

Testimony for Congress – "The Roadmap to Middle East Peace: Can it be Restarted?"

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At the end of the Camp David discussions, Yasser Arafat, who was offered a Palestinian state alongside—but not instead of—Israel, declared the Oslo Peace Process a dead end. Israel soon found itself in a position where it faced terror attacks unprecedented in scope and character. Within three years, there were thousands of terror and guerilla attacks, more than a hundred suicide attacks and many more terror attacks that were foiled. The annual number of casualties caused by terror attacks hit the highest point since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. This terror offensive has forced Israel unwillingly to move from “conflict resolution” to “conflict management” using all the counter-terrorism means at its disposal

Israel has identified the Palestinian Authority and its Chairman, Yasser Arafat, as being responsible for this terror activity, by instigating, financing, inciting, assisting and even actively perpetrating terror attacks (as opposed to terror attacks carried out during 1994 - 2000, when the perpetrators were mainly Hamas and Islamic Jihad activists and Arafat was “only” accused of turning a blind eye). Since September 2000, over 50% of the most serious terror attacks have been carried out by members of Arafat’s own organization, Fatah).

Some experts tend to analyze and evaluate the prospects of peace initiatives in the middle-east without recognizing terrorism as a crucial factor.

This was also the official policy of late Rabin's government in 1994-1995 using the slogan - "we will pursue peace as if there is no terrorism and fight terrorism as if there is no peace process". This Israeli strategy offered no incentive to the Palestinians to refrain from terrorist attacks and the Palestinian Authority to pressure these organizations to hold their fire.

As a consequence it became evident to the Palestinians that terrorist activity does serve their interests or at the very least doesn't endanger them.

This false conviction that "terrorism pays" stood in full contradiction to any peace initiative in the Middle East. Moreover, after three years of an on going war of attrition against Israel, the Israeli public, like the American public does after 9/11 attacks, believes in zero tolerance attitude towards terrorism.

Anyone who cares for peace in the Middle East has to acknowledge the importance of a complete secession of Terrorism as a crucial prerequisite to any future effort to reach a peaceful solution to the Israeli – Palestinian conflict.

What is the phenomenon of terrorism? Terrorism is a combination of two factors – motivation and operational capability - the motivation of a terrorist organization to perpetrate attacks, and its operational capability of doing so at a given time. Based on the terrorism equation one may conclude the Counter-Terrorism counter equation – either lower the motivation to use terrorism as a tool for achieving political goals or diminish the terrorists' operational capabilities to do so. (It is better of course to try and accomplish both simultaneously but unfortunately they are often contradicting as the offensive designated to limit operational capabilities usually feed motivation to retaliate).

Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, Yasser Arafat has adopted a policy whereby he refrains from disrupting the military infrastructure of the Palestinian radical groups - Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) in the areas under his control. Thus, he was free to preserve the constant threat of terrorism as a bargaining chip to be used against Israel, acting to prevent attacks when it served what he saw as the Palestinian national interest. But whenever such prevention was necessary it was always accomplished through a policy of “persuasion and threats”—never through direct military action.

Whenever the PA came out to prevent terror attacks against Israel it has maneuvered to limit the terrorist organization’s motivation to do so at a given time frame but systematically refrained from dismantling their operational capabilities –preserving them for later use when it better suited PA’s political agenda.

What made Arafat’s threat and persuasion policy effective was the fact that the Palestinian authority and the fundamentalist terror organizations – Hamas and PIJ, shared from day one of establishing the P.A. what was agreed upon as “the short term Palestinian national interests”.

These interests were the removal of Israeli forces from the West bank and Gaza strip, the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as it’s capital, and the ostensible " right of return " of 1948 Palestinian refugees to live in Israel within its 1967 borders.

Both sides also shared an understanding that "civil war" among themselves (“Fitana”in Arabic) is to be avoided at all costs as it would only serve Israel’s interest.

