

The Tender Trap: Palestinians and the Truth

We have the truth on the highest authority. Fawzi Barhoum, spokesperson for Hamas, in denying in May 2015 that his organization was engaged in “secret talks” with Israel, called Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian Authority, a liar and a slanderer. One must admit that Barhoum is not always trustworthy with the truth since in August 2012 he proclaimed, “the Holocaust is a big lie.”

Evidently Hamas has got Abbas under its skin. Barhoum’s vitriolic remarks are relevant in view of two recent factors: the remarks in Abbas’s speech at the United Nations General Assembly on September 31, 2015, and the important Amnesty International report on the conduct of Hamas. The issue of the truth of Palestinian allegations as well as the legitimacy of the authority of Abbas, now in the eleventh year of his four-year term of office, should be given serious consideration.

In his UN speech President Abbas delivered his “bombshell” that Palestinians would stop abiding by the Oslo Accords. This came as a surprise because Palestinian leaders had stopped abiding by them virtually since they were agreed. It was not Israel that had destroyed the foundations on which political and security agreements are based. It was not helpful that Abbas, a person supposedly interested in peace, refers to what he calls “the state of Palestine with pre-1967 Borders with East Jerusalem as its capital” as a state under occupation.

There are legitimate differences of opinion about the building of Israeli settlements. Yet, whatever one’s views on them, they do not constitute what Abbas called colonial military occupation of the land of the Palestinian people, nor are they examples of Israeli brutality or aggression and racial

discrimination. Not surprisingly, Abbas using the historical fiction of the Palestinian Narrative of Victimhood, forgets the true nature of the events of May 1948 and the Arab states attacks on the new State of Israel.

Again, Palestinian refugees are inaccurately referred to as victims of the Al-Nakba (catastrophe) that occurred in 1948.

Abbas, surrounded by 193 countries in the UN most of which are guilty of serious violations of human rights, and at a moment of chaos in Syria and Iraq as well as among the Palestinian organizations themselves, asked an absurd question: "will the world allow Israel to continue its occupation, the only (sic) occupation in the world?"

The speech of Abbas may have been absurd and counterproductive for prospects for peace in the Middle East, but the real "bombshell" was dropped by Amnesty International (AI). In May 2015 AI, not considered an organization overly friendly towards Israel, issued a report "Strangling Necks: Abduction, Torture, and Summary Killings of Palestinians by Hamas forces during the 2014 Gaza/Israel Conflict."

The report is a scathing indictment of serious Palestinian crimes and violations of human rights by Hamas which has had nominal authority over the Gaza Strip for nearly fifteen years. All objective observers realized that Hamas and Palestinian armed groups had committed war crimes by firing indiscriminately thousands of rockets and other projectiles into southern Israel. Fewer were aware, or acknowledged, that Hamas forces has carried out a brutal campaign of abductions, torture, and unlawful killings against Palestinians accused of "collaborating" with Israel and others during Israel's 50-day military response, Operation Protective Edge, to the Hamas attacks on civilians in Israel.

The AI report details a series of abuses, including the extrajudicial execution of at least 23 Palestinians and the

torture of many others, including members and supporters of Fatah, the organization headed by Abbas. Hamas took the opportunity to settle scores with other Palestinians, in a ruthless series of unlawful killings and other grave abuses. Hamas committed horrific abuses against people in its custody. These actions, designed to exact revenge and spread fear across the Gaza Strip, were war crimes. Among them was the use of civilian places, such as hospitals, for military purposes and for detaining, interrogating, and torturing supposed "suspects."

From the start Hamas lied about its actions. At least 16 of those it executed for "collaboration" with Israel were in fact in the custody of Hamas before the 2014 fighting began. Many prisoners were summarily executed.

Hamas also abducted, tortured, and attacked members of Fatah. What is important, in the light of Palestinian allegations against Israel, is that no one, not a single person, has been held accountable for the crimes committed during the 2014 conflict. Indeed, the Hamas leaders have actually encouraged the crimes, the tortures and murders, against innocent and powerless individuals. The torture included beatings with truncheons, gun butts, hoses and wires. Some people were burnt to death with fire, hot metal, or acid.

A particularly shocking incident was the public execution of six men by Hamas forces outside al-Omari mosque on August 22, 2014 in the presence of hundreds of spectators including children. The men were hooded, dragged along the floor, and then individually shot in the head with an AK-47.

It is revealing that an organization claiming to call for the rights of Palestinians should have acted so callously towards them. President Abbas and his followers have falsely claimed that Palestinians are trapped in a racist and apartheid Israel which uses "brutal force," in general and particularly against

the Al-Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount where Jews are not allowed to pray and where Israel is keeping order to prevent riots.

It is unfortunate that Abbas in his speech at the UN did not mention that it is his fellow Palestinians who are preventing what he calls the inalienable, legitimate rights of Palestinians from being implemented.

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