinian rights." This comes close to an admission that PA incitement is very much the cause of violence, again coupled with a transparent attempt to switch the subject.

"Israeli leaders continue to incite against Palestinians." Another classic Erekat absurdity, given the one-sided nature of the violence we witness today!

"The so-called 'Aqsa-deal' does not address the core of the issue," Erekat tells us. In other words, the Palestinians are once again rejecting Kerry's efforts, and those of King Abdullah II, to restore calm on the Temple Mount.

Erekat's Point 3: *"Palestinian Recognition of Israel was met with more Colonization."*

What the text describes as the PLO's "historic compromise of recognizing Israel over 78 percent of historic Palestine (the 1967 border)" was nothing of the sort. The PLO recognized that Israel exists (on much smaller part of the original mandatory territory, which included Transjordan), but did not offer an end-of-all-claims deal, nor diminish its demand for the so-called Palestinian "right of return" which means the erasure of Israel.

Five years later, the Palestinians signed the Oslo Declaration of Principles, which made it very clear that full sovereignty, borders, and settlements are issues to be settled in "permanent status" talks. Leaping over this requirement for negotiations, and repeating claims about "belligerent" Israeli occupation, colonization, and Apartheid, does not alter the fact that the path to independence through negotiations has very much been open to the

Palestinians. As should be well known, three times over the past decade the PA has rejected the compromises put on the table by Israel.

"As a matter of fact, since Palestine recognized Israel, the number of settlers has tripled (from 190,000 to more than 600,000)." This is a deliberate attempt to confuse and conflate the numbers of West Bank settlers with those Israelis who live in the former Jordanian-occupied parts of Jerusalem.

Erekat's Point 4: *"For Israel, forcible displacement and colonization are an official policy, not the two-state solution."*

Selective and inaccurate quotes from Israeli election campaigns, and expressions of personal opinions by individual office holders, cannot supersede official Israeli policy as conveyed to key players in the international community. What counts are the Prime Minister's 2011 speeches at Bar-Ilan University and in the U.S. Congress, his formal remarks at his first meeting with EU foreign affairs commissioner Mogherini after the 2015 elections, and his speeches to the U.N. General Assembly – all of which commit Israel to the two-state solution.

Thus, to write that "Israel today continues to reject the two-state solution while their settlement-expansion and forcible displacement policies continue to plague Palestinian aspirations of peace and security" – is to pile lie and insult upon injury. It was Abbas who effectively rejected the Kerry framework; and nothing has developed in terms of Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria that actually precludes a practical compromise in the future.

As to Palestinian notions of "peace and security" – well, the absurdity of Erekat's position is clear, given that Israelis are targeted for murder by Palestinians on a daily basis.

Erekat's Point 5: *"East Jerusalem is an integral part of the Occupied State of Palestine."*

Since the "State of Palestine" is still more fiction than fact, the entire statement is nonsensical. No-one can gainsay the reality of today's united and flourishing city of Jerusalem. Israel's act of unification in 1967 followed liberation of the city after a war foisted upon Israel by Jordan. Since then, Jerusalem has indeed drawn to it many Palestinian residents precisely because of Israel's successful custodianship. For the world to now advocate the carving-up of a living city would be a legalistic folly endangering the future of all who have their home there.

"Despite Israeli claims and efforts to change the historical narrative of the occupied city, 360,000 Palestinians live in East Jerusalem" – and are thus a minority in the city as a whole, as they have been for more than 150 years, well before the beginning of the Zionist endeavor.

The Palestinian "narrative" – a blatant attempt to falsify basic aspects of Jerusalem's identity and history, known to all who ever read the Bible – has not only ignored this, but tried hard to obliterate the unbreakable bond that made Jews yearn for two millennia for a return to Jerusalem.

Erekat's Point 6: *"Israeli settlements in Occupied East Jerusalem are as illegal as settlements in the rest of the Occupied State of Palestine."*

There is no need to reiterate all that is false in the previous points, and hence in this statement too. It should be noted, however, that in 1993 the Palestinians clearly recognized the unique nature of Jerusalem insofar as it was to be negotiated as a separate issue.

Erekat's lists a series of post-67 Jewish Jerusalem neighborhoods that he calls settlements; which includes places like Ramot and French Hill, which are part and parcel of Israel in any conceivable configuration. It is quite striking and telling that one neighborhood is missing from his list of "illegal settlements": the Jewish Quarter in the Old City. Somehow, even Erekat may understand that is absurd to speak in this manner of the Jewish Quarter in the Old City, which was depopulated and razed by Jordan after it fell in battle in 1948, and its synagogues were demolished or desecrated.

Erekat's Point 7: *"The Al-Aqsa Mosque Compound is under Israeli Occupation just as the rest of East Jerusalem."*

"While some media outlets have preferred to focus their discussion on whether Al-Aqsa is holy for Muslims or for Jews, they tend to omit the fact that this Muslim holy site is under Israeli Occupation," complains Erekat. Well, how dare these journalists dispute the exclusivist and intolerant Palestinian rants demanding that Jews not defile the place!

To specifically pile this upon previous fallacies is Erekat's sly way of ignoring not only Israel's careful respect for the status quo on the Temple Mount, painstakingly reasserted in the face of murderous provocation. It is also meant to denigrate and ignore the relatively constructive role of the Kingdom of Jordan in the efforts to maintain law and order at the holy site.

"Interference with the institutions of the occupied by the occupying power is strictly prohibited by international law," Erekat opines. This is another elegant invention by Erekat's propaganda workshop. Of course Israeli authorities are within their rights as they act, with great caution, to prevent the use of such institutions for terror and violence! When a PA-sponsored preacher in the mosque on the Temple Mount spews Nazi-style incitement against all Jews, it is very much the duty of government to put an end to this.