When Arafat wanted to temporarily stop terrorist attacks against Israel, or “lower the flames”, he managed to convince the leadership of the terror

organizations that attacks at that specific point in time would be counterproductive and harm the Palestinian national interests. He usually added a warning that if these organizations would disregard his request, he would be obligated to act thereby risking civil war. At such times, Arafat, who controlled the Palestinian media, would work to ensure that the popular environment was not conducive to terrorist activity. However, during the seven years that the Palestinian Authority has existed, Arafat never lifted a finger to curtail the ability of the terrorist organizations to carry out attacks. He never took real steps to disrupt the militants' command centers, shut down their bomb factories, or prosecute the leaders of the organizations' military wings. What actions he did take were always carried out "for the cameras," and were rescinded or overturned as soon as the eyes of the world were elsewhere. Nor did Arafat ever do anything about gathering up the thousands of illegal weapons in the hands of militants, including those of his own Fatah organization—contrary to the terms of numerous agreements signed with Israel. Nor was anything done to prevent radical organizations from engaging in fund-raising or recruitment activities. On the contrary, the terrorist organizations have been allowed by Arafat to take root and grow in the soil of the Palestinian Authority. The PA turned a blind eye to the activity of Hamas, the Islamic Jihad and other groups in the autonomous zone, allowing them to act freely, to organize for terror attacks, and to possess many and varied weapons. Not only has Arafat, and the PA under his control not fought to control those who oppose the agreements, but they have actively encouraged such militancy. This is clear from the incitement in PA text books, in the television commercials (on the official PA channels) encouraging Palestinian children to die as martyrs; it is clear in the attempts—both

open and clandestine—to smuggle into Palestinian territories weapons against all their obligations in the treaties with Israel. And it is clear from Arafat’s undermining of the authority of any Palestinian leader who attempts to rein in Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, much less Fatah’s own Martyrs of al-Aqsa Brigades.

Whenever Arafat’s policy was criticized he immediately assumed the “underdog” position, claiming he was doing whatever was possible but was “too weak to guarantee success”

After every terror attack involving massive Israeli casualties, Arafat would reiterate that he was doing everything in his power to prevent the attacks, in his words – “100% effort”, but that no one can guarantee 100% success in thwarting terrorism.

He would usually back his statement with a one time exposure of an explosive laboratory or a casual arrest of a terrorist, orchestrated to get maximum international media coverage and create a PR spin.

The lack of any qualitative criteria for measuring its efforts at combating terror absolved the Palestinian Authority of all responsibility for terrorist attacks, allowing the PA to fall back on impotence.

Eventually, when Israel made it clear that this deceiving policy can not last, a new excuse was invented. According to this new argument, Arafat should be held responsible only for terrorist attacks carried out from areas under Palestinian control (Area A) and not for those launched from areas under Israeli security control (Areas B and C). Immediately Arafat issued orders to the Palestinian radical groups not to “embarrass the Palestinian Authority,” by ensuring that the perpetrators of every attack set out on their mission from outside of the Autonomy. All of this, of course, completely ignores the fact that everything that went into the attack—the

planning, the bomb making, the intelligence gathering the recruiting and training—all this took place inside Palestinian autonomous areas.

The old underdog position assumed by Arafat time and again is still being used by the PA to excuse their permanent unwillingness and impotence in dealing with the terrorist infrastructures in Gaza and the West bank. This Palestinian policy was never a matter of weakness on the part of the PA - it was not that they feared a confrontation with the fundamentalists.

Rather, it was part of a calculated policy, whereby the threat of violence was held in check, to be used to put pressure on Israel at the appropriate time during the negotiations.

