



PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

The Palestinian Authority Joins the Chemical Weapons Convention

by Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Raphael Ofek

BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 863, June 12, 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The recent admittance of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) borders on the absurd. The PA has no access to chemical weapons technology and is not threatened by chemical weapons. Nor did it ever condemn the Halabja chemical weapons massacre of Iraqi Kurds by Saddam Hussein's regime in 1988 or the multiple chemical weapons assaults on civilians by Bashar Assad's regime during the Syrian Civil War. If anything, the PA's admittance to the OPCW is another step in the Palestinian campaign to win recognition from international organizations that can then serve as additional fora through which to censure Israel. Next, the PA might attempt to be accepted as a member of international nuclear organizations and conventions.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) recently issued the surprising announcement that "the State of Palestine deposited on 17 May 2018 its instrument of accession to the Chemical Weapons Convention with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the depositary of the Convention."

The US is reportedly considering cutting funding to the OPCW as well as to several other UN agencies that the Palestinians have joined. An unnamed US official told the AFP, "It has been the consistent position of the United States that efforts by the Palestinians to join international organizations are premature and counterproductive."

The OPCW, which has its seat in The Hague, is the implementing body of the CWC, which entered into force in 1997. The organization is not an agency of the UN but cooperates with it in coordinating policy and activities.

The OPCW has 193 member states, including the PA. They include the great powers, the EU countries, the Arab states, and Iran, as well as Andorra, Chad, Eritrea, the Comoros, Samoa, Mauritius, Fiji, and East Timor. Israel has signed the CWC but not ratified it.

The current director-general of the OPCW, Ahmet Uzumcu, a Turkish career diplomat, served from 1999-2002 (the pre-Erdoğan era) as ambassador to Israel. Though the PA is joining the OPCW shortly before Uzumcu completes his post on July 25, there is no indication that he was personally engaged in its accession.

The OPCW's decision to accept the PA as a member state, while risible, is not really that surprising. It reminds one of the well-known quip of the late Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban in 2004 about the conduct of voting in the UN General Assembly: "If Algeria introduced a resolution declaring that the earth was flat and that Israel had flattened it, it would pass by a vote of 164 to 13 with 26 abstentions."

The Palestinians' joining of the OPCW borders on the absurd. The PA has no access to either offensive or defensive chemical weapons technology and is not itself threatened by chemical weapons. Furthermore, it is now thirty years since the Saddam Hussein regime murdered thousands of Iraqi Kurds in a chemical attack on the city of Halabja (on March 16, 1988) but the PA has never uttered a word of condemnation. Nor has the PA ever condemned the use of chemical weapons by Bashar Assad's army in the Syrian Civil War against either armed opposition forces or the civilian population. The last Syrian chemical attack was in the town of Douma, close to Damascus, on April 7, 2018.

The PA's accession to the OPCW can thus only be explained as one more step in its campaign to win recognition from international organizations so as to use them as springboards for denigrating Israel:

- The PA joined the UN's cultural agency, UNESCO, on November 23, 2011. Note UNESCO's subsequent one-sided approach against Israel. An example is the bizarre resolution of October 13, 2016 denying any Jewish connection to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall in Jerusalem and characterizing the area as an exclusively Muslim holy site.
- After being granted full membership in UNESCO, the PA sought to become a member of the World Health Organization as well as fifteen other smaller UN agencies.
- On November 29, 2012, the UN General Assembly granted the PA "non-member observer state" status at UN. The PA now seeks to become a full state member of the organization.

- On April 1, 2015, the PA became a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, which it seeks to exploit to sue Israel for alleged war crimes.

In the past, these activities were masterminded by the PLO's chief "peace negotiator" Saeb Erekat, but today, the main driving force behind them is Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Maliki. While part of the drive behind these moves is the desire of senior PA officials to come and go in the halls of international organizations, their central object is to advance the PA's agenda by using the various fora to denounce and delegitimize Israel.

The strange admittance of the PA to the OPCW raises the question of what the PA might choose to attempt next. Other organizations it might try to join could include those concerned with nuclear energy and technology.

Jibril Rajoub, a former terrorist turned "moderate" senior PLO/PA official, told Lebanese television on May 13, 2013 that if the Palestinians had a nuclear weapon they would have nuked Israel "this morning." While there is no Palestinian activity connected to nuclear technology as yet (other than possible medical applications of radioactive materials), the PA could be planning to make an effort to be accepted as a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), as well to join conventions such as the NPT (the Non-Proliferation Treaty of Nuclear Weapons). Apparently, many of these organizations' member states will not hesitate to support the "State of Palestine's" admittance.

Lt. Col. (res.) Dr. Raphael Ofek, a BESA Center Research Associate, is an expert in the field of nuclear physics and technology who served as a senior analyst in the Israeli intelligence community.

BESA Center Perspectives Papers are published through the generosity of the Greg Rosshandler Family