

Mahmoud Abbas Angrily Rejects \$50 Billion Dollar Aid Package

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The economic plan to help the “Palestinians” that was unveiled in Bahrain was staggering in its size. More than \$50 billion dollars was to be given as aid to the “Palestinians” in the West Bank, Gaza, and in Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt. If this plan were adopted, it would be the largest aid package for a single recipient – the soi-disant “Palestinian people” – in history. By contrast, under the Marshall Plan, \$120 billion was divided among 16 recipient nations.

What’s more, to receive this gigantic sum, the “Palestinians” were not required to make any political concessions, but of course the hope was that prosperity would be followed by a readiness to drop maximalist territorial demands. Receipt of the money was not dependent on specific undertakings by the

“Palestinians”: they could continue to demand Jerusalem as their “eternal capital,” continue to insist that all Israelis leave the West Bank, continue to maintain that all those people whom the PA considers to be “Palestinians” abroad – five million of them – could return to live in Palestine, and so on.

But that was not enough for Mahmoud Abbas, sulking in his tent, outraged – along with his courtiers in the Palestinian Authority – that anyone would think he would gratefully receive \$50 billion for his people without insisting that first there had to be political concessions by Israel. In other words, the “Palestinians” needed to be bribed to take the \$50 billion. Not all “Palestinians” were quite so ready to write off the possible largesse. At first, some Palestinian businessmen were ready to attend the conference, but were scared off by threats from the Palestinian Authority. And while Israeli businessmen were eager to attend, once the “Palestinians” had pulled out, the Americans rescinded the invitations to the Israelis. So the conference in Bahrain on economic development for the “Palestinians” went on, with neither any “Palestinians” or any “Israelis” present, but with representatives of seven Arab states. Three of these were countries that stand to gain financially from the sums earmarked in this plan for their own resident “Palestinians” – Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon. Three others – Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar – were expected to be among the donor nations. One other – Bahrain – was the host. The “Palestinians” tried and failed to get all the Arabs to boycott the Bahrain event.

Now that the “Palestinians” have looked a giant gift horse in the mouth, how should the rest of the world regard them? The men in Ramallah no doubt think of themselves as demonstrating a fierce and noble pride – “we are people who can’t be bought” – but this is preposterous posturing, because much of the world knows that Mahmoud Abbas, with his \$400 million dollar

fortune, and with dozens of his West Bank henchman also having enriched themselves, through corruption and theft of aid money, and the world knows, too, that such Hamas leaders as Moussa Abu Marzouki and Khaled Meshal have each squirreled away \$2.5 billion, again stolen from the aid money that was meant to support the "Palestinians.'" The "Palestinians," whether in Gaza or the West Bank, have been led by some of the most corrupt people on earth. Abbas' "principled stand" amounts to this: he first wants the Palestinians' political demands to be met, and then they will deign to accept the aid package that the Americans and Arab donors have on offer. Abbas seems to think he will manage to get his way. I think he is wrong.

The "Palestinians'" expect the other Arabs to stand with them. They are overestimating their importance. They still think it is 1990, or 1970, when the "Palestinian" cause was the center of Arab politics. Many Arabs no longer see the "Palestinians" as central. Some Arab states – Saudi Arabia, the U.A.E. Egypt – have been talking with the Israelis, sharing intelligence on Iran, attempting jointly to counter Iranian aggression. 33% of Saudis now say they want to establish relations with Israel; five years ago, only 1% of Saudis did. The Arab states, having endured all kinds of domestic threats, including armed conflict, naturally want to focus their attention on their national interests. The "Palestinians" are not part of that calculation. Egypt is trying to suppress the Muslim Brotherhood threat; Libya is still plagued with warring militias; Syria remains in a state of civil war; Saudi Arabia and the Emirates are both consumed with their war against Iran's proxy, the Shi'a Houthis, in Yemen; Qatar suffers from an air, sea, and land boycott by its Gulf neighbors; Iraq has Sunnis and Shi'a vying for power, and the Kurds are seen as a threat by both in their quest for greater autonomy; Jordan has a large and restive "Palestinian" population that the government has viewed with suspicion ever since the "Palestinians" of Black September rose up against the

Jordanian government. All these conflicts, in a region convulsed in violence ever since the "Arab Spring."

