

Update

Fatah as “Moderate” A Hard Look Post-Annapolis

Can Mahmoud Abbas and his party
serve as legitimate peace negotiation partners?

Arlene Kushner



(Recently released Fatah poster: see inside for explanation.)

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On the cover:

Fatah poster recently commissioned for celebration of Fatah's 43rd anniversary.

The Arab kafiye scarf over the entire map of Israel counters support for a two-state solution. The rifle stands for "armed struggle" and not peace negotiations.

Executive Summary

This comes four months after the release of the primary report: “Fatah as ‘Moderate’” – seen at <http://israelbehindthenews.com/pdf/ModerateFatah.pdf>.

The fully documented update that follows this summary examines a marked pattern of incidents – statements and actions by key members of Fatah or by the organs of Fatah – that work against genuine moderation. This situation has enormous import in light of the peace negotiations between Israel and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority that are based on the premise of Fatah moderation.

OVERVIEW: Increased Radicalism & Deterioration

Political discourse within Fatah (which controls the Palestinian Authority) has been radicalized: more openly embracing terrorism and rejecting negotiation, and moving towards an Islamic stance.

Fatah is now much closer to Hamas than was the case previously, as nationalism is now entwined with Islam: nationalist rhetoric is succumbing to the notion of a religious war with a “Zionist-Crusader West.”

Internal Fatah politics are also increasingly unstable: Obstructionist elements are in ascendancy.

Influential members of the Fatah Central Committee who are hard line make it impossible for Abbas to advance a reasonable proposal for peace.

THE EVIDENCE

Praise of and Support for Terrorism

Considerable evidence exists for PA glorification of terrorism – often couched as “armed struggle.”

Abbas Interview

Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, has given an interview that connects him directly with terrorism.

Praise of Terrorists and Their Actions

The PA officially praises terrorists who are responsible for horrendous terrorist acts:

We see this with the infamous terrorist Imad Mughniyeh, referred to as “extraordinary hero... a beacon of light.” With the terrorist who massacred eight students at the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva in Jerusalem, referred to as a *Shahid* - holy Islamic martyr, and approved by a Fatah leader who says Fatah conducts itself similarly. And others.

Incitement

Evidence of incitement exists at the highest levels of the PA.

Multiple charges by Abbas

On at least three occasions during March 2008, Mahmoud Abbas, PA president, made inciteful statements, either to the press or in talks within Arabic conferences. He spoke of “an ethnic cleansing” in Jerusalem, and of a ‘barbaric holocaust’ in Gaza.

“Right of Return” Plan

Also in March 2008, a PA Deputy Minister advanced an initiative for all Palestinians living abroad to converge upon Israel for Israeli Independence Day.

Blanket Criticism of Israeli Military Operations

When wanted terrorists responsible for murder of Israelis were killed by Israeli forces, the PA referred to this as a “barbaric crime... executions against our people.”

With regard to violence between Palestinians (no matter their affiliation or terrorist deeds) and Israel, the PA defends the Palestinians, who are brothers, and not Israel.

Terrorist Acts

Repeatedly, Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades, a military arm of Fatah, claims full or partial credit for terrorist acts or attempted acts: These include a planned terror by poison in a

restaurant; an attempted knifing; a number of rocket launchings; and two shootings each of which killed two Israelis.

Adherence to the “Phased Program”

The PLO’s “Phased Program” has the final goal of acquisition all the land, but achieved one “liberation step” at a time. It calls for giving an impression of moderation, with diplomatic processes. Each step is expected to weaken Israel. “Armed resistance” – terrorism – is to be utilized when it can be useful.

In an April 2008 TV interview, the Fatah-affiliated PA representative in Lebanon made it clear that the PLO still adheres to this policy.

Connection to Iran

Israeli Intelligence has information that Iran provides money to several Fatah groups.

Ongoing Hamas Connection

The Western world is providing an enormous amount of assistance to Fatah, broadly based on the premise that it is a moderate entity serving as a foil to the radical Hamas, and not significantly associated with it.

But in actuality Abbas does a dance between two poles. He cannot totally avoid contact with Hamas – for he is struggling with the power and influence of Hamas, the ethos of Palestinian brotherhood, and the weakness of Fatah.

In March there were preliminary negotiations between Hamas and Fatah towards a renewed unity government, but this fell apart immediately.

