

Palestinians End Temper Tantrum, Resume Ties with Israel

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The Palestinians have decided to renew the ties they broke with Israel last May, when Jerusalem announced its plans to extend its sovereignty to parts of the West Bank. Since that plan was not executed, and apparently will not be, the Palestinians – that is, the PA, not Hamas – are finally ready to resume cooperation with Israel. The story is here: “Palestinian Authority Resuming Cooperation With Israel, Official Says,” [Algemeiner](#), November 17, 2020:

The Palestinian Authority (PA) will resume civil and security cooperation with Israel suspended in May over a now-frozen Israeli plan to annex parts of the West Bank, a Palestinian

minister said on Tuesday.

Right now the PA apparently figures they have more to gain by reestablishing civil and security ties with Israel than to continue their cutoff of ties even after Israel's annexation plan has been shelved. They benefit mightily from their cooperation with Israel on security. Their long drawn-out attempt to make peace with Hamas hasn't worked out as the PA had hoped, and it again sees Hamas, as well as the PIJ (Palestinian Islamic Jihad), as threats to the PA itself. They need Israel's help in keeping Hamas and PIJ operatives in check in the West Bank, and Israel will again profit from intelligence supplied by the PA on terrorist activity originating in the West Bank.

Civil Affairs Minister Hussein al-Sheikh wrote on Twitter that "the relationship with Israel will return to how it was" after PA President Mahmoud Abbas received confirmation that Israel remained committed to past agreements with the Palestinians.

Suspending cooperation with Israel six months ago, the Palestinians said its annexation plans in the West Bank, territory it captured from Jordan in the 1967 Six-Day War, would make a two-state solution impossible.

Renewed Israeli-Palestinian ties could open the way for the payment of some 3 billion shekels (\$890 million) in tax transfers that Israel has been withholding from the PA, whose economy has been hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic.

This is the heart of the matter. Mahmoud Abbas has since May cut all ties to Israel, civil and security. This includes his refusal to accept any of the tax money that Israel collects on imports for it, as long as Israel insisted on deducting from the transferred amount the precise sum that the PA was providing to terrorists and their families in the "Pay-For-

Slay” program that incentivizes terrorism. Now he has quietly given in. Israel will give him the \$890 million in tax transfers it has so far accumulated and has been patiently waiting to transfer to the PA, while it continues to withhold the amount the PA provides each month both to imprisoned terrorists and to the families of dead terrorists. Abbas can no longer stand on “principle” – and what a nauseating “principle” it was, his insistence that the “Pay for Slay” subsidies to terrorists and families will continue, no matter what harm is thereby inflicted on the rest of the Palestinians by Abbas’ refusing to accept the transfer of money held for it by Israel if the Jewish state deducts the “Pay-For-Slay” amounts. Now Abbas has changed his mind. He’s given in, so he can get his hands on the \$890 million Israel stands ready to transfer. He’s decided not to commit economic suicide after all. And of course, when the \$890 million arrives in his office, he will no doubt make sure he gets his cut; he’s never been a slouch about that. Abbas’ behavior calls to mind the 19th century humorist who said that “when a man says it isn’t the money, it’s the principle – it’s the money.”

Abbas desperately needs that \$890 million Israel has been holding for the PA.. The Americans have cut off all aid to the PA. Aid to the Palestinians from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states have in the first 10 months of this year dropped by 81% from the amount given during the same period last year. These are two gigantic body blows to the Palestinian economy. And the coronavirus has further contributed to the PA’s economic crisis, both in the huge added expense of treating patients – 70,000 so far, with each hospitalized patient costing an average of \$30,000; tens of millions of dollars are spent on patients, and many more millions are lost from job losses, illness-related absences from work, and lockdowns. Abbas no longer even pretends to stand on the untouchable “Pay-For-Slay” principle; in Ramallah, “it’s the money.” Meanwhile the Israelis will continue to deduct from the sums transferred to the PA the amounts being delivered to

terrorists and their families in the “Pay For Slay” program. The PA blinked; Israel did not.

Israel collects the levies on Palestinian imports that go through its ports.

In a Zoom video conference organized by the Council on Foreign Relations, PA Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh said the decision to resume contacts with Israel was based in part on confronting the health crisis.