Some experts still mistakably hold that Arafat is not in control of the Palestinian masses, and is thus not in a position to stop the Intifada. But Arafat was in the past and is still today in full control of the main apparatuses that can dismantle terrorism:

Control of intelligence

The first and the most important pillar of counter-terrorism is intelligence. The gathering of intelligence plays a key role in the ongoing war on terror. Intelligence is meant to provide essential data on the terror organization: it's hierarchy, leaders and main activists, exposing their infrastructure, locating the terror cells, learning about their terror attacks planning etc. The Palestinian intelligence agencies had and still have the best intelligence - better than any Israeli, American or other intelligence agency - on the ongoing activity of the Palestinian terrorist organizations in Gaza, the West Bank and abroad. This gives the Palestinian Authority a huge advantage in any counter-terrorism activity.

Before the Oslo agreements, (1994), control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip gave the Israeli intelligence agencies uninhibited access to the “street” and made possible the gathering of vital information for the war on terror and the frustration of attacks before the killers even ventured from their nest. Needless to say, the withdrawal of the IDF from these areas did not encourage the residents to continue turning over information to Israeli intelligence authorities. The bitter end of those suspected of collaboration with Israel brutally illustrated the fate that awaits collaborators—or whoever is suspected as such—once the IDF departed and Arafat and his people took over. This gap in intelligence was supposed to have been bridged by intelligence cooperation with the PA. But even at the pick of cooperation between the PA and Israel, the Palestinians were reluctant to give Israel any information that was gathered by their own sources in order to prevent terror attacks. The intelligence cooperation channel was mainly used for passing Israeli intelligence data, which naturally is gathered from classified sources, to the PA security forces for the purpose of interdicting attacks. In many cases the Palestinians chose to ignore the information and did not use it to prevent terror attacks. In other cases they opted to warn the terrorists instead. Sometimes they would put up a show arrest apprehending the terrorists and let them go free after a short while through the infamous "revolving door" policy . Whatever the case their only genuine effort was immediately directed at exposing and eliminating the Israeli intelligence sources who provided the information . In effect, an extremely dangerous paradox was formed. Intelligence data from classified sources was passed to the PA security forces for the purpose of interdicting attacks. Yet at the same time, the PA was doing its best to eliminate Israeli intelligence sources

defined by them as “collaborators”. Of course, anyone suspected of cooperating with Israel has his fate determined well before seeing a judge.

Control of the media

By controlling the media, Arafat controls the standards of popularity. From the outset it was the official messages disseminated through the radio, television and the official PA preachers, that set the standards for popularity in the Palestinian street.

At the heart of Arafat’s dilemma is the need to continue to mobilize his society in an atmosphere in which no real achievements can be presented.

The ultimate victims of Palestinian terrorist attacks have been the Palestinians themselves. The Palestinian Authority never implemented plans to develop a self-sufficient economy. The income of most Palestinians has always been based on the employment of Palestinians in Israel. Since the outbreak of hostilities, Israel, fearful of terrorist attacks has now virtually closed its borders to Palestinian laborers. At the same time, tourism, a mainstay of both the Palestinian and the Israeli economies, has dropped to a trickle.

Thus, Arafat is forced to continue to justify a war that, while saving him the need to address domestic concerns, has brought the Palestinians nothing but grief.

Control over terrorist groups

Arafat also has considerable influence, even over the “opposition” Islamist groups. These organizations, while not directly controlled by Arafat, were still dependent on his keeping their military capabilities

intact. Had he chosen to disarm and outlaw the PIJ and Hamas, the Islamists would have been largely marginalized.

Arafat's own terrorist groups compete with the Islamic groups in number of attacks against Israeli targets. The Fatah groups enjoy the overwhelming support of Arafat's constituency, and he has invested a great deal in keeping them armed and active, even when his civilian infrastructure languishes for lack of funds.

Over the past three years, since the outbreak of Palestinian hostilities, Arafat consistently preached "Jihad" (Holy war) against Israel. However, at first it was mostly the Islamist groups, Hamas and PIJ that carried out the mass-casualty attacks inside Israel. The Fatah -Tanzim, which lacked the resources for carrying out the kind of "professional" bombings typical of Hamas, confined itself to shooting attacks on Israelis on the roads in the disputed territories.