When Fatah and Hamas join forces, Fatah does not moderate Hamas, *Hamas radicalizes Fatah*.

Abbas has indicated he has stipulations for dealing with Hamas. But *at no time* has he insisted that – because he is now negotiating peace with Israel – he can only form a government with a party that recognizes Israel’s right to exist and is prepared to negotiate a two-state solution.

Abbas's bottom line is simply the return of Gaza, which was wrested from Fatah in a coup almost a year ago.

<u>INTRODUCTION.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>OVERVIEW: INCREASED RADICALISM & DETERIORATION</u>	<u>8</u>
<u>THE EVIDENCE.....</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>PRAISE OF AND SUPPORT FOR TERRORISM</u>	<u>11</u>
<i>Abbas Interview.....</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Praise of terrorists and their actions.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<u>INCITEMENT.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<i>Multiple Charges by Abbas</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>The “Right of Return” Plan.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<u>MISREPRESENTATION OF THE FACTS</u>	<u>15</u>
<u>BLANKET CRITICISM OF ISRAELI MILITARY OPERATIONS.....</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>TERRORIST ACTS</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>ADHERENCE TO THE “PHASED PROGRAM”.....</u>	<u>18</u>
<u>CONNECTION TO IRAN.....</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>ONGOING HAMAS CONNECTION.....</u>	<u>19</u>

Update:

Fatah as “Moderate” A Hard Look Post-Annapolis

Arlene Kushner

INTRODUCTION

This update comes four months after the release of the primary report: “Fatah as ‘Moderate’: A Hard Look Post-Annapolis” – which can be found at <http://israelbehindthenews.com/pdf/ModerateFatah.pdf>.

It is of critical significance because of the events currently unfolding as peace negotiations between Israel and the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority continue. For the underlying premise of these negotiations was from the beginning, and remains, that the PA is moderate.

In examining the present state of affairs within the PA, one is struck by the number of incidents on the record – statements and actions by key members of Fatah or by the organs of Fatah – that strongly refute the premise that this faction is moderate. It is not a question of culling a random incident here and another there, but rather of marking a distinct pattern.

This update offers key examples of such statements and actions, as well as a concise examination of their implications.

An introductory overview of the present situation of the PA, offered by political analysts, provides necessary context.

OVERVIEW: Increased Radicalism & Deterioration

Political discourse within Fatah (which controls the Palestinian Authority) has been radicalized: more openly embracing terrorism, rejecting negotiation, and moving towards an Islamic stance.

The growing influence of Hamas – in Judea and Samaria as well as Gaza – is certainly a factor with regard to what is happening to Fatah.

Barry Rubin describes this:

“...given the cult of violence and total victory dominating Palestinian political culture, Hamas is inevitably seen as heroic because it fights and rejects compromise ...

“*Compromise is treason; moderation is cowardice.* This is the daily fare of Palestinian ideology and politics, purveyed by leaders, clerics, media and schools.

“...*Fatah is undergoing a radicalization process* which may not displace Abbas, but will install his successor. Public opinion is also more extreme, with *support for terrorism zooming upward. Fatah both heeds and feeds the trend...*

“We are now seeing the birth of a new Fatah all right, but not the one heralded by such people as former British prime minister Tony Blair or Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. *It is rather an even more extremist version*, coming from those who wield guns, not pens, namely the Aksa Brigades. Contrary to much reportage, this is not an "offshoot" but an essential part of Fatah.”¹ (Emphasis added)

Ido Zerkovitz, in the most recent edition of the *Middle East Quarterly*, addresses another factor in what is transpiring inside of Fatah — Islamization:

“...even as Western diplomats seek to bolster Fatah's Abbas as an alternative to Hamas, they underestimate the degree to which Palestinian nationalism now intertwines itself with Islam. Since the 2000 Palestinian uprising, Fatah has fused national and religious symbols in order to use Islam as an instrument of mobilization.

“Islam provided a bond to hold the factions together² and, unlike Palestinian nationalism, also allowed the group to establish links to non-Palestinian movements under the banner of Islamic solidarity.

“Fatah imagery chronicles the Islamization of the movement...

“To preserve his legitimacy, as well as national unity among Palestinians, Abbas must strengthen the Islamic elements in his political behavior. Fatah has deepened its own Islamic terminology...

