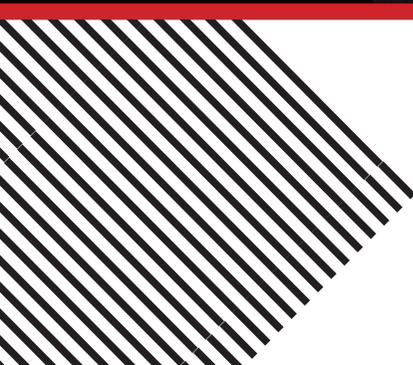


A close-up portrait of a man with white hair, a mustache, and gold-rimmed glasses. He is wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a striped tie. The background is dark with horizontal lines on the left side.

MIXED
MESSAGES

ABBAS AND
PALESTINIANS
ON ISRAEL 2014-16

A decorative graphic consisting of a series of parallel diagonal lines in black and white, forming a triangular shape.

DAVID POLLOCK

DAVID POLLOCK

MIXED
MESSAGES

ABBAS AND
PALESTINIANS
ON ISRAEL 2014-16



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Photo: Mahmoud Abbas, February 2016 (REUTERS/Franck Robichon/Pool)

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DAVID POLLOCK
April 2016



FIG 1



FIG 2



FIG 3



FIG 4



FIG 5



FIG 6



FIG 7

INTRODUCTION

Behind the illusion of impasse, much has happened in the Israeli-Palestinian arena since April 2014: the final failure of U.S. mediation in April 2014; another attempt at “unity” between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Hamas; a war in Gaza in the summer of 2014; an uptick in violence in Jerusalem toward the end of 2014 and again late in 2015; and new Palestinian efforts in international forums, like the United Nations and the International Criminal Court. In light of all this, it is useful to reexamine whether and how PA messaging has shifted during this period. This paper analyzes that government’s messages concerning the key issues at stake: the two-state solution, normalization and reconciliation with Israel, refugees, negotiations versus unilateral “lawfare,” Jerusalem and its Holy Places, armed resistance, and hate speech or incitement to violence.

As of early 2016, official PA and ruling Fatah Party media and cabinet-level officials continue to praise Palestinians who shoot or stab Israeli civilians to death as “heroes” and “martyrs.”¹ PA president Mahmoud Abbas does not publicly endorse that violence, but neither does he condemn it anymore, as he did on several occasions in past years. The latest Palestinian public opinion polls, too, show wide popular support for this kind of “armed resistance.” Official talk of negotiations, peace, reconciliation, or even the “two-state solution” has become conspicuous by its absence. How and why this significant transition in official and popular Palestinian discourse occurred are the subjects of this paper.

In late March and early April 2016, Abbas abruptly adopted a new, relatively conciliatory tone toward Israel. He met with a few Israeli delega-

tions, including one comprising Jewish refugees from Arab lands, and gave a rare interview on Israeli television noting his rejection of violence and desire for peace and even negotiations with Israel. But this charm offensive is in sharp contrast to his behavior, and that of his government and ruling Fatah party, over the preceding two years.

The discussion that follows is organized first thematically and then chronologically, as best befits each topic. The focus throughout is on the official statements, media, and social media of the PA and its ruling Fatah Party, with the expressed views of Hamas, other factions and movements, independent media, and individuals largely excluded. This investigation of PA and Fatah messaging is followed by an analysis of Palestinian public opinion on the same issues, divided into four phases over eighteen months, in a search for convergence of or divergence between official messages and popular attitudes. Finally, a concluding section examines possible policy implications of the analysis.

As the author has previously documented in detail, a kind of “division of labor” has long existed in PA messaging, with splits between English and Arabic; Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas and his entourage; the PA and Fatah; and print and broadcast media versus websites and social media. The net effect is to create a web of ambiguity about the authentic PA position. (Much the same can be said about the current Israeli government, but that is a subject for a different report.) That pattern, as this study will demonstrate, persists into the present. But the most recent period covered here began with an extra layer of ambiguity: self-proclaimed “unity” between the PA and Hamas, which categorically rejects the very idea of permanent peace with Israel. Detailing the content, changes, and effects of PA messaging during the latest phase is, therefore, an especially complex challenge.

The PA has President Abbas and his senior lieutenants presenting its message to both domestic and international audiences, who often hear different stories. And PA messaging relies on Fatah leaders and other officials to convey positions that are not directly in line with the formal PA position. Government media sources, such as the PA’s official newspaper, *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, present both the PA official and PA-affiliated viewpoints. *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah* sometimes presents contradictory viewpoints, providing a platform for present and former PA and Fatah offi-

cials in op-eds while providing the PA line on various current events. Even unofficial West Bank sources, such as Maan News Agency, are partly controlled by PA censorship, although they sometimes publish articles unflattering to the PA.

So journalism is another important form of indirect messaging by the PA, because of its increasingly strict censorship of the press; independent media are subject to both formal and informal restraints.² The wise analyst is well advised to avoid crudely lumping all these sources together—but also to check the words of senior PA officials against the less diplomatic, more extreme, and possibly more accurate messaging of lower-level spokespersons.

1.