All of this began to change towards the end of 2000, when Arafat ordered his security services to release the majority of the imprisoned Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants—many of them convicted terrorists who had been jailed under the terms of the Oslo agreements with Israel. Hamas was invited to join the Palestinian Authority's governing body, and while the invitation was not accepted, a new level of cooperation between Fatah and Hamas began to take shape. The first joint attacks against Israeli civilians were not long in coming.

To date, the Fatah-Tanzim and the Martyrs of al-Aqsa – yet another Fatah offshoot - have taken responsibility for more than 300 terror attacks in which Israeli civilians were killed.

Since September 2000 the Arafat's Fatah-linked groups have carried out more than 1,500 attacks and attempted attacks, including car bombings, shootings, kidnappings, and knifings.

As Arafat could have—and still can—prevent the terror attacks against Israel, so he can, put a stop to the current round of violence in the Territories. After all, he has at his disposal all the means necessary to do so. Among these is the complete control of the Palestinian media, which, right up until the time these lines were written, continues to broadcast blatant incitement against Israel. And then there is the security and intelligence apparatus, deeply rooted in Palestinian society, the heads of which miss no opportunity to express their loyalty to Arafat, and whose personnel receive their monthly salary from Arafat’s Palestinian Authority. Add to this a vast law enforcement force, numbering in the tens of thousands, and one has ample means to control the violence in the Palestinian street.

The violence and terrorist activity known as the “al-Aqsa Intifada” was a direct result of Arafat’s evaluation that violence and terrorism pay—that in the end, “the Palestinian national interests” will be better served by violence than by negotiations. By instigating a war of terrorist attrition as an extension of his overall political effort , Arafat meant to force Israel into further concessions - more than what was offered to him at Camp-David (The creation of a Palestinian state on 95% of the West Bank and Gaza strip including the control on the strategic territory of Jordan valley. In exchange for the highly Jewish populated territory in the West Bank that Israel wanted to keep, Israel was ready to swap Israeli territory bordering Gaza Strip. Israel was also willing to divide it’s capital – Jerusalem to accommodate a parallel capital for the Palestinians).

To the other parties utter disbelief those far reaching concessions of historic magnitude were suddenly deemed insufficient and Arafat , apparently sensing blood , have decided to push for more assuming that an additional dose of terror and orchestrated violence will do the trick.

He was probably right as the pattern worked time and again. Few weeks after Arafat provoked the resumption of violent activity, Israeli negotiators (in the Taba Talks) expressed sudden flexibility on the Israeli sacred Casus Beli issue of Palestinian claim of return of the 1948 Palestinian refugees into Israel proper – a horrifying gamble on Israel’s sheer existence , later rectified by the Israeli electorate through a democratic process.

It’s difficult to unlearn the lessons of years all at once, and Israel is now paying dearly for past mistakes. The Israeli government and most of the Israeli public are not willing nor able to adopt a policy of turning a blind eye to the Palestinian terrorist activity by promoting peace “as if there is no terrorism”. This is probably also clear to Arafat. Therefore his strategy in promoting the current terrorist activity is not anymore to obtain further voluntary concessions from Israel, but to try to manipulate the international community to force a solution probably assuming that such a compromise, will hold more for the Palestinians than what was offered at the negotiating table.

In other words, from Arafat’s viewpoint, terrorism and violence will once more pay off, regardless of how many Palestinian or Israeli lives are lost along the way. In fact, the higher the casualties, the greater the urgency of an imposed solution.

Based on the American administration policy in the Middle East, the Mitchell committee understood the need to break the deadly patterns of the PA policy, and demanded full cessation of Palestinian terror activity, and total dismantling of the terrorist organization operational capabilities and infrastructures to be considered an overriding pre condition to any further diplomatic and political discussions concerning future arrangements and solutions of the conflict.

