



## PERSPECTIVES

THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

### **Mahmoud Abbas's Demands: A Decree of Israel's Surrender**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The demands issued by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas show a clear intention to turn the clock back. Israel cannot accept these dictates, which would have been rejected out of hand by Yitzhak Rabin.

Reflecting a tactic of skilled negotiators, the list of demands made by Mahmoud Abbas as a precondition for renewing talks with Israel mixes sensible requests with unacceptable demands. His demand that Israel upgrade the Palestinian solar network, for example, appears fairly reasonable on the face of it but has security implications for the work of the Shin Bet.

Abbas's demands as a whole indicate a desire to restore the status quo that existed before the terror war begun by the Palestinians against Israel more than 20 years ago, in September 2000. His wish list also indicates that he believes it is possible to go back to the state of affairs that prevailed when he rejected PM Ehud Olmert's sweeping proposal, though more than a decade has passed since then.

During the intervening years, the Middle East has seen many sea changes. In the past decade, for example, as the Syrian civil war unfolded and Iranian involvement there increased, Qassem Soleimani's plan to surround Israel with a ring of fire deployed and supported by Iran steadily progressed. Under those circumstances, Israel's control of the Jordan Valley became far more vital than it was in the days of the July 2000 Camp David summit at which PM Ehud Barak was willing to cede the Valley and agree to the Clinton Parameters for a partition of Jerusalem.

In the business world, it is inconceivable that terms for a deal would not change with the passage of time. Abbas's list of demands implies that when negotiating with Israel, the years that have passed and the events that occurred during those years should be dismissed as irrelevant.

Amid all the developments in both the Middle East and Israel, it is more important than ever to adhere to the conditions set by PM Yitzhak Rabin in his last speech to the Knesset on October 5, 1995:

- Transfer of most of the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank to the rule of the Palestinian Authority (which was indeed carried out in Gaza in May-June 1994 and in the West Bank in January 1996).
- United Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, under Israeli sovereignty and including Maale Adumim and Givat Ze'ev.
- The Jordan Valley, in the broadest sense of the term, under Israeli control.
- The Palestinian Authority will be "an entity that is less than a state."

The developments in the quarter-century since Rabin's speech make clear why Israel insists that the lands of Area C, which Rabin himself regarded as critical assets, are essential to its national interests. All of Israel's West Bank communities are in Area C, and they facilitate the control of territories that are vital to Israel's security and Jewish identity. Abbas's demands directly contradict this reality.

Rabin would likely have rejected the demand to put a stop to construction in Jerusalem and the West Bank communities, and certainly would have refused to grant the PA control of the Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea. The same logic would have necessitated rejecting Abbas's demands for an official Palestinian presence in East Jerusalem, centered on Orient House, and for altering the framework of Israel's control of the Temple Mount.

The Israeli defense establishment can explain very well why it cannot forgo the ongoing counterterrorist activity in Palestinian cities, which is crucial to preventing terror and maintaining the stability of Abbas's rule vis-à-vis its Palestinian enemies, notably Hamas.

It is no less essential that the Israeli government turn down the request to transfer additional lands in Area C to the PA. That would entail negotiating over assets that Israel holds and needs to retain as bargaining chips when presenting its own demands for a trade-off. The crux of the dispute, not only between Israel and the PA but also between Israel and the US administration,

is this: Does Israel have a right to territorial claims in the West Bank and the Jordan Valley?

Israel, whose population density in the coastal plain is growing, very much needs the open expanses of the Jordan Valley. That, in turn, entails basic needs for infrastructure, housing, and transportation arteries. If Israel accepts a schematic partition of the land into two states based on the 1967 lines, it will be hard put to defend itself or, for that matter, to maintain itself. By 2050, more than 25 million Israelis and Palestinians are expected to live in the space between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, necessitating a common infrastructure network. Seen in that light, the two-state paradigm is an idea that cannot be implemented.

Abbas's demands are anchored in the reality of the previous century, as if time had stood still. Even if some of his demands could be fulfilled, anyone familiar with the emerging trends in Israel and the region knows how much this paradigm is divorced from the conditions actually prevailing.

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