THEMES IN PA MESSAGING

The Palestinian Authority's decision in April 2014 to join with Hamas in a "unity government" prompted some to question the former's commitment to the peace process with Israel. Unlike Fatah, Hamas has consistently refused to recognize Israel, acknowledge previous agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), or renounce armed resistance. This chapter reviews statements made by the PA since the reconciliation agreement regarding the two-state solution, normalization, armed resistance, and refugees and elicits a clearer picture of its current (and likely future) position.

PA "RECONCILIATION" WITH HAMAS: TWO STATES OR TWO STAGES?

Some level of hate speech has long pervaded official PA media, but the government's messaging under President Mahmoud Abbas's tenure has significantly moderated since 2005. Even Israeli sources have recently compared PA messaging favorably to Hamas messaging. As of late 2013, the author's detailed assessment concluded, "These rival Palestinian governments are vastly different in their practice of incitement."³ But the unity government with Hamas raised new questions about the direction of PA messaging.

The announcement from Cairo of the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation agreement drew sharp criticism from both U.S. and Israeli officials. Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu declared, "What happened today in Cairo is a mortal blow to peace and a great victory for terrorism."⁴ He later elucidated this point, saying, "Hamas is committed to our

destruction,” he said. “We remain committed to advancing the peace, preferably a negotiated peace. But we can only negotiate with a government whose constituent parts are committed to peace.”⁵ In other words, Netanyahu rebuked Fatah for its decision to enter into an agreement with Hamas and called into question its commitment to the peace process as a result.

On Netanyahu’s left flank, Justice Minister Tzipi Livni similarly denounced the move. In a post on her Facebook page, she wrote, “The reconciliation agreement that Mahmoud Abbas signed with Hamas is a bad step, which not only caused the cancelation of the meeting⁶ but cast a heavy shadow on the possibility to progress.”⁷ And on Netanyahu’s right flank, Naftali Bennett, the minister of the economy, took an even harsher tone in his condemnation of the reconciliation agreement. “We don’t talk to murderers,” he said. “The agreement among Fatah, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad brings the Middle East to a new diplomatic era. The (PA) turned into the largest terrorist organization in the world, 20 minutes from Tel Aviv.”⁸ In short, the response from Israeli officials was overwhelmingly negative, with the reconciliation agreement widely believed to signify the PA’s renegeing on the peace process.

U.S. officials also issued a number of statements signaling their disapproval of the agreement and cautioning President Abbas and the PA on Hamas’s role in the unity government. In a phone call with Abbas, Secretary of State John Kerry noted his “concern about Hamas’s role in any such government.”⁹ In remarks to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), days after the reconciliation deal was announced, Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. permanent representative to the UN, expressed the United States’ concern regarding Hamas’s inclusion in the government, given the latter’s repeated objections to previously stipulated conditions. She said, “Any Palestinian government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to nonviolence, recognition of the state of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations between the parties,” and went on to emphasize that Washington’s relationship to the new government would be assessed based on its adherence to these principles.¹⁰

In a dramatic retelling, Azzam al-Ahmed, member of the Fatah Central Committee, described how a senior American contact urged Fatah “polite[ly]” then “threateningly” not to sign the reconciliation agree-

ment with Hamas in Cairo, lest Congress halt aid to the PA after its union with a U.S.-designated terrorist group. President Abbas, Ahmad recalled to the official PA newspaper, “responded immediately:...“The unity of our people means more than the satisfaction of Congress, and all the money in the world.””¹¹ This vignette, a Palestinian official’s version of the birth of the reconciliation agreement, presents in miniature the various intertwining aspects of analyzing PA messaging.

The PA has historically supported the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This refers to the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, roughly based upon the 1967 borders of the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, and represents the major international and regional proposals (i.e., the Arab Peace Initiative) to resolve the conflict. A close analysis of statements made by the PA’s officials and in publications since the reconciliation agreement, however, raises doubts about the strength of that support. Post-reconciliation statements by Abbas and several key members of the PA suggest their policy is to maintain support for a two-state solution but to distance the new government from that view, emphasizing its noncommittal, technocratic nature.

Following the announcement of the unity government, President Abbas came under considerable pressure from the United States, Europe, and Israel to clarify the PA’s position on the two-state solution. On April 24, 2014, the day after signing the reconciliation agreement, Abbas stressed that little had changed, despite the addition of Hamas: “There is no contradiction between reconciliation and negotiations...Reconciliation will contribute to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state and its capital, East Jerusalem.”¹² Abbas continued to emphasize this point, stating on June 2, 2014, that his government would “naturally abide, like its predecessors, by the commitments of the Palestinian Authority and signed agreements and our political programme...[to establish a Palestinian state living] in security and peace alongside the state of Israel in accordance with the two-state solution.”¹³

Later that month, Abbas issued a number of other such statements. On June 10, 2014, he said:

Truthfully, the reconciliation happened on our terms and conditions, and we agreed to a government of independent technocrats...We agreed to commit the unity government to my policies

that I have written, including recognizing Israel, renouncing violence, abiding by international laws, and accepting peaceful resistance and negotiations.¹⁴

Similarly, in a speech to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation on June 19 in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Abbas again stated the unity government's position on the two-state solution. He emphatically declared,

