

Mahmoud Abbas Changes His Mind

by Hugh Fitzgerald



That distinguished statesman Mahmoud Abbas, enraged at the Trump peace initiative, announced at an emergency meeting of the Arab League in Cairo on February 1 – a meeting that he had requested – that he was cutting off all ties with Israel and the U.S. The assembled Arab foreign ministers heard him loud and clear. So did the rest of the world. There seemed to be no ambiguity. And on February 4, Abbas reiterated, again in no uncertain terms, that he was cutting all ties with Israel and the U.S. But with Mahmoud Abbas, one never knows.

While he huffed and puffed in public, behind the scenes – so Western diplomats in Ramallah reported – he either had reconsidered, or had never been serious in the first place about cutting ties, but thought such a show would go down well

with the Palestinians and the wider Arab street. Word was passed, according to [a report](#) in the *Jerusalem Post*, that “the Palestinian Authority has no intention of halting security coordination with Israel and the US, or moving closer to Hamas in protest against US President Donald Trump’s recently unveiled plan for Mideast peace, according to European Union officials and Western diplomats who talked to senior Palestinian officials in Ramallah in the past few days.”

Abbas had realized that if he ended security coordination with Israel, the only beneficiary of such a policy would be Hamas, Abbas’ rival and mortal enemy, whose operatives and sympathizers in the West Bank would be harder for the security services of the P.A., without help from Israel, to monitor at the whereabouts and movements of Hamas members, and to foil their attacks.

“We’ve been told not to take seriously the talk about a possible reconciliation between the PA and Hamas,” one EU official told the Post. “Palestinian officials told us that it’s important for Abbas to always talk about national unity because that’s what the Palestinian street likes to hear. But they assured us that this talk does not mean we will see an end to the dispute between Abbas and Hamas anytime in the near future.”

Another EU official quoted a senior Abbas adviser as saying during a private meeting earlier this week: “We don’t trust Hamas. They want to undermine the PA and not work with it. The only way for real unity is for Hamas to disarm and relinquish control of the Strip. I don’t see that happening in the coming days or weeks.”

The Western diplomats and EU officials, who spoke separately to the Post, agreed there was a “big gap” between the PA leadership’s public positions and what its representatives are saying in private encounters. They said they made it clear to their Palestinian interlocutors that the

Palestinians should make every possible effort to maintain calm and security in the West Bank.

Neither Abbas, nor any successor who will follow him as President of the Palestinian Authority, will ever trust Hamas. They remember the bloodbath when Hamas took control of Gaza in June 2007:

Hamas militants seized several Fatah members and threw one of them, Mohammed Sweirki, an officer in the elite Palestinian Presidential Guard, off the top of the tallest building in Gaza, a 15-story apartment building. In retaliation, Fatah militants attacked and killed the imam of the city's Great Mosque, Mohammed al-Rifati. They also opened fire on the home of Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh Just before midnight, a Hamas militant was thrown off a 12-story building.

On June 11, the residences of both Mahmoud Abbas, Fatah's leader and the Palestinian Authority president, and of then-Prime Minister Ismail Haniya, of Hamas, were targeted with gun and shell fire.

On June 12, Hamas began attacking posts held by their Fatah faction rivals. Hundreds of Hamas fighters had moved on the positions after giving their occupants two hours to leave. A major Fatah base in the northern town of Jabaliya fell to Hamas fighters, witnesses told AFP news agency. Heavy fighting also raged around the main Fatah headquarters in Gaza City, with Hamas militants attacking with rocket-propelled grenades and automatic weapons...

Hamas members held a prayer in the compound, which they referred to as the "heresy compound." Hamas also changed the name of the neighborhood where the building is located from "Tel al-Hawa" to "Tel al-Islam."...

For the Palestinian Authority, memory of Hamas' murderous

takeover of Gaza still burns bright, and feeds a constant worry that the same thing might happen in the PA-controlled parts of the West Bank. That is why Mahmoud Abbas, having made his public declaration about cutting the PA's last ties with Israel – a show of defiance aimed at the Palestinian street – did not, in fact, end that security coordination with Israel. Determined to remain in power and enjoy his family's ill-gotten \$400 million fortune, Mahmoud Abbas never will.

First published in