Between the hundreds of thousands of Israeli settlers who live in the West Bank, and the tens of thousands of Palestinian workers who commute to Israel daily for work, coordination was needed to help prevent the virus’s spread, Shtayyeh said.

“Our life is so interconnected between us and the Israelis, and there is no way that we can fight viruses by ourselves only,” he said...

The coronavirus pandemic is another reason for the PA to agree to resume cooperation

Israel’s medical facilities are vastly superior to those of the Palestinians; Israel’s assistance will be indispensable for the Palestinians in all aspects of fighting the disease – in the provision of PPEs and ventilators, in testing and contact tracing, in ICU beds if the PA’s hospitals are filled, and now, it seems, not only the Palestinians but the whole world may possibly be saved by a vaccine from Moderna, whose chief medical officer, Tal Zaks, is an Israeli. The tens of thousands of Palestinians who commute from the West Bank to work in Israel may bring the virus from their homes to Israel, or may bring the virus from Israel back to their communities in the West Bank. Both scenarios are likely. The coronavirus spread in Israel and the PA’s territories now require intense cooperation between the Israeli and Palestinian medical

services. This is health emergency like no other. Now is not the time for Abbas to continue to “cut all ties” with the Israelis, and he knows it.

There was no immediate word on whether the Palestinians would resume contacts with the Trump administration that were severed in protest at what they viewed as a policy biased toward Israel...

Given the PA’s hatred of President Trump, why would they bother to resume contacts with his administration? They’ll just wait him out, until the baton passes to President Biden, who is certain to be far more solicitous of Palestinian desires and demands. They could even risk a return to negotiations with Israel, now that they know they have a friend in the White House.

In the Gaza Strip, however, the ruling Islamist group Hamas condemned its rival West Bank-based PA’s decision as a “stab against efforts to achieve a real national partnership.”

Hamas has discovered that the PA is willing to walk away from its “agreement” for a ceasefire between itself and Fatah (which can be thought of as the “military wing” of the PA). The two groups temporarily sought unity in the face of the threat of Israeli annexation of territory, and in order to offer a unified front against the Trump Administration, which has proven to be the most pro-Israel in history. But now the annexation threat is gone, and the Trump Administration will end on January 20. The PA will not be held back from restoring ties either with Israel or the Americans by the more militant Hamas. The attempt of Hamas and the PA earlier this year to create yet again a “unity government” – after the Hamas-PA “unity government” agreements of 2011 (the 2011 Cairo Agreement), 2012 (the Fatah-Hamas Doha Agreement), and 2014 (the Fatah-Hamas Gaza Agreement) – ended, like all the others, in failure.

The PA now understands how much benefit it derives from its cooperation with Israel. The security collaboration with the Jewish state has helped the PA's leaders to keep track of terrorist threats to their rule in the West Bank – operatives both of Hamas and the PIJ – and foil their attacks. And the PA also has intelligence gathered by its network of informers in the West Bank to share with Israel.

In dealing with the coronavirus, the movement of the tens of thousands of Palestinians who live in the PA-run parts of the West Bank but work in Israel need to be monitored – tested, and if necessary quarantined – by both Israel and the PA. The PA needs Israeli medical help, in rapid testing, access to an adequate supply of PPE and ventilators, and in treating Palestinians who – like the late Saeb Erekat – require a level of care available only in Israeli hospitals. The Israelis are also have a more efficient distribution system for vaccines, once they become available. Logistics are not the PA's strong suit. One of the two leading vaccines comes from Moderna where – it's worth noting – the chief medical officer, Tal Zaks, is an Israeli.

“It's the money.” Without any American, and with very little Gulf Arab aid, and having to deal with the enormous expense of treating coronavirus patients, and other effects of the pandemic, including job losses from illness and mandated lockdowns, Mahmoud Abbas has had to stop his tantrums, climb down from his tree, and reconcile himself to the fact that the Israelis will continue to scrupulously collect taxes for the PA and transfer them, but only after the “Pay-For-Slay” amounts the PA gives terrorists and their families are deducted. Israel has won that contest of wills; it's time for the PA to move on.

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