This [unity] government will not deal with negotiations or policy making, but will remain committed to the political agenda of the PLO. What is this agenda? This agenda is the following: The Palestinian government recognizes Israel; we recognize Israel. The government renounces terrorism; we renounce terrorism. The government recognizes the legitimacy of international commitments; we recognize the legitimacy of international commitments. Also we added to those points that the government believes in negotiations, and even if it cannot participate in them, it is the PLO that participates in them.¹⁵

It must be noted, however, that Abbas has, on occasion, slipped into official public pronouncements that all of Israel, not just the land it captured in 1967, is occupied Palestinian territory. In a speech to the UN Human Rights Council on October 28, 2015, broadcast on official PA television, Abbas asked, "How long will this protracted Israeli occupation of our land last? After sixty-seven years [since Israel's creation in 1948, two decades before any occupation of the West Bank and Gaza], how long?" Later in the same speech, he again alluded to "the holy sites that have been desecrated...for seven decades now under an occupation that does not quit killing, torturing, looting and imprisoning."¹⁶

On the narrower issue of unity with Hamas versus peace talks with Israel, other PA officials struck similar chords, with "government of technocrats" becoming the principal means of describing the government and lessening the connotation of changes in policy. Shortly after the Palestinian factions signed the unity deal, Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the PA and the official spokesperson of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks, explained, "There is no contradiction between negotiations and reconciliation." She went on to say that "this is not a political government, but rather a technocratic government commissioned to provide public services. However, the PLO has its rules that

all parties wishing to enter it must follow, including abiding by previous agreements.”¹⁷ In clarifying that all parties to the unity government must accept the PLO’s policies and previous agreements, Ashrawi suggests that negotiations and even the two-state solution are still the official policy of the PA.

Saeb Erekat, a close confidant of Abbas and the chief negotiator of the PLO, has offered support for the two-state solution within a slightly different context and in direct response to international criticism of the reconciliation agreement. Erekat stated,

The Israeli government has refused to recognize Palestine’s right to exist on the 1967 border, although the PLO recognized Israel twenty-six years ago...And the moment we sign a national reconciliation agreement upon a single political platform that recognizes all previously signed agreements between Palestine and Israel, Netanyahu and his government blame us.¹⁸

Yet while these senior PA officials confirmed their new government’s commitment to its prior agreements, sources farther removed from the core but still affiliated soon presented a different image. Especially after the resumption of Israel-Hamas combat in the summer of 2014, some Fatah Central Committee members made increasingly contradictory remarks. One such voice was that of committee member Abbas Zaki. During an interview on the satellite TV program *Hawwar al-Youm* on August 4, 2014, Zaki exclaimed,

Absolutely no return to negotiations with that monster entity, which has blood on its hands...That barbaric and savage enemy... We have requested international protection and want the international community to define them as terrorist because the greatest form of terrorism is occupation.¹⁹

Fatah official Tawfiq al-Tirawi also made remarks contradicting much of what Abbas and other PA officials had said about the two-state solution. On August 5, 2014, Tirawi wrote a note on his official Facebook page expressing solidarity with Gazans. In it, he described his vision for the future of Palestine, saying, “Oh, our family of free people in Gaza, Palestine, who have been promised freedom, independence, and the end of the occupation of all the pure soil from the sea to the river... Long live a free Gaza.”²⁰ Tirawi’s call for a Palestine from “the river to

the sea” was a blatant repudiation of the two-state solution and the continued existence of Israel.

Similarly, Mahmoud Habbash, who served as the minister of religious affairs for the PA until June 2014 and now serves as the religious advisor to President Abbas, delivered a Friday sermon in early December 2014 calling for the return of the entire historic Palestine. During his sermon, Habbash outlined an image of the future where

all of this land will return to us, all our occupied land, all our rights in Palestine—our state, our people’s heritage, our ancestors’ legacy—all of it will return to us even if it takes time. Patience is the key to victory, and we are patient. In terms of resistance, all options are on the table, and in terms of diplomacy, as well.²¹

Soon afterward, Habbash claimed Jews have no right to Jerusalem, and that Israel had been falsifying facts about the Jewish connection to the city. In February 2015, WAFA, the official news agency of the PA, reported that Habbash had issued a statement to UNESCO asking the organization to stop Israeli attempts to “Judaize” Jerusalem and saying that, despite such attempts, “this will not change the fact that it is the religious, political, and spiritual capital of Palestine, to which the Jews have no right.”²²

Official PA media outlets have also published a variety of positions on the two-state solution. Yahya Rabah, a regular columnist for *al-Hayat al-Jadidah* and former member of the Fatah Revolutionary Council, has supported the two-state solution, but in vague terms. On April 23, 2014, Rabah wrote in his column that

the first stage of reconciliation presented an opportunity that we should take advantage of to complete it in terms of reforming the national institutions, reclaiming a national fabric not tarnished by deep division...ending the occupation, and establishing a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem.²³

Although Rabah’s designation of East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state suggests he supported a two-state solution, he failed to mention Israel as a neighboring state. In another column on April 26, he also skirted the issue, writing,

We want an end to the occupation through negotiations, no problem, through resistance, no problem, through international rec-

ognition, no problem. However, Israel continues to act without restraint and continues to neglect its commitments...so, welcome, national reconciliation.²⁴

Amr Helmi al-Ghoul, also a columnist for *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, offered clearer support for a two-state solution but remained quite skeptical of Israel's motivations. On April 26, 2014, he wrote,

Unity of the people and the land is a national priority not superseded by any other priority and the existence of national unity must parallel any political arrangement. We also cannot concede any part of the 1967 occupied territories intended for an independent sovereign Palestinian state with its capital East Jerusalem.²⁵

He further stated, "It is the leadership and the Palestinian people's choice to commit to internationally binding decisions and recognizing Israel."²⁶ Ghoul, like Rabah, presented the unity government in the context of a necessary response to the deteriorating relations between Israel and Palestine. By mentioning the 1967 lines and East Jerusalem and expressing his support for recognition of Israel, he was clearly supportive of the two-state solution.

