

The Day After Abbas

The BESA Center held a June conference which examined scenarios for the Palestinian Authority after the retirement or departure of Mahmoud Abbas. Lectures related to the expected battles for succession among Palestinian leadership, Israel's diplomatic dilemmas, and likely international scenarios. Might this transition be a watershed moment, forcing a reassessment of the feasible contours of accommodating Palestinian independence?



Minister Ze'ev Elkin

PA President Mahmoud Abbas is old, sick and tired. He has little to show for his incorrigible efforts at isolating Israel diplomatically or forcing Israel into hasty withdrawals.

His regime is viewed as utterly corrupt by 95.5 percent of Palestinians (according to a recent Palestinian poll). The tens of billions of dollars in international aid he has swallowed have failed to build any real institutional basis for good or democratic Palestinian government.

Abbas' underlings are jockeying aggressively around him for pole position in the battle to succeed him as West Bank despot. Hamas, too, smells blood.

Where does leave Israel? That was the focus of a June conference on "The Day After Abbas," which was addressed by **Ze'ev Elkin**, who was then the Minister

of Immigrant Absorption and Minister of Jerusalem Affairs (Likud), and **Amir Peretz** MK, former Defense Minister (Zionist Union), as well as experts.

Elkin said that Israel must prepare itself for a long period of instability and even chaos in the West Bank, in the era after Abbas. "I don't see any mechanism for an orderly transition of power, or new elections," he said. "There are many competing centers of power in the PA, ranging from the party (Fatah), the movement (PLO), the bureaucracy (PA), multiple formal security organs, and many militias, gangs and clans. We could see open warfare among these elements."

"Meanwhile, Israel must maintain border security, ensure the safety of Jewish residents in Judea and Samaria, handle water and other infrastructure matters, and deal with Palestinian diplomatic initiatives that attack Israel."

His conclusion: Israel may need to consider a "paradigm change" with regard to administration of the territories; meaning greater Israeli intervention.

Elkin added that Israel continues to make a major mistake by ignoring the education towards hate of Israel that is prevalent in the PA. "This is the source of evil that eventually leads to terrorism, and which of course dims the likelihood of any practical compromises for peace in future."

Peretz attacked Elkin and the Israeli right wing for ignoring and isolating Abbas over the years. "We will all yet miss Abu Mazen," he said. "Israel does not have the power or the right to organize Palestinian leadership at will, but it should act to strengthen the PA."



Former Defense Minister Amir Peretz

In fact, we should be focusing on the day before Abbas goes to improve the situation and build a better basis for peace; not on the day after Abbas," he said.

"Time is not on our side. Every day that we fail to reinforce PA institutions and leadership increases the chances that we'll get ISIS and Al Qaeda and Hamas in the West Bank after Abbas." Peretz called on the Israeli government to freeze all settlement construction; to permit much greater numbers of Palestinian workers into Israel; and to remove roadblocks in the West Bank."



Maj. Gen. (res.) Gershon Hacohen.

Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies associates agreed with Minister Elkin about the need for a new Israeli paradigm regarding the Palestinians, but disagreed which way to go. Lt. Col. (res.) **Dr. Mordechai Kedar** argued for the recognition of a series of mini-states in the West Bank, what he calls "Palestinian emirates." **Maj. Gen. (res.) Gershon Hacohen** called for repudiation of the two state construct and instead for long-term struggle for complete Israeli sovereignty in the territories. **Prof. Efraim Inbar** argued for maintaining the status quo.



Prof. Efraim Inbar, Minister Ze'ev Elkin, Ehud Yaari and Maj. Gen. (res.) Eitan Dangot (l. to r.)

In a fascinating presentation, the former Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, **Maj. Gen. (res.) Eitan Dangot**, explained how Israel does and probably can maintain the status quo.

Also addressing the conference were **Ehud Yaari**, Arab affairs commentator for Israel TV2 News, **Prof. As'ad Ghanem** of Haifa U., and **Prof. Hillel Frisch** and **Prof. Jonathan Rynhold** of the BESA Center.