“Fatah's new religiosity cannot easily be undone. It is ironic that while many Western diplomats now turn to Fatah as an alternative to Hamas's Islamism, the real Fatah is much closer to Hamas while the secular Fatah now appears to be a relic of the past.”³ (Emphasis added)

Egyptian journalist Emad El-din Aysha, writing after the Hamas electoral victory in 2005, provides insight into this process that is well worth noting:

“The exact nature of the ‘religious’ factor in the Hamas victory cannot be overemphasized...

“Hamas could very well become the rallying point for Mideast Islamist activity...

“...the very animating concepts underlying the Arab-Israeli conflict may change, resulting in an Islamization of the confrontation between Israel and the Arabs. Helen Rizzo, a sociologist who specializes in political and social movements in the Middle East, is of this opinion, believing that what could also come about is a pragmatic awareness that religion is a factor that can be utilized in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict...

“The nationalist rhetoric that this is a war for national independence between the colonial West, embodied in Israel, and the Third Worlders known as Arabs will increasingly succumb to the notion that there is a religious war with a Zionist-Crusader West.”⁴

Fatah, whose rhetoric was secular nationalist, has, inevitably, been swept up in this changing dynamic.

But there is yet another factor at play in the Fatah politics, which are increasingly unstable: That is the tension between different factions of Fatah, with the obstructionist elements in ascendancy.

Interestingly, Rubin sees the commitment of the international community to provide the Palestinian Authority with \$7 billion over a period of time as a factor in the tensions: There is greater largesse to battle for.⁵

Rubin describes it thus:

“The PLO and the PA are governed by Fatah. There are 20 members of the Fatah Central Committee, that organization's highest body. No new members have been added since 1995...

“At least six members are very hard line, openly hostile even to the 1990s peace process. These are all very important people:

- Farouq Quddumi, the head of Fatah
- Sakhr Habash (Abu Nizar), chief of the Fatah Revolutionary Committee which is the group immediately below the Central Committee
- Salim al-Zaanun, head of the Palestine National Council (PNC), the legislative wing of the PLO
- Muhammad Ghana'im (Abu Mahir), Fatah's veteran representative to Kuwait
- Abd al-Hamid Ha'yil, who led one of the main terrorist organizations in Fatah
- General Muhammad Jihad, former Palestine Liberation Army officer

“[Of those] remaining, ten members are...Arafat-era bureaucrats who have never expressed any view that could be considered moderate. I could easily put many or most of them into the hard line group listed above.

“Thus, the Fatah leadership can be said to be:

- Opposed to any changes including...an end to incitement for anti-Israel terrorism...or shifts in ideology toward greater moderation...
- Hostile to bringing in new leadership and unwilling to add the voice of the younger generation.

“If Abbas were ever to propose a realistic peace agreement with Israel he would be lucky to carry one-fifth of the Central Committee. Knowing this, he will never try.”⁶

THE EVIDENCE

What follows here are facts on the ground: Actions and statements by members of Fatah and its organs that provide evidence for what has been described above:

Praise of and Support for Terrorism

There is considerable evidence within the PA of the glorification of terrorism – often couched as “armed struggle” – that countenances the deliberate targeting of innocent civilians, including women and children.

Abbas Interview

On February 28, 2008, the Jordanian daily *al-Dustur* published an interview that had been done with Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, in which he said that he was opposed to an armed struggle [terrorism] against Israel - for the time being and for purely pragmatic reasons.

Palestinian Media Watch (PMW) provided a translation of his words:⁷

“At this present juncture, I am opposed to the armed struggle because we can't succeed in it, but maybe in the future things will be different,” he said.

He also expressed pride both in himself and his organization, Fatah, for trailblazing “the path of resistance” [i.e., terrorism].

“I had the honor of firing the first shot in 1965 and of being the one who taught resistance to many in the region and around the world; what it's like; when it is effective and when it isn't effective; its uses, and what serious, authentic and influential resistance is,” Abbas said.

“It is common knowledge when and how resistance is detrimental and when it is well timed. We [Fatah] had the honor of leading the resistance and we taught resistance to everyone, including Hezbollah, who trained in our military camps.”

In this instance, Abbas is not praising the terrorist actions of others, but rather his own involvement in terrorism, which he marks with pride, even now.

This speaks volumes in terms of his attitude and intentions.