On May 4, 2014, Ghoul penned another piece discussing the United States' role as mediator, in which he wrote,

America should reexamine its ways of dealing with the Israeli government and regulate it and compel it to commit to international decisions regarding the peace process, to withdraw from the 1967 occupied territories, and to cultivate peaceful, neighborly relations between the two states.²⁷

Even though Ghoul contended Israel's obstinacy was the major obstacle to a peace agreement, his call for the United States to encourage Israel to foster neighborly and peaceful relations with a Palestinian state signaled a genuine preference for the two-state solution.

Munib al-Masri, a prominent Palestinian businessman from Nablus, presented a less optimistic assessment of the two-state solution, emerging from an understanding of the situation similar to Ghoul's. Masri published an article in *al-Hayat al-Jadidah* in which he appeared supportive of a two-state solution but no longer trustful of Israel as a part-

ner in the peace process. Masri expressed his frustration about the lack of progress and the concurrent decline in Palestinian living conditions:

These results have forced the Palestinians to partake in *Kufr* [infidelity], otherwise known as negotiations. The occupation has attempted to put an end to the Palestinian national project under the guise of terms such as “the peace process” and “permanent arrangement”...preventing Palestinians from attaining their rights to a state along 1967 lines with a capital in East Jerusalem and a solution to the refugee issue according to [United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution] 194.²⁸

This type of discourse represents an interesting juxtaposition within PA-affiliated discourse, where rhetoric similar to that of those with more extreme views, soundly denouncing Israel and rejecting negotiations, also presents Palestinian “rights” as being only to the land beyond the 1967 boundaries rather than the entirety of Israeli territory. However, the reference to UNGA 194 also reserves the Palestinian refugee “right of return.”

Adding to the currently ambivalent attitude toward the two-state solution is the absence of explicit references to it on Fatah’s official Facebook page. Instead, the page has displayed pictures of Palestine that include not only the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, but also Israel’s sovereign territory.²⁹ And some senior Fatah officials have made this explicit. In late 2014, for instance, the reliably hardline Tawfiq al-Tirawi told Hona al-Quds TV, “The two-state solution has ended and no longer exists after Israel abolished it completely.”³⁰ Similarly, in late 2015, official PA television and social media periodically referred to all of pre-1967 Israel as “occupied” Palestine, which would someday “return to us.”

Such departures from the two-state formula no longer represented an effort to find common ground with Hamas. By mid-2015, the unity government that had lingered for over a year had begun to crumble, with Mahmoud Abbas calling for a reshuffling of the government, and an upswing of incitement between Hamas and the PA beginning once again. Hamas was reporting arrests of its members by West Bank security forces almost daily, and the senior PA officials’ tone when discussing reconciliation had shied away from any concrete commitments. Abbas’s nominal resignation as secretary-general of the PLO only compounded

the opacity of domestic Palestinian politics, with experts torn on whether he wished to retire or to consolidate power.

In any case, as the above analysis indicates, the question of a genuine versus merely tactical acceptance of a two-state solution by the PA—meaning permanent peace with Israel—is only partly linked to the PA’s flirtations with Hamas. Leaving Hamas entirely aside, plenty of internal evidence exists within PA and Fatah messaging strongly suggesting that the dream of liberating all of Palestine someday, including pre-1967 Israel, remains part of their ethos. As seen in figure 1 (see page vi), Fatah often uses images depicting Palestine as the whole of the West Bank, Gaza, and pre-1967 Israel in its promotional materials. When reconciliation with Hamas is on the table, that ambiguity tends to be papered over; when the rival Palestinian movements are drifting farther apart, it tends to move toward lower-level PA or Fatah officials.

What can clearly be established is that, even in the context of a two-state solution, precious little PA messaging ever treats peace with Israel as a positive good rather than, at best, a necessary means of gaining Palestinian independence. Visions of reconciliation with Israel, instead (or perhaps even alongside) of reconciliation with Hamas, have not featured in PA rhetoric lately. Discussions of any long-term prospects for cooperation, or just common interests, are conspicuous by their absence. That is why, when Abbas spoke at the UN General Assembly in September 2015, he offered many examples of Israeli “aggression” or “criminality” or “extremism.” But when he announced that the PA was fostering a “culture of peace,” he did not provide a single example.

Even among PA officials, careful analysis of PA discourse demonstrates that, while elements within the PA, such as Abbas and Erekat, have reaffirmed support for negotiations and the two-state solution, others, such as Zaki and Tirawi, have undermined it and called for the elimination of Israel. Since its unity agreement with Hamas, the PA has largely failed to present a unified and clear message on the two-state solution.