In contradiction to the Mitchell committee recommendations, The Road-Map that was structured by the European “Quartet” and inspired by a Saudi initiative , was based on a simultaneous, reciprocal steps by Israel and the Palestinians, with no preliminary demand from the Palestinians to dismantle the terrorist organizations. This was Arafat’s victory and therefore he embraced the Road-Map plan.

The amendment that has been later introduced by the American administration demanding the cessation of Palestinian terrorist activity and dismantling Hamas as preliminary steps, complicated Arafat’s vision. Nevertheless he hoped that the American policy will be changed after he will reach a temporary cease-fire (“Hudna”) with the Palestinian Islamic-radical terrorist organizations. This was not the first time that such Hudna was discussed between Palestinian factions in order to promote Palestinian national interests.

But there was no real expectancy to this Hudna since the four players – the PA, Hamas and PIJ, Israel and the USA adopted this Hudna directly or indirectly for different reasons and with different expectations.

Hamas understood that the PA and maybe the Palestinian public will regard terrorist activity at this specific timing as endangering Palestinian

national interests and they wanted to prevent deterioration to a possible civil war.

The PA for its part adopted the Hudna in an attempt to diminish the motivation of the Islamists to execute terrorist attacks and so to avoid failing to meet its obligations to dismantle the terrorist organization. They argue that in any case they do not have sufficient military capabilities to dismantle Hamas and PIJ right now so it should be postponed for later times. Meanwhile Israel should be forced to fulfill its obligations by the Road-Map.

Israel adopted the Hudna indirectly in order to buy time for Abu-Mazen's new administration to reorganize and start fulfilling their obligation to dismantle the Palestinian terrorist organizations.

The USA was indirectly accepting the Hudna having the same point of view as Israel but as the time passed, some statements of the American administration implied that there is a beginning of a shift in the American position towards the Palestinians by softening the demand for immediate dismantling of the terror organizations .

As expected the Hudna did not last long. The terrorist organizations did not keep their obligation to abstain from terrorist attacks. The volume of the attacks did drop at first but there was no cessation of terrorism and definitely no pressure on its infrastructure.

Few days after the Hudna agreement was concluded , Israel suffered from cold weapon terrorist attacks, then a kidnap of a taxi driver, up to suicide attacks that culminated in the horrific suicide attack on a Jerusalem bus in August 19th and the killing of more than 20 Israelis and wounding 112 others.

There was no hope for the Road-Map plan or any other peace initiative in the Middle East since the PA headed by Arafat did not have the slightest intention to fulfill their obligation to dismantle the terrorist organizations infrastructures.

The new Abu-Mazen's government that was created as he pointed out, to pave the way for Arafat's return to the international arena, had no chance to fulfill its obligations even if they wanted to. Abu Mazen did not have any sovereignty or power of its own in the Palestinian constituency.

Any capabilities he had were those relayed to him courtesy of Arafat.

Under such circumstances even if a surrogate nominee for PM will be genuinely motivated to dismantle Hamas and PIJ, Arafat would never empower him to do so and will withhold the authority and support needed for this assignment.

Arafat can not afford anyone to dismantle the terrorist organizations, as by so doing he would publicly admit a decade long deception of the entire international community.

As long as Arafat is present in the West Bank and Gaza strip, no other Palestinian leader will emerge that is capable of simultaneously withstanding two fronts –the Islamic radical terrorist organizations and Arafat himself.

Even pragmatic Palestinian leaders who understand that tackling the Islamic radical organizations is in their own best interest, would not dare to declare Fitna (Civil War) against the terrorist organizations.

Since Hamas and PIJ will never recognize the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish state, will spare no effort to bring about its destruction and will never volunteer to dismantle themselves, there is no real prospect for a viable peace initiative in the Middle East as long as the Palestinians will choose Hudna over Fitna and as long as Arafat is in control there.

