

Abbas Cuts Off His Nose to Spite His Face

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Mahmoud Abbas has for years threatened repeatedly to cut off security coordination with Israel, and even to rip up entirely the Oslo Accords. He's huffed and puffed, but until now, he's never followed through. Now he has finally gone and done it. He's decided to punish Israel in advance for its plan to extend its sovereignty over both the Jordan Valley and Jewish settlements throughout the West Bank. In a speech in Ramallah on May 18, Abbas declared that "the Palestine Liberation Organization and the State of Palestine are absolved, as of today, of all agreements and understandings with the American and Israeli governments." Not just the Oslo Accords with Israel, but "all agreements" with the Jewish state. And not just with Israel, but also with the Americans.

This time, he is following through. He has already instructed the Palestinian forces to end all security coordination with the Israelis. P.A. police who had been stationed in the East Jerusalem satellite towns of Azzariyah, Abu Dis, Biddu and Beit Ichsa, after getting special permission from Israel to be there as part of the effort to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, have been removed. The Palestinian security forces have ceased to coordinate – even to talk – with the Israelis. Ending all such security coordination with Israel in the West Bank will only benefit Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and others determined not just to destroy Israel, but also the P.A. Abbas doesn't care. What's more, to show his fury with the Trump Administration, for that proposed Deal of the Century which would have given the Palestinians a state of their own and \$50 billion in aid, he's also ending "all ties" to the Americans, including the C.I.A.

What does this mean? The security cooperation with Israel has been vital for the survival in power of Abbas and his entourage, whose corruption has made them ever less popular in the West Bank. They well remember that Hamas came to power in Gaza through elections. In the West Bank, as Mahmoud Abbas himself admitted in a speech at the U.N. General Assembly in September 2019, Hamas would defeat Fatah were elections to be held. The Hamas threat in the West Bank has been held in check because Israel and the P.A. have so extensively cooperated on intelligence. If that now ends, Israel, the P.A., and even Jordan – which also fears a Hamas takeover in what are now the P.A.-run parts of the West Bank – will suffer.

The Israelis have had valuable information given to them about Hamas and other groups, such as Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The Shin Bet even cracked an Al Qaeda cell in Jerusalem with help from the Palestinians. The P.A. has also been helpful in helping the Israelis locate terrorists on the run in the West Bank. In return, Israeli intelligence has helped the P.A. to foil Hamas operations in the West Bank, including several

assassination plots against Abbas himself. Israel has shared information with the P.A. about Hamas operatives and activities outside the West Bank, in Gaza and even in Europe.

Now that Abbas has declared such security coordination at an end, the P.A. will no longer supply information to Israel about terrorists in the West Bank, both those who are planning attacks and those who, having committed their murders, have been hiding in the West Bank. No doubt Israel will suffer. But so will the P.A., which will have a much more difficult time keeping track of its enemies, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and even Al Qaeda operatives. The P.A. has in the past used such coordination with Israel to suppress not just terrorist groups, but also political dissent in the West Bank. Israel has helped in this effort, deeming the P.A. the least bad of possible alternatives. But with Abbas cutting off all ties, such continued coordination will be impossible.

By ending all agreements with Israel, Abbas has created other problems for the P.A. Right now more than half of the P.A.'s revenues, roughly \$50 million a month, come from the taxes that Israel collects on Palestinian imports and then transfers to the P.A. If the Oslo Accords and all other agreements with Israel are "ripped up" by Abbas, Israel will certainly not be willing to transfer the taxes it collects on imports to the P.A. How will the P.A. survive if those payments – half of its revenues – come to an end? Or what if Israel, retaliating for Abbas throwing overboard all agreements with the Jewish state, simply halts all imports to, and exports from, the P.A. territories?

Another result of Abbas' declaring all agreements with Israel invalid will be a steep rise in unemployment for Palestinians in the West Bank. About 85,000 West Bank Palestinians now have work permits for Israel, while another 30,000 have permits allowing them to work in the settlements. These Palestinians are paid at least twice as much as they earn working in the P.A.-run territories. That money helps keep the P.A.'s economy

afloat. If Abbas insists on cutting all ties, Israel is unlikely to allow such an arrangement to continue; it's one more example – just like his recent refusal to accept humanitarian aid from the UAE because the Etihad plane carrying that aid landed in Israel – of Mahmoud Abbas cutting off his nose to spite his face.

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