Praise of terrorists and their actions

Mughniyeh

On February 13, 2008, the infamous senior Hezbollah operative Imad Mughniyeh, responsible for innumerable terrorist acts over the years, was killed. While Israel has made no claim of responsibility for this act, the Arab world has assumed that Israel was responsible.

Palestinian Media Watch reported that on the day following his death, the PA daily *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* placed Mughniyeh “on a pedestal of glory.”

Fatah leader Ahmad Dahbur, until recently the undersecretary of the ministry of culture, described Mughniyeh as an “extraordinary hero... unequaled Hezbollah commander ... a beacon of light.” He called Mughniyeh’s killing... “a tragedy that has hurt every Lebanese, every Palestinian, every Arab, and every free man on the face of this earth.”

Writing in his daily column for *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Dahbur said:

“The treacherous Zionist enemy will never permit us to lessen our revenge towards him, or to stray from our confrontation against him, until he is wiped off this land, which is saturated with the blood of the *Shahids* (Islamic martyrs). And what is the fall of the Knight of Lebanese Resistance, Hajj Imad Mughniyeh, if not one of the signs of the nation's Jihad - persistent and definitely unstoppable till the Zionist Project [Israel] will be defeated.

“Hajj Radwan [nom de guerre of Mughniyeh] deserves all glory and praise for evoking confusion and alarm among the Zionists, whether he be alive or a *Shahid*.

“An abundance of mercy is due to the *Shahid* - Hajj Rudwan Imad Mughniyeh. May his blood serve as the ink for a new document of fraternity, which will unite the Jihad's fighters.”⁸

Mercaz Harav Massacre

On March 6, 2008, a Palestinian terrorist, Ala’a Abu D’heim, massacred eight students at the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva in Jerusalem. There followed a spate of praise for this action from Fatah:

On March 9, the official PA daily *Al Hayat Al Jadida* honored the terrorist who committed this act by conferring on him the status of *Shahid* - Holy Islamic Martyr.

Reports PMW: A picture of the murderer was placed prominently on the front page, with the caption, "The *Shahid* Ala’a Abu D’heim." In a page one article on the terror killings, his act is defined as a "*Shahada* achieving" action.⁹

At the same time, the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades, Fatah's military wing, released an official pamphlet – obtained by Aaron Klein of World Net Daily – declaring its appreciation of “the heroic operation in Jerusalem.”

“We bless the martyr [who carried out the shootings] with all the blood of the heroes of the resistance and with the soil of our land,” said the statement.

Quoting a verse from the Koran, it stated, “Kill them and then Allah will torture them in your hands and Allah will give you victory over them and will bring joy to the hearts of the believers.”

It then went on to declare that “resistance” is the only strategy that will “take back our rights and release all the soil of Palestine to our hands.”¹⁰

The Fatah terror group called on Abbas to immediately negotiate a national unity government with Hamas, “in order to confront the challenges that our people face.”

While MEMRI (Middle East Media Research Institute) released a video clip from ANB TV, Lebanon, in which Fatah leader and former PA minister Qadura Fares said:

“The Fatah movement does not denounce this kind of operation [the Mercuz Harav massacre] and the Palestinian people has the right to conduct resistance against the occupation. In addition, the Fatah movement - since its foundation and to this moment - has been employing this form of struggle.”¹¹

Sbarro terrorist

On April 7, 2008, the PA daily *Al-Quds* ran an interview with the poet Dr. Mutawakil Taha, who wrote a book two years ago about a terrorist couple, Nizar Tamimi and Ahlam Tamimi. Nizar is in prison for 16 life sentences because of her part in planning the horrific Sbarro suicide bombing of August 2001, in the center of Jerusalem, which killed 15 people including seven children.

Taha refers to the couple as “great heroic prisoners...whom we are proud of.”

He goes on to say:

“I feel that the prisoners are Martyrs in potential, and that we should bond with them without question or accounting. We should bond to the prisoners unconditionally as we bond to the Martyrs and the homeland.”

Palestinian Media Watch, which reported on this interview, comments that it is part of a “current trend in the Palestinian Authority media to honor past and present terrorists.”¹²

Incitement

Evidence of incitement exists at the highest levels of the PA.

The international community often fails to recognize this incitement, brushing it off as hyperbole that need not be taken seriously.