The constant demands and whining from the "Palestinians" have caused quite a few Arab states to lose interest in the "Palestinian" problem; that palpable want of sympathy is likely to increase if the "Palestinians" turn down a hugely generous offer from the rich Arabs and even the West. If they were so dismissive as not even to show up in Manama – well, in Riyadh and Cairo and Dubai they may now be thinking, the hell with you.

The most important Arab states – Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt – are likely to decide that this is it, that Bahrain was the last chance for the "Palestinians," and if they didn't even bother to come and discuss this unprecedented aid offer, then there will be no further offers to this spoiled child of the international community. They'll be on their own, just like dozens of other peoples. No one offers the Bolivians, or the Nepalese, or the Kurds, 50 billion dollars. Why should the "Palestinians" receive such an offer? The diplomatic power of the Arabs and Muslims has long helped the "'Palestinian' cause" at the U.N. and other international forums. But now that support is sinking, as Arab nations are beset by their own problems. And the "Palestinians," with their endless refusals to negotiate, or even to hear out those who want to give them 50 billion dollars in aid, have severely damaged themselves.

There will be no diplomatic push against Israel on their behalf against Israel by the Saudis, the Emiratis, the Egyptians. Israel already collaborates with Egypt against both the Muslim Brotherhood and remnants of the Islamic State in the Sinai. Israel shares intelligence on Iran with Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. For Israel to be of greatest military value in any future confrontation with Iran, it needs to retain control of the invasion route from the east, that is, the West Bank. Saudi Arabia and the Emirates do not want

Israel to be fatally weakened by losing military control of the territories. They cannot say this aloud, but their future indifference about the West Bank will be telling. And they can take this occasion of the Bahrain fiasco to simply turn their backs on Mahmoud Abbas, and on the terrorist groups Hamas (which is rightly seen in Egypt and Saudi Arabia as a branch of the hated Muslim Brotherhood of which Hamas is a part), and Hezbollah (which is hated by the Arabs for being a loyal ally and puppet of the Islamic Republic of Iran). After Bahrain, most of the Arabs will have had quite enough of those trouble-making, tiresome, ungrateful "Palestinians."

In the rest of the world, too, there will be many states, and many peoples, who will be disgusted by the "Palestinian" refusal of such aid. Imagine you are one of the billions of poor people living in sub-Saharan Africa, in South America, in South Asia, or even in the richer countries of the West. What would be your natural reaction to hearing that the "Palestinians" had just turned down \$50 billion, unless and until they get all their political demands met? Certainly you would not feel solidarity with these "Palestinians." You would wonder why the "Palestinians" receive such special treatment, are thought deserving of such gigantic sums, while your own people, in Brazil or Bolivia, India or the Philippines, have nothing like such amounts being offered. The "Palestinians" will no longer be seen by many as people who are "oppressed"; rather, they will be seen as people who are now demanding far too much, have always been demanding too much. And if their fellow Arabs are no longer their enthusiastic supporters, why should we, in the impoverished Third World, continue to carry water at the U.N. for the likes of Mahmoud Abbas?

The day before the Bahrain Conference was to open, which the "Palestinians" both boycotted and denounced, **Mahmoud Abbas told journalists that "We will not be slaves or servants for Greenbelt, Kushner and Friedman."** Has he lost his mind? Since when does the receipt of 50 billion dollars turn one into

either a "slave or servant" of anyone? There were no political strings attached to this money; the hope was merely that with an increase in "Palestinian" prosperity, there would be a greater willingness to make political compromises. Abbas knows this, but pretends not to. As for the Arab donors, and other Arabs, too, the "Palestinians" have become the spoiled children of the Arab tribe, increasingly intolerable in their demands and behavior. And in what used to be called the Third World, those who loyally supported the "Palestinian" cause may now be ready to rethink that former loyalty, and wash their hands of the people who believe, and have led others to believe, that the world owes them a living, and a good deal more.

if that happens, the meeting in Bahrain, because of who came and even more, because of who didn't, will have been well worth it.

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