JEWISH STATE

By contrast, on one increasingly salient related issue, Abbas and his entire entourage have remained clearly and consistently negative. Abbas has issued a number of statements over the past two years saying he will

never accept defining Israel as a Jewish state. In January 2014, while meeting with East Jerusalem residents at the Mukata, he commented, “This is a story that we have heard only in the last two years. We won’t recognize and accept the Jewishness of Israel. We have many excuses and reasons that prevent us from doing so.”³¹ He reiterated this position in late November at an Arab League meeting, remarking, “We will never recognize the Jewishness of the state of Israel,”³² and again in early April, saying, “We unequivocally reject a Jewish state, and we will not concede this issue.”³³ In late April, Abbas declared,

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, close to a million Russians returned to Israel, including Muslims and Christians, and they became citizens in Israel that pray in mosques and churches. How do they ask of us to recognize a Jewish state? No, we will not recognize a Jewish state.³⁴

In other statements, Abbas has made clear that his refusal to recognize a Jewish state does not, in his view, contravene recognizing either the state of Israel or the freedom of religion. In an interview in April 2014 with journalist Gilad Sher, he remarked,

First, the two-state vision must become real, in which the State of Israel will live alongside the State of Palestine on the 1967 borders in security and stability. The second most important section is that East Jerusalem be the capital of the Palestinian State. Jerusalem will remain open to all religions with arrangements between the two parties. The borders of the Palestinian State will eventually be in the hands of Palestinians, not the Israelis. The refugee issue must be addressed based on the guidelines of the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for [a] just and agreed solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees according to UNGA resolution 194.³⁵

Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesperson of the Palestinian presidency and a Fatah Central Committee member, echoed Abbas in December 2014: “The PLO recognized Israel in 1993 in the framework of mutual recognition. Thus, there is no need to recognize Israel as [a] Jewish state.”³⁶ Hanan Ashrawi has made similar statements, saying the Israelis

do not want the Palestinian refugees to enjoy their right of return... We, the Palestinians, do not have the right of return even though we bear the property deeds and the keys of our houses...Accept-

ing a Jewish State does not only mean the automatic acceptance of Zionism, but also the exclusion of Palestinians, completing the Nakba of 1948.

Sultan Abu al-Einein, another member of the Fatah Central Committee, also repudiated the notion of a Jewish state. In an interview with P.N. News in August 2015, he said, “Accepting a Jewish state means accepting a new expulsion of 1.6 million Palestinians who have held firmly onto their land since 1948...and accepting the erasure of the right of return for Palestinian refugees in the diaspora.”³⁷ Saeb Erekat, yet another Fatah Central Committee member and chief of the PLO’s Negotiations Bureau, made a typically sarcastic comment about this issue in October 2014: “The Israeli government is trying to transform this conflict into a religious conflict, and while its prime minister talks about the Islamic State Organization and its dangers, he pretends to forget that he leads the Jewish State Organization.”³⁸

Overall, however, after the collapse of peace talks, the “Jewish state” question tended to fade from PA public discourse. Behind the scenes, the PA and Abbas personally reportedly maintained their adamant objections to this formula, even at the price of forfeiting potential diplomatic tradeoffs. In 2014–2015, on several occasions when the United States or France proposed “Jewish state” or “Jewish people” formulations, even in parallel with greater recognition for an independent Palestinian state, the PA apparently rejected this notion out of hand. It even lobbied hard, and successfully, to convince other Arab governments to refuse this offer as well.

NORMALIZATION

Another important indicator of developing a robust peace process is the normalization of relations between Israelis and Palestinians. In this arena, although President Abbas and the PA have articulated a formal recognition of Israel, views in the discourse vary.

Regarding one aspect of normalization—Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation—Abbas has typically refrained from explicitly suggesting a rupture; rather, he explicitly supports cooperation. For example, after three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped in early June 2014, Abbas said in an interview that the Palestinian government “will not intervene in poli-

tics, but [is] committed to PLO positions: recognizing Israel, rejecting terrorism, abiding by international law, participating in negotiations and peaceful protests, believing in security cooperation with Israel; we will not allow a third intifada.”³⁹

Furthermore, Abbas subsequently met with Israeli officials, convening with Isaac Herzog, the leader of the Labor Party and the opposition in the Israeli parliament, in mid-September 2014.⁴⁰ There are even reports that he met with Yoram Cohen, the head of the Israel Security Agency (ISA), in late August 2014 to discuss an alleged foiled Hamas plot to overthrow Fatah in the West Bank.⁴¹ But Abbas steadfastly refused to meet Netanyahu in 2014 and drastically curtailed meetings even with the Israeli Jewish “peace camp” during that period. In 2014, he was also quoted as opposing a boycott of Israel; subsequently, his office “clarified” that position into support for a civil society or NGO boycott, if not an official one, and later into support for boycotting settlements, if not all of Israel.

Other PA officials were even less forthcoming. In August 2014, during the Gaza war, Fatah Central Committee member Mahmoud al-Aloul called for a boycott of all Israeli products. He explained that the Palestinian consumer market is the second biggest for Israeli products and, therefore, “the economic arena is one of the most important elements of pressure on the occupation state.”⁴² Aloul’s support for this boycott initiative clearly advocated against normalization of relations with Israel.