Multiple Charges by Abbas

Charges to the media

On March 1, 2008, in a statement to the press regarding Israeli actions in Gaza, Mahmoud Abbas, PA President, referred to these operations as “worse than the Holocaust.”¹³

In Dakar, Senegal

On March 13, 2008, Abbas, when addressing the 57 nations assembled for a summit of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Senegal, said:

“Our people in the city [Jerusalem] are facing an ethnic cleansing campaign through a set of Israeli decisions such as imposing heavy taxes, banning construction and closing Palestinian institutions in addition to separating the city from the West Bank by the racist separation wall.”

He told them that Palestinians “are facing a campaign of annihilation” by Israel.¹⁴

In Abbas’s statement to the press, the term “Holocaust” – a charged buzz word – is applied inapplicable in order to generate antipathy to Israel.

Abbas’s charge in the second instance above is without sense, as over 200,000 Arabs live in Jerusalem, carry residency cards, and receive social benefits. “Ethnic cleansing” is also a buzz word, being used inappropriately to malign Israel.

In Damascus

On March 29, 2008, an Arab summit convened in Damascus, Syria. Boycotting it, because of displeasure with Syrian ties to Iran and specific Syrian actions, were several of the more moderate Arab states: Jordan, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia most notably.

PA President Mahmoud Abbas was in attendance, however. He spoke to those who were gathered about “barbaric Israeli attacks” in Gaza.

Making no mention of the rockets attacks on Israeli civilians, he asked Arab countries to “think seriously of Arab and international protection for our people.”¹⁵

In this instance, there is incitement, but also an implied defense of Hamas in Gaza, which is not called to task for the launching of rockets against civilians, i.e., for terrorist actions.

The “Right of Return” Plan

On March 18, 2008, Ziad Abu Ein, Deputy Minister for Prisoners' Affairs in the Palestinian Authority, announced a plan called “The Initiative of Return and Co-existence,” which has the stated goal of “implementing UN resolution 194.”

The plan stresses that the Palestinians can no longer expect to achieve the "right of return" at the negotiating table with Israel. “We must take matters into our own hands.”

Abu Ein's initiative – which won the backing of many PA leaders in Ramallah – called upon Palestinians living abroad to converge upon Israel by land, sea and air, on May 14, for Israeli Independence Day, with their UN identity cards in their hands.

They are also to bring suitcases and tents, so they can settle in their former villages.¹⁶

This “plan” was designed to embarrass Israel at an historical juncture, and to put pressure upon her.

It specifically rejects the possibility of successful negotiations, which would be the goal of a moderate regime.

What is more, it rejects negotiations *while they are still ongoing*. And it makes clear that compromise is not within the realm of consideration: If they don't see that they are getting what they want at the table, they retain the right to seize it in other ways.

It must be noted that, Palestinian claims aside, there is no “right of return.”¹⁷

Misrepresentation of the Facts

While multiple instances exist, one example follows here. Its intent is to cast aspersions on Israeli actions. In this case, a “resistance fighter” is turned into a “citizen,” the implication being that Israel kills innocents.

(See also the Wafa report under “Credit for attempted knifing,” below.)

On February 19, 2008, there were two versions of one particular event in Palestinian news sources.

Wafa, which is an official PLO (Fatah-controlled) news agency, reported thus:

“IOF Kills Citizen in east Khan Younis” (IOF = Israeli Occupation Forces)

“KHAN YOUNIS, February 19, 2008 (Wafa - PLO news agency)-Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF) killed a citizen on Tuesday in the Gaza Strip city of east Khan Younis Governorate, medical sources said.

”They told Wafa that Ismael Jadallah, 26, was shot and killed in al-Qarara town, east Khan Younis city. He was shot with live bullets all over his body when IOF troops stormed al-Qarara town.”¹⁸

Ma’an, which is an independent news agency, had this version:

“Resistance fighter killed in clashes with Israeli forces in Gaza Strip”

“Gaza - Ma'an - A 25-year-old resistance fighter was shot dead during clashes with Israeli forces, east of Dir Al-Balah in the central Gaza Strip on Tuesday, Palestinian medical sources said.

”Mu’awiyya Hassanein, head of ambulance and emergency services in the Palestinian ministry of health told our correspondent that fighter Ismail Jadallah was taken to Al-Aqsa Martyr's Hospital in Dir Al-Balah.

”The National Resistance Brigades, the military wing of the Democratic Front, confirmed that Jadallah was one of their members and he was killed during armed clashes with Israeli forces.¹⁹

Blanket Criticism of Israeli Military Operations

From material above we have been able to see the readiness of PA officials to criticize Israeli actions in Gaza without acknowledgement of the defensive nature of such actions.