Here is another blatant lie: "Israel has effectively interfered with and changed the status quo of Christian and Muslim prayer sites and institutions in Occupied East Jerusalem." Exactly the opposite is true, given Israel's scrupulous respect for the existing religious practices in Jerusalem. Unless, of course, Erekat means PLO political institutions, which indeed were closed for obvious reasons after a murderous wave of violence instigated by Arafat and his minions swept the streets of Jerusalem in 2001-2002.

Erekat's Point 8: *"Israel has effectively changed Al-Aqsa Status Quo."*

Here Erekat's shameless campaign of lies, apparently aimed at journalists who will not bother to check the verbiage they are fed, reaches new heights. No respect is paid in this document to the Jewish heritage and patrimony on the Temple Mount. Nor has such respect been evidenced on the Mount, where the Waqf has deliberately destroyed archeological evidence of the ancient Jewish temples.

The lies, moreover, pertain to recent events which can be easily researched. The "terror attack by Israel in 1969" referenced by Erekat was in fact the arson act of a demented Australian Christian, and the rescue was carried out by Israeli teams. In 2000, Sharon did not "storm" the compound but paid a visit. "Illegal excavations" on the Mount have been the sole domain of the Waqf, as mentioned, and very destructively so.

The graves mentioned in Erekat's screed as "destroyed" were moved out of a park compound in which they had illegally been dug as a provocation; and have nothing to do with the Temple Mount.

As to occasional limitations on the visitation to the site imposed by Israel, these are strictly temporary and designed to prevent violence, based on well-established information on the intentions of young provocateurs. Unless, of course, Erekat and his team consider attacks on tourists and hurling rocks on Jewish worshippers at the Western Wall from atop the Temple Mount to be legitimate aspects of Islamic practice...

The sting of this outrageous paragraph is in its tail: "Placing (monitoring) cameras (on the Mount) that will broadcast to Israeli occupying forces is a further violation of the Status Quo." This is a flimsy attempt to delegitimize and disrupt the joint efforts of Israel, Jordan and the United States to establish transparency (for the entire world) regarding activities on the Temple Mount. Clearly the PA feels that there is something to hide in their activities: or else why resist the cameras? What do the Palestinians have to fear if their intentions are honest?

Erekat's Point 9: *"International protection is a right for the Palestinian people."*

Here, false language is employed ("belligerent occupation" – a technical, not a moral term), as are false accusations ("forced displacement... collective punishment... large-scale attacks in Gaza," etc.) in order to establish a fantastic claim that the world owes the Palestinians "international protection."

In his plaint for protection, Erekat neatly skips over the origins of the last three rounds of major violence, spawned by the Palestinian Hamas in Gaza. And I wonder what the truly beleaguered peoples of Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen, not to mention the Congo, might say about their relative need for international protection, as opposed to Erekat's.

The problem here is not that some poorly informed Western reporter might be tricked into advancing such a claim on behalf of the hapless, innocent Palestinian people; people who supposedly never have harmed a fly. The problem is that some people in high places in Ramallah really believe that the world owes them an imposed intervention! And as long as such delusions persist, the hopes for a practical compromise leading to peace with Israel are slim.

Erekat's Point 10: *"International law, UN resolutions and agreements were made to be implemented, not to be 'negotiated upon'."*

Here, the Palestinian misunderstanding of basic texts, compounded with distaste for negotiated compromises – and an assumption about the world's short memory – reaches new heights of chutzpah. This statement is an open challenge to the entire international community, from UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon on down, who have called on Abbas to come back to the negotiating table.

For negotiations to be meaningful, it is the Palestinian side which needs to face reality – namely, the necessity of reasonable compromise, of robust security arrangements, and of mutual recognition by the two national

movements. None of this is demanded by Israel as a precondition for negotiations; they are subjects for negotiation.

Instead, from Erekat we get a tired list of Palestinian preconditions, masquerading as a demand for fulfillment of Israeli "obligations" – such as "full cessation of settlement activities." Since when did this become an "obligation"? Remember, that when Israel implemented a 10-month settlement freeze, it led to nothing. Abbas refused to come to the table.

The next Palestinian precondition for negotiations – the release of prisoners (read: convicted Palestinian murderers) from Israeli jails – was part of a bargain the Palestinians broke by taking unilateral actions. Similarly, the Palestinian demand for reopening of political institutions in eastern Jerusalem was part of a "Road Map" bargain that the Palestinians broke in practice.

As to "clear terms of reference based on international law, including a clear timeframe and an end to the occupation that began in 1967" – Erekat's language here reflects a deliberate distortion of the foundational UN Security Council resolution 242 of 1967. The famous 242 wording – "territories", not "the territories"; as well as "secure and recognized borders" (the 1949 armistice lines were neither) – clearly suggests the need to negotiate new borders.

So did the language of the 1993 Declaration of Principles signed by the PLO. "Any political process" should lead, therefore, not to an imposed solution answering every Palestinian demand, but to a reasonable compromise between Israel and the Palestinians.

Erekat concludes with another riff on "Israel's occupation, colonization, Apartheid and culture of impunity." He really does love these pejorative terms. Of the four calumnies, the last one is the most offensive: Israel's supposed "culture of impunity." Talk about calling the kettle black!

As US Senator Charles Schumer recently noted, it would have been a different world had the people (the Palestinians) who gave us the airline hijacking culture of the '60s and '70s, and who desecrated the Munich Olympics of 1972 by an act of massacre, did not end up being forgiven and their crimes forgotten.

It would behoove Palestinian propagandists like Erekat not to belabor too much the false claim of Israeli "impunity."

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