A month later, in September 2014, Jibril Rajoub, Fatah Central Committee member and chairman of the Palestinian Football Association (PFA), called for a boycott of an Israeli-Palestinian soccer match sponsored by the Peres Center for Peace, stating, “Any activity of normalization in sports with the Zionist enemy is a crime against humanity.”⁴³ Rajoub argued that, in organizing the game, Israel was attempting “to cover up their crimes against [Palestinian] athletes.”⁴⁴

In 2015, the PFA successfully added a motion to vote on suspending Israel from FIFA, the international soccer organization, to the agenda of the May FIFA congress. In the days leading up to the congress, Rajoub stated clearly, “[I] will not withdraw the motion and will not accept any compromise and any side deals.”⁴⁵ He defended his position again dur-

ing his speech to the congress on May 29, saying, “I think it’s time now to raise the red card for racism, humiliation, and discrimination in Palestine and everywhere.”⁴⁶

Israel countered with a compromise proposal, however, which included forming a joint committee to monitor soccer-related issues, easing travel for Palestinian players, facilitating soccer-related projects in the West Bank, and covering the costs of tax and customs for imported sports equipment. FIFA delegates overwhelmingly voted in favor of the compromise, and Rajoub withdrew his motion to suspend Israel. After shaking the hand of his Israeli counterpart, Ofer Eini, he explained, “I decided to drop the suspension, but it does not mean that I give up the resistance.”⁴⁷

The above survey of PA statements on normalizing relations with Israel reveals that, from 2014 to early 2015, President Abbas was a rare voice of moderation. Most other PA members either avoided engaging with the issue or called for economic and even cultural boycotts of Israel, obviously hindering a robust culture of peace. But Abbas himself has since been drifting toward a harsher position. From early 2015 to early 2016, he has refrained from public meetings with any Israeli government officials—meeting, in fact, only very rarely with Israelis of any kind, except for Arab members of the Knesset.

REFUGEES

On the topic of Palestinian refugees and the “right of return,” statements by PA officials from April 2014 to date have ranged from calls to implement the Arab Peace Initiative based on UNGA Resolution 194 to demands for a full-fledged return of refugees. In the weeks following the signing of the unity agreement with Hamas, President Abbas made a few statements suggesting some limited flexibility on the refugee issue, while still implicitly clinging to the right of return. In particular, he addressed the issue on May 15, 2014, during his Nakba Day commemoration speech, by saying, “We will work with any effort focused on a two-state solution, ending the Israeli occupation, and finding a just solution to the refugee issue as stipulated in the Arab Peace Initiative.”⁴⁸ He reiterated a similar message in a subsequent statement, declaring, “This government is committed to the PA’s positions...

[including] a solution to the refugee issue as stated in the Arab Peace Initiative.”⁴⁹ These statements reflect a relatively conciliatory tone, as his reference to the initiative implies support for a compromise on the refugee problem by calling for an “agreed upon” solution.

Abbas later made more detailed statements about the refugee issue, which helped clarify some of his earlier remarks. During an interview with Sada al-Balad, an Egyptian TV station, on August 23, 2014, he said,

There’s an Arab Initiative to which the whole world has agreed... What does it call for? It calls for a just and agreed upon solution to resolve the refugee issue in accordance with UNGA Resolution 194. What does resolution 194 say? It says reparations for those who do not desire to return. Again, it says reparations for those who do not desire to return. That means pay me the value of my land. This [choice] is made by the citizen. Another important point is that the right of return is an individual right. What does that mean? It means if I want to return and my son does not, he [is not obligated]; he is free to make his own choice. As long as I have my right, I want to exercise my right....The Arab Initiative emerged in this form to resolve this issue.⁵⁰

In this statement, Abbas reiterated many of his previous points, but he also interpreted the Arab Peace Initiative and UNGA Resolution 194 to allow each Palestinian to choose if he or she wants to return or receive reparations. In other words, Abbas does not think a Palestinian government can annul the individual right of return.

Other Fatah leaders have also cited the resolution, but usually without mention of the words “agreed upon.” For example, in April 2014, Azzam al-Ahmed said, “The PLO leads the Palestinian people to ending the occupation and establishing a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and finding a solution to the refugee issue according to UNGA Resolution 194.”⁵¹ He echoed these remarks a day later, saying, “There must be a solution to the refugee issue in accordance with UNGA Resolution 194.”⁵²

Tawfiq al-Tirawi has taken an even harder line on this issue, as on many others. During a speech on Nakba Day 2014, he said, “Our stubbornness will not be broken, and nothing other than a full return will be accepted.”⁵³ In so saying, Tirawi rejected any form of compromise with

Israel. Moreover, he did not base his comment on any specific UN resolution or other international decision, making him an outlier relative to Abbas and other PA officials.