Below is a criticism of a different nature. For in Gaza, while the IDF aims only for terrorists and is scrupulous in attempting to avoid damage to civilians, such damage is possible because the terrorists operated in civilian areas. But now it is evident that even if the action is a pinpoint operation that takes out exclusively known and wanted terrorists responsible for multiple Israeli deaths, PA criticism of Israel ensues.

Abbas and his Fatah associates stand with the terrorists and not with Israeli actions against terrorists.

On March 12, 2008, four terrorists in Bethlehem associated with Islamic Jihad were killed by special Israeli forces. One of them, Muhammad Shehadeh, was the head of the Islamic Jihad terrorist-operative network in Bethlehem (Al-Quds Brigades), which has contact with Syria. He was wanted for more than eight years for his participation in

attacks in which several Israelis were killed or wounded. (There were unconfirmed reports that Shehadeh was also connected to the Mercaz Harav Massacre.) The other three, part of the active Islamic Jihad terrorist network, were also wanted by Israel.²⁰

A spokesman on behalf of Mahmoud Abbas condemned this IDF operation: “This barbaric crime exposes the fake mask on Israel's face.” He slammed Israel for “talking about peace but committing daily crimes, murders, and executions against our people.”²¹

This statement represents the PA position: In the end, with regard to tensions or violence between Palestinians (no matter their affiliation or terrorist deeds) and Israel, the PA defends the Palestinians, who are brothers, and not Israel.

The highly touted notion of Fatah as a moderate foil against radical elements in Palestinian society is no more than a myth.

Terrorist Acts

Planned terror by poison

On March 19, 2008, Israel security forces and the Israeli police arrested Ihab Yehye Ahmed Abu Rial and Anas Mustafa Said Salum, residents of Nablus, who had admitted to planning to perpetrate a terrorist attack by poisoning food at the restaurant where they worked in Ramat Gan.

The two men belonged to a military cell of the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigades (which is intrinsically connected to Fatah). This particular cell receives financing and direction from Hezbollah.²²

Credit for attempted knifing

On March 31, 2008, a Palestinian, Abed al-Latif Kharoub, approached two Israelis waiting at a hitchhike point near the community of Shilo, and then pulled out a six-inch knife, crying “Allah Akbar” (“God is great,” the cry used before Palestinian terrorists attack Jews).

One of the Israelis, Erez Bar-On, pulled out his personal weapon and shot the terrorist. Within a day, Al Aksa Brigades of Fatah had taken credit for the attack.²³

Wafa, the official PA news agency, reported that “Abed al-Latif Kharoub 22, of Hares village, was shot dead in a cold blood by a group of colonizers as he was walking near Tarmas'aya town, north Ramallah.”²⁴

Rocket claim

On the same day that the knifing occurred, Maan, the independent Palestinian news agency, reported that Al Aksa Brigades had claimed to have shot a projectile at an Israeli town east of Al-Maghazi refugee camp, in Gaza.²⁵

Rocket responsibility

When the number of rockets coming into Israel from Gaza increased in early March, 2008, officials noted that most were being launched by Islamic Jihad but that groups such as Al Aksa Brigades were responsible for some of the launchings.²⁶

The various terror groups actually color their rockets differently, with Al Aksa Brigades putting yellow Arabic writing near the tail of their rockets. Thus it is possible to identify which group has shot the rockets in this manner as well as by the claims of responsibility that are made. The Sderot police station has a collection of such rockets, which includes Al Aksa weapons.²⁷

Shootings — joint responsibility

On April 9, 2008, four or more Palestinian terrorists made their way from Gaza to Nahal Oz in Israel, where they killed two Israeli workers at the fuel terminal located there. Fatah's Al Aksa Brigades was one of three groups claiming responsibility.²⁸

On April 25, 2008, two Israeli security guards at the Nitzanei Shalom Industrial Zone were shot dead by a Palestinian terrorist coming out of nearby Tulkarm. Once again, Al-Aksa Martyrs Brigades was one of three groups that claimed responsibility.²⁹

Adherence to the “Phased Program”

The “Phased Program” or “Strategy of Stages” was officially adopted by the Palestinian National Council of the PLO in 1974, after it became apparent that “total liberation” – i.e., taking out Israel completely in a war – was not going to be possible.

