



PERSPECTIVES

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Israel and Abbas: Security Cooperation + Terrorism

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: At one and the same time, the PA indirectly encourages terrorism while pursuing extensive security cooperation with Israel to quell it. Israel accepts this contradictory framework and will probably continue to do so, even during the succession crisis that is likely to follow Abbas's demise.

Ostensibly, the message praising Majd Jammal Matir's "martyrdom" in a knifing attack that wounded two Israeli border policemen in Jerusalem's Old City on December 13 was little different from many Palestinian messages of condolence and praise for perpetrators of terrorism in the area.

But it contained two crucial details that highlight the tortuous relationship between Mahmoud Abbas, who rules over the Palestinian Authority with the help of over 170,000 employees and a budget of \$4.9 billion, and Israel.

The first is that it was the Fatah Movement, over which Abbas presides, that conveyed the message mourning Matir's "martyrdom." The second is that in the expression of condolence, Matir is linked to another "martyr" from the Qalandia refugee camp: General Bashir Nafi. Nafi was a former senior officer in Military Intelligence, one of the many security services that existed under Arafat at the time of his death.

Why make that particular link? After all, the Qalandia refugee camp – a no-man's land between Israeli Jerusalem and the PA – has been home to the highest number of terrorists since the end of Arafat's war of terror (euphemized as the "al-Aqsa intifada"). Why single out Nafi among the dozens of terrorists from the Qalandia camp who have been killed since then? It is a particularly curious choice given that Nafi was killed by chance in the Hyatt Hotel bombing

in Amman in 2005 – an attack committed by an Islamist group that had no bearing on the Palestinian conflict.

The answer is clear. Fatah, Abbas's political party, wanted to emphasize the link between the PA, Fatah and its president, and "martyrdom" for the Palestinian cause. That relationship will be cemented by the ample funds that will flow to the terrorist's family in the coming years. The PA expends \$300 million annually to terrorists imprisoned in Israel, their families, and the families of dead terrorists like Matir.

Simultaneously, the same PA that encourages "martyrdom" on behalf of the Palestinian cause maintains an almost unprecedented level of security cooperation with Israel to quell the very terrorism it is encouraging. The PA pursues Hamas and Islamic Jihad terrorists, common enemies to both Abbas and Israel, and disrupts and destroys their front organizations with the same seriousness of purpose as does Israel.

Its 6,000 officers make sure to remain in their barracks and at their stations when the IDF pursues terrorists on the run or makes preventive arrests against those planning terrorist acts. Intelligence flows freely in meetings between senior Israeli IDF officers and their Palestinian counterparts in Abbas's security services. Often, such meetings embarrassingly show up in photos in the Hamas media, prompting condemnation and derision.

Israelis who mistakenly find themselves in PA-controlled territory, or who intentionally defy the prohibition on doing business in those areas and then find themselves attacked, are often rescued by PA security – acts Hamas propagandists readily exploit to deride the "Dayton" forces, so named to emphasize that they were recreated and retrained by a US army general of that name after they were pummeled in the war the PA waged against Israel in 2000.

Yet the two sides, despite the painful contradictions entailed by the relationship – for Israel, the loss of innocent lives (the Israeli victims are usually civilians) and for the PA, the loss of legitimacy – continue to maintain their close security cooperation, as well as considerable political and functional cooperation.

For Israel, as painful as the ongoing terrorism may be, the situation in Jerusalem and the West Bank over the past decade has been and remains many times better than the standoff between Israel and Hamas-controlled Gaza.

In Gaza, Israel has been involved with Hamas not for security cooperation but to engage in bouts of war. In the West Bank, Israel is able to go after terrorists and either apprehend or kill them. In Gaza, most of those who launch missiles either run for cover in tunnels, take refuge in nearby apartment buildings, or launch the missiles from underground silos. In the West Bank, a company (100

men) is usually the highest number of soldiers required to chase terrorists or make preventive arrests. In the last bout in Gaza, Israel called up tens of thousands of reserves, and deployed hundreds of tanks and dozens of F-16s. That massed firepower inflicted some deterrent pain, but hardly made more than a dent in the Hamas infrastructure.

For the PA, the stakes of not playing ball with Israel are high. Israel carries by far the heavier burden in terms of draining the large Hamas swamp in PA territory. Without Israeli bayonets, the PA could face defeat, as it did in 2007 when it lost Gaza, or even a prolonged civil war. It needs Israel.

Only one event – an inevitable one – will change the status quo: the death of Abbas.

A minority of voices among Israel's decision-makers say Israel should not intervene in the succession crisis. They argue that the costs of possible chaos or disintegration into warlord areas will be offset by the benefits of such a major blow to the Palestinian political cause in achieving statehood, either alongside Israel or as its replacement.

The more bureaucratic-oriented majority favors intervening to help the PA continue to exist, despite the contradictions. Better the devil we know, they reason.

One thing is for sure: The campaign Israel's left wages "to separate from the Palestinians" is a pipe dream. A Labor-led government will face the same dilemmas and act scarcely any differently from the present government.

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