A number of authors for the official PA daily *al-Hayat al-Jadidah* have also discussed the issue of refugees. Amr Helmi al-Ghoul has mentioned it on many occasions and consistently called for “the return of refugees according to UNGA Resolution 194.”⁵⁴ Leading businessman-cum-politician Munib al-Masri echoed Ghoul in an op-ed in which he urged relevant parties to find “a solution to the refugee issue according to UNGA 194.”⁵⁵ *Al-Hayat al-Jadidah* has also published more uncompromising voices, however, such as Issa Abd al-Hafiz, who wrote, “We seek the realization of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and the right of return,” without any caveats or qualifiers.⁵⁶ Muwaffaq Matar, another columnist, also wrote that “the right of return for refugees is connected to the free choice and the individual wishes of the Palestinian refugee. It is considered to be a human and sacred right that no power in the world can deny”⁵⁷—clearly suggesting the matter is not open for negotiation.

In sum, while Abbas has often expressed his support for a solution to the refugee issue in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, other high-ranking PA officials have continued to invoke UNGA resolution 194 alone—dating all the way back to 1948, and with no reference to any “agreed upon” arrangements. And some senior PA and Fatah officials even call for a full return of all Palestinian refugees. On this issue, as on others, the PA sends mixed messages at different levels, leaving its real position perennially open to question.

ARMED RESISTANCE

Both “armed resistance” and “popular resistance” are embedded in the narrative of the Palestinian people as two central yet differing strategies in their struggle against occupation. Armed resistance includes the use of weapons and force, with often lethal consequences for Israelis. As figure 2 demonstrates (see page vi), images of violence and the Palestinian struggle are often intertwined with imagery of revolution. With its slogan “Revolution until Victory,” the poster implies the violence will continue. On the other hand, popular resistance, also considered peace-

ful resistance, excludes the use of violence and favors protests, strikes, and other such methods of opposition.

The PA leadership toes a delicate line between recognizing the role armed resistance has played in its struggle and recommending more peaceful methods as the conflict wears on. President Abbas, for example, has repeatedly articulated that the PA is committed to popular resistance as its primary form of resistance.

In mid-2014, after the incident in which three Israeli teenagers were kidnapped in the West Bank, Abbas unequivocally condemned the action and publicly demanded, in Arabic as well as in English, that the youths be returned home safely. “[They] are human beings,” he declared.⁵⁸ The three were eventually found dead, with responsibility laid to Hamas rather than to Fatah or the PA. In general, Abbas has been more likely to repudiate Hamas than Fatah or “lone wolf” Palestinian terrorist operations.

During the subsequent war in Gaza, however, President Abbas did seem to suggest armed resistance could play a role. In a speech on July 22, 2014, he described a Palestinian return to Jerusalem using both religious and military imagery:

Your wound is our wound and is the great anger that is within us. We will never forgive and never forget. Our people will kneel only before Allah...Praise and eternal life to our brave martyrs. Victory, if Allah wills it, for truth, justice, and the will of our people, which has paid a very high price for its freedom and independence. The killing and destruction will not frighten us. We will rebuild what the aggression has destroyed and dress our wounds when we inevitably win and the banners of Jerusalem fly high over al-Aqsa and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, the capital of the independent state of Palestine, if Allah wills it.⁵⁹

The most striking aspect of reactions to the latest Hamas-Israel clashes is an act of omission: the PA and Abbas did not call for Hamas to stop firing rockets into Israeli cities. This contradicted Abbas’s previous declarations that the new PA government and its Hamas backers would honor past PA commitments regarding nonviolence against Israel. Instead, Abbas’s office claimed, “The Palestinians have the right to defend themselves by all legitimate means” against “Israeli escalation.”⁶⁰ PA messaging, moreover, made no effort to distinguish between

the Hamas “political leadership”—which signed the reconciliation agreement with the PA’s ruling Fatah Party and may have attempted to restrain the initial rocket salvos—and the Hamas “military wing,” which some PA officials privately blamed for trying to torpedo reconciliation by firing indiscriminately at Israel. Ironically, pro-Hamas Palestinian media took the PA to task for offering mere verbal support, even as it largely strove to maintain calm and coordination with Israel in the West Bank territory it controls. Fatah’s own military wing—the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades—further muddled Fatah’s political responses to the conflict (see figure 3, page vi).

In March 2015, after the Gaza conflict, Sultan Abu al-Einein, a Fatah Central Committee member, addressed the issue of violence on his Facebook page in response to Israeli minister of foreign affairs Avigdor Liberman’s statement that “those who are against us...we need to pick up an ax and cut off his head.” Einein wrote:

I say to all our Palestinian people that peace is inconceivable, and that it is now impossible to go back to any [form of] negotiations with such people. We must prepare ourselves for opening the options of resistance, in order to cut [out] the tongues of all of the Israeli enemy’s Libermans and to purify our land of their terror.⁶¹

Violent themes have also been promoted by official PA music and television. Recently, for example, official PA TV broadcast a music video memorializing Yasser Arafat with the lyrics “*Yasser Arafat, rest in peace, rest in peace / While we continue the struggle, the struggle / By Allah, we won’t throw down our weapons / We treat the rifle as a brother/We treat the rifle as a brother.*”⁶²

Similarly, Mahmoud al-Aloul, the previously mentioned Fatah Central Committee member who is also former governor of the PA’s Nablus governorate, still espouses a strong belief in armed struggle against Israel. As recently as January 7, 2016, Aloul stressed at a celebration for Fatah Day that

despite the prolonged pressure and siege on the revolutionaries in Beirut [in 1981] and the attempt to uproot them...they persevered on their path to the first and second intifadas...The message of the Fatah movement to the occupier is clear: continued resistance until [the occupation] is removed.⁶³

Such statements, though not a direct call to arms, attempt to justify and encourage more forceful and hostile behavior on behalf of Palestinian “resistance.”