It continues to adhere to the final goal of acquisition of all of the land, but conceptualizes doing this one “liberation step” at a time. Thus, there is an attempt to give an impression of moderation, with utilization of diplomatic and political processes.

Each step is expected to strengthen the Palestinians and weaken Israel.

“Armed resistance” – terrorism – is to be utilized when it can be useful in conjunction with the political process. (Note: Abbas, in his interview cited earlier, said the time to use “armed resistance” may come again.)

What we see below is that this approach has not been abandoned.

Abbas Zaki, Palestinian Authority representative in Lebanon, was formerly the Palestinian Legislative Council member for Hebron and Fatah operations head. He currently serves as a member of the PLO Central Council.

On April 9, 2008, Zaki gave an interview to NBN TV in Lebanon. MEMRI recorded and translated that interview, which included the following:

“The use of weapons alone will not bring results, and the use of politics without weapons will not bring results. We act on the basis of our extensive experience. We analyze our situation carefully. We know what climate leads to victory and what climate leads to suicide. We talk politics, but our principles are clear...

“The PLO is the sole legitimate representative [of the Palestinian people], and it has not changed its platform even one iota. In light of the weakness of the Arab nation...and in light of the American control over the world, the PLO proceeds through phases, without changing its strategy. Let me tell you, when the ideology of Israel collapses, and we take, at least, Jerusalem, the Israeli ideology will collapse in its entirety, and we will begin to progress with our own ideology, Allah willing, and drive them out of all of Palestine.”³⁰

Connection to Iran

In private conversation with this writer, on March 23, 2008, Maj. Gen (res.) Yaakov Amidror – former Commander of the IDF's National Defense College – indicated that Israeli Intelligence has information that Iran provides money to several groups within Fatah, in some instances directly, and in some instances via Hezbollah.

Ongoing Hamas Connection

Fatah has a long history of interaction with Hamas, including a formal agreement forged in 1995. This called on the PA to cease all preventative security, so that, in essence, it was possible to do a “good cop-bad cop” routine.

Once Hamas achieved electoral gains and increased power, the dynamic shifted. As the analysis in the first section of this report indicates, more and more the radical ideology of Hamas is setting the tone for Palestinian political discourse.

In early 2007, in an agreement in Mecca, Fatah and Hamas forged a unity government that was shaky from its inception. It fell apart violently with the Hamas coup in Gaza in June, 2007. This set the tone for the situation we now see: with Hamas represented within the international community as radical and Fatah as moderate.

Contact between Fatah and Hamas has continued, however. This was documented in the final section of the January Report. It has since been confirmed that at least low level communications between the two groups is ongoing.³¹

Mahmoud Abbas is actually doing a complex dance in his various relationships with Hamas and the nations of the Western world.

While it has been widely reported in the press that Abbas promised US officials that he would have no contact with Hamas, this writer has found no documentation to support this. What is clear is that US and European support for Fatah – which includes billions of dollars and assistance such as the training of troops – is broadly and tacitly predicated on this assumption.³²

Abbas must provide a semblance of avoiding contact with Hamas if he wants the largesse from the West to continue.

But in actuality he cannot totally avoid this contact – for he is struggling with the power and influence of Hamas, the ethos of Palestinian brotherhood, and the weakness of Fatah.

A stable Fatah union with Hamas is unlikely in the near future because of the influence of the West, as well as the power struggle between the groups. The dance will continue, however, with some level of coming together of the factions likely at intervals. There may even be a brief period of another unity government.

That renewed unity government came close when representatives of both parties signed an agreement in Sana'a, Yemen, in late March, 2008, saying that they had accepted the Yemen initiative for renewing dialogue in order to restore the normalcy that had existed before the Gaza takeover.

Before the ink was even dry, however, disagreements emerged regarding the implications of the agreement: Hamas saying it provided a guideline for discussions and Fatah saying it obligated Hamas to surrender the control of Gaza.

Abbas then reneged, saying that his representative had signed the agreement without his permission.

When Fatah and Hamas join forces, Fatah does not moderate Hamas, *Hamas radicalizes Fatah*.

Abbas has indicated that he has stipulations for dealing with Hamas.

But *at no time* has he insisted that – because he is now negotiating peace with Israel – he can only form a government with a party that recognizes Israel's right to exist and is prepared to negotiate a two-state solution.

