

Saeb Erekat Worries About Arab Support Melting Away

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The P.A. is naturally anxious about the waning support among fellow Arabs for the “cause of Palestine.” Mahmoud Abbas has sent Saeb Erekat out to gauge that support among Arab leaders.

The story from JNS is [here](#):

PLO Secretary-General Saeb Erekat said on Tuesday that Ramallah will “seek clarifications” regarding reports that many of the moderate Arab states will not challenge Israel’s plan to apply its sovereignty in the Jordan Valley and parts of Judea and Samaria.

“The former chief Palestinian negotiator added that he was confident that the Arab world would not allow Israel to move forward with its sovereignty plan.

If Erekat is so confident, why the sudden need to “take the temperature” among the Arab states? Why not instead issue a self-assured statement, something along the lines of “We know that our Arab brothers will never betray us, and will remain steadfast in support of the cause of Palestine”? It’s not true, of course, but by saying it, Erekat could make it harder for some of those Arabs to raise no objection to or, still worse, to appear to endorse, the Deal of the Century.

Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, said Erekat, has “spared no effort to salvage the [Israeli-Palestinian] peace process,” and “the next few weeks will determine whether the next decades will be ones of peace and coexistence or of violence and war.”

Nonsense and lies. It was Saeb Erekat himself who told the world that Ehud Olmert had offered Mahmoud Abbas not just the entire West Bank, but an additional 24 square kilometers of land, as well as permanent control of the Temple Mount, and that Abbas had rejected the offer. But now Erekat is claiming that Abbas “spared no effort to salvage the peace plan.” Since rejecting Olmert’s offer, Abbas has refused to negotiate with Israel without preconditions, again showing his lack of interest in that so-called “peace process.” Instead of seeking “peace” he has doubled down on the P.A.’s financial support for terrorists and their families.

Arab sources told Israel Hayom on Tuesday that while Arab leaders were concerned that the unilateral annexation of areas in the West Bank the Palestinians seek for a future state, would see the region plunged into a violent conflict, behind the scenes, moderate Arab leaders are in no rush to prevent Israel from pursuing the territorial bid.

The “moderate Arab leaders” apparently no longer see Israel as the enemy they once did, nor do they see the Palestinians as deserving of full-throated Arab support. Egypt, as General El-

Sisi unapologetically proclaimed on "60 Minutes," collaborates with Israel – by, for example, sharing intelligence – about both the Muslim Brotherhood and the remnants of the Islamic State in Sinai. Saudi Arabia and the UAE similarly collaborate with Israel on intelligence matters concerning their common enemy, Iran. This has caused a warming of relations between these countries and Israel, as illustrated by the broadcasting in Saudi Arabia of two television series, Umm Kanoun and Exit 7, both of which show sympathetic Jewish characters. The Saudi media has in recent months published many openly pro-Israel and anti-Palestinian articles. It is not just that Israel has risen in the estimation of Gulf Arab allies, but that the Palestinians are now seen by many Arabs as ungrateful, constantly needy, demanding the attention and the support, diplomatic, financial, and military, of the other Arabs. Egyptian commentators have noted the sacrifices of men and money, that Egypt made in the three wars it fought against Israel on behalf of the Palestinians, without receiving any gratitude in return, and have suggested that Egypt, faced with its own mounting problems, had done quite enough for the Palestinians and from now on should think only of its own national interests.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia and the UAE have decided that Israel is more useful to them, as a partner against Iran, than the Palestinians, who have only been a drain on Arab attention and resources and, what's worse, have accepted aid from Iran. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed is reported to have quarreled with Mahmoud Abbas, demanding that Abbas take "whatever deal" he can get, and reminding him that he has only himself to blame for having turned down much better deals in the past.

The rulers of Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states have all warned Israel that a unilateral sovereignty move would foster hostilities that could destabilize the region.

Jordan's King Abdullah even warned that the move would set

Amman and Jerusalem on a collision course that may even jeopardize the peace treaty the two signed in 1994. He further warned the move could hasten the collapse of the Palestinian Authority.

King Abdullah knows perfectly well that he would prefer Israeli sovereignty in the Jordan Valley to that of the Palestinians. For if the P.A. controlled that part of the West Bank, it could from such a base link up with the Palestinians who make up 70% of Jordan's population, to overthrow the Hashemite king and make Jordan into an enlarged "Palestine" on both sides of the Jordan River.

Ending the peace treaty with Israel would come with considerable costs for Jordan. The Jewish state would in turn halt its security cooperation with Jordan, which has its own problems with Islamist terrorists who oppose the regime. Furthermore, the deliveries of water, electricity, and natural gas by Israel, on which Jordan depends, would no longer be forthcoming. Abdullah can threaten to tear up the peace treaty, but he can't replace those necessities that Israel supplies.