Other PA officials not only include armed resistance as an integral part of their struggle but emphasize it as the predominant method by which to achieve their goals, as seen in figure 4 (page vi). In a television interview, for example, Abbas Zaki explained the historic ties between Fatah and the armed resistance:

From where did the reaction come when Mahmoud Abbas and the political leadership announced that we cannot take it any longer?...Who took action? The young from the Oslo generation who are in the prime of their youth did, [those] whom Allah chose and loved. They chose the path of Martyrdom. Yes, they marched of their own will on the illuminated path to Paradise. They succeeded in making Israel worry, with rocks and knives.⁶⁴

In a November 22, 2015, TV interview, Zaki went even further:

The purpose of ISIS, the Islamic State, is to provide an excuse for the Jewish state’s existence, except for the difference that this one [the Islamic State] is doomed to disappear, and this one [Israel] to remain...I believe the situation cannot be fixed, and the only way to save the region is to remove from the body this cancer that is Israel, which is the reason for all the types of backwardness and destruction.⁶⁵

This complete rejection of any Israeli state stands in clear contrast to Abbas’s statements noted earlier.

In sum, PA senior officials’ discourse concerning armed resistance since the unity agreement between Fatah and Hamas remains mixed. Abbas, as PA president, has deliberately endorsed popular resistance over armed resistance and promised that even reconciliation with Hamas will not entail an embrace of the latter. Meanwhile, other members of the Fatah Central Committee, such as Aloul, have maintained a commitment to armed resistance in conjunction with popular resistance as a joint strategy for Palestinians. And, at the extreme, PA officials like Abbas Zaki have promoted armed resistance as the primary method.

By comparison, Fatah websites and social media have been more con-

sistent—but in maintaining full support for armed struggle. During the most recent Gaza war, the official Fatah Facebook page frequently displayed photos and statements supporting and celebrating armed resistance, sometimes valorizing the participation of Fatah’s al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. On February 20, 2016, a post appeared commemorating the actions of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades during the second intifada, cautioning its readers not to forget “the heroic operation on the occupation’s checkpoint Ain Arik that resulted in the killing of six Zionist soldiers” and picturing an armed al-Aqsa fighter.⁶⁶

Another post further highlighted the ongoing participation of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades in armed resistance:

For he who wonders where the al-Aqsa Brigades are in the West Bank... This is the heroic martyr Zakaria al-Aqra’a, a son of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade who ascended to heaven after a violent clash with the occupation forces in the village of Qiblan for six hours today.

On September 22, 2014, the Fatah Facebook page commemorated the anniversary of the death of Zainab Abu Salim, who “carried out a suicide bombing and killed two Zionist soldiers and injured sixteen others.”⁶⁷ These posts, as seen in figures 5 and 6 (see page vi), and similar to many other examples, openly declared that violence remained part of Fatah’s *modus operandi*.

Altogether, although some PA official messages renounced violence, others continued to endorse armed resistance, throughout 2014 and beyond. Given Abbas’s constant rejections of armed resistance, this double discourse is obviously problematic. The PA’s response to a major upsurge in violence in late 2015, which some have already labeled “the third intifada,” will be examined in a separate section below.

Notwithstanding such screeds, periodic PA threats to stop security coordination with Israel have not been implemented and were openly retracted during this time. In early December 2014, Ziad Abu Ein, the Palestinian minister for resisting the separation wall and settlements, passed away following a physical altercation with the Israel Defense Forces in the northern West Bank village of Turmus Ayya. His death prompted multiple Palestinian leaders to call security cooperation with Israel into question. Abbas did not immediately call for an end to coop-

eration but warned, “We will take the necessary measures after [we know] the results of the investigation.”⁶⁸ Other Palestinian leaders later stated that security cooperation had ended. According to Jibril Rajoub, “The Palestinian leadership decided to end all forms of security cooperation with [Israel].”⁶⁹ Saeb Erekat echoed Rajoub. Nonetheless, the PA ultimately backtracked and decided to maintain security cooperation with Israel.

HATE SPEECH AND ANTI-SEMITISM

Hate speech and anti-Semitism in official PA publications and the official Fatah Facebook page are another point of concern. According to Bakr Abu Bakr, a member of the Fatah Revolutionary Council,

The Israelis [say] that they love life and that we love death, but what they do is the opposite of that. Whoever loves life loves it for all and does not distinguish between one life and another, where his life is of value and other lives are of no value, a touchstone of the commandments of the Talmud that killing bugs and their kind [illiterates/*goyim*] is a virtue.⁷⁰

Abu Bakr further stated that Netanyahu’s belief in “ethnic cleansing... makes Hitler’s Nazi practices against all of his enemies, including the European Jews, record a tremendous victory today. Hitler is happily applauding what Netanyahu is doing, as his death was not in vain.”⁷¹

Al-Hayat al-Jadidah columnist Yahya Rabah described Israel and Israelis using well-established anti-