Abbas's bottom line is simply the return Gaza.³³

¹ Barry Rubin, "Palestinian Politics: Onward and Downward," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 23, 2008.

Rubin is director of the Global Research in International Affairs Center at IDC Herzliya and editor of the Middle East Review of International Affairs.

² "In order to hold the factions together": This is an exceedingly important part of what is happening. Hamas ideology holds sway, and Fatah bows to, or absorbs, Hamas positions.

³ Ido Zerkovitz, "Fatah's Embrace of Islamism," *Middle East Quarterly*, Spring 2008.

Zerkovitz is a PhD candidate in Middle Eastern history at Haifa University.

⁴ Emad El-din Aysha, "The Hamas Victory and the New Politics that May Come," *New Politics*, Vol. 11, No.1.

<http://www.wpunj.edu/newpol/issue41/Aysha41.htm>

Aysha teaches at the American University in Cairo and is a political columnist for the *Egyptian Gazette* and *Egyptian Mail*.

⁵ Barry Rubin, "Fatah Falls Apart, GLORIA, February 18, 2008.

⁶ Barry Rubin, "Fatah's Politics Make Peace Impolitic," GLORIA, January 21, 2008.

⁷ http://www.pmw.org.il/Bulletins_feb2008.html#b280208.

⁸ http://www.pmw.org.il/Bulletins_mar2008.html#6090308.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Aaron Klein, "'Peace partner' praises 'heroic shooting massacre,'" *WorldNetDaily*, March 8, 2008.

¹¹ The clip and a transcript can be seen at: <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/1714.htm>.

¹² http://www.pmw.org.il/Bulletins_apr2008.html#b080408.

¹³ (AP) "Abbas: IDF action worse than the Holocaust," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 1, 2008.

¹⁴ Alistar Thomson for Reuters, March 13, 2008.
Heidi Vogt for the Associated Press, March 13, 2008.

¹⁵ (AFP) "Abbas calls for Arab, international troops to protect Palestinians, YNet, March 29, 2008.

¹⁶ Khaled Abu Toameh, "PA urges Palestinians to 'return' to Israel on 60th anniversary," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 18, 2008.

¹⁷ Resolution 194, on which the Palestinians base "right of return," was a resolution of the General Assembly of the UN, not the Security Council, and as such is a recommendation, without standing in international law. The Conventions on refugees make no mention of such a right, and the UN High Commission on Refugees, which attends to all other refugees in the world, regularly resettles refugees – its goal being to help them get on with their lives quickly.

¹⁸ Wafa, February 19, 2008.

¹⁹ Maan, February 19, 2008.

²⁰ Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, March 17, 2008.

²¹ Roe Nahmias, "Abbas: IDF operation in Bethlehem a barbaric crime," YNet, March 12, 2008.

²² This information was released by the prime minister's office and can be seen at: <http://imra.org.il/story.php3?id=38895>.

²³ Nissan Ratzlav-Katz, "PA terrorist shot dead by quick-thinking civilian," *Israel National News*, April 1, 2008.

²⁴ Wafa, March 31, 2008.

²⁵ Maan, March 31, 2008.

²⁶ Amos Harel, "IDF upping ground ops in face of heavier rocket fire," *Haaretz*, March 31, 2008.

²⁷ In a JPost blog and confirmed by Noam Bedein, who heads the Sderot Media Center.

²⁸ Amos Harel, "2 Israeli civilians killed in attack by Gaza infiltrators," *Haaretz*, April 12, 2008.

²⁹ Yaakov Katz, "Two Israel guards killed near Tulkarm," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 25, 2008.

³⁰ <http://www.memri.org/bin/latestnews.cgi?ID=SD189608>. A clip of the TV interview is also available.

³¹ Dr. Mordecai (Moti) Kedar, professor of Arab Affairs (and Arabic speaker) at Bar Ilan University, in private communication, April 2008.

³² In a January 7, 2008 BBC interview, Sec. Rice spoke about showing the "Palestinians that they will have the support for making tough choices."

³³ From Reuters, March 26, 2008:

"We are ready to open a new chapter but the Palestinian condition remains unchanged, and that is a complete and a total reversal of the coup," Abbas's media adviser Nabil Amr told reporters in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

"This is the final position of the Palestinian National Authority, of the Palestine Liberation Organization and of Fatah."