Still, senior officials in the moderate Arab countries made it clear that, despite the pan-Arab stance against the annexation plan, behind the scenes the move is not being challenged as forcibly as the Palestinians might hope.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, whose want of sympathy for the Palestinians has been clear for several years, has accepted Trump's plan. The UAE, Bahrain, and Oman, all of whose diplomats attended the ceremony at the White House where the details of the Deal of the Century were revealed, have also endorsed, albeit in subdued fashion, Trump's plan. Egypt at first warned against Israel's "annexation" of territory in the West Bank, but it appears to have changed its mind. On April 27 Israel Hayom reported that at least three Arab states,

Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, have given the go-ahead for Israel to annex the Jordan Valley and the settlements in the West Bank.

Each has its own reasons for doing so. In the case of Saudi Arabia, it is a case of being fed up with the Palestinians and a desire to keep its growing friendship with Israel, which has been the Saudis' most useful ally against Iran.

In Egypt, there is the understanding of how valuable an ally Israel has been in the fight against both the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic State fighters in the Sinai. Egypt also appreciates Israel's campaign against Iran, whose aggressive behavior worried even during Mubarak's reign. Egypt is also seeking large loans from the IMF and other institutions; good relations with the Trump Administration would no doubt help Egypt receive favorable treatment.

Jordan's King Abdullah may publicly warn that Israel's "annexation" plans will cause his country to end its peace treaty with Israel, but he is more worried about Palestinian control of the West Bank leading to a possible attempt by Palestinians on both sides of the Jordan to unite against his regime.

Over the past few months several Arab leaders have met with senior White House adviser Jared Kushner and US Middle East envoy Avi Berkowitz, who are overseeing the implementation of the US Middle East peace plan.

Sources privy to these meetings said that the Arab leaders have, in essence, given the two American officials the go-ahead for the joint US-Israel committee tasked with mapping the areas included in the annexation plan to continue its work—despite publicly lambasting the US plan.

A senior Jordanian official told Israel Hayom that "if Jordan suspends or cancels the peace agreement [with Israel], it will undermine its position [as custodian of] the holy

Islamic sites in Jerusalem.”

Jordan would also rather have Israel securing the border than the Palestinians, said the official.

“The king also prefers to see Israeli troops near Jordan’s western border [the Jordan Valley] over Palestinian forces or a multinational peacekeeping mission. Jordan’s security forces have close ties with their Israeli counterparts and with all due respect to Palestinian interests, the king cares more about Jordanian interests. He wants to maintain the kingdom’s status in Jerusalem and his good relations with President Trump,” said the official.

The Jordanian official understandably did not mention King Abdullah’s fear that unless Israel continues to control the West Bank militarily, the Palestinians in the West Bank and in Jordan might join forces to depose the king. That is naturally even more important to Abdullah than any undermining of his role as custodian of the Islamic holy places in Jerusalem.

The Jordanian official’s position is shared by senior security officials in Cairo, Riyadh and Abu Dhabi.

A senior diplomat considered a confidant of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman told Israel Hayom that Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates are coordinated in their unofficial position on Israel’s annexation plan.

“The official pan-Arab position opposes any move that allegedly infringes on Palestinian interests and the Palestinians’ right to an independent state,” he stressed. “However, the Palestinians need to understand that the entire world, especially the Arab states, has undergone great changes since the Khartoum conference, and recognizing Israel’s existence is a matter of fact,” he added, referring to the 1967 Arab League meeting in Sudan, where the pan-Arab group rule for a continued state of belligerency with Israel.

“With all due respect to the tens of thousands of Palestinians living in the Jordan Valley, Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE and Jordan will not jeopardize their relationship with the Trump administration for them,” said the diplomat.

The Saudi official continued: “We believe that Trump will go on to serve a second term. The Palestinians failed to make the most of the Obama administration, which was sympathetic to their cause, and dug in their heels. It is time for Abu Mazen [Abbas] and his advisers to wake up and realize that global and regional interests have changed. If they again miss an opportunity to establish an independent and sovereign state alongside Israel because of the annexation of the [Jordan] Valley and some of the settlements, they will be left with nothing.”

A senior Egyptian security official told Israel Hayom that moderate Arab rulers, led by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi, the Saudi crown prince, Jordan’s King Abdullah and Persian Gulf rulers, “ see preventing Iran from achieving Shi’ite hegemony in the Middle East as more important than the Palestinian issue.

“The United States and Israel are very important [players] in the fight against Iran. No Arab leader will jeopardize his country’s own interest in curbing Iranian expansion for the Palestinians,” said the official.

Clearly, the worst fears of the Palestinians, of being abandoned by many of their “Arab brothers” who put their own national interests above that of the Palestinians, seem to be coming true. Saeb Erekat has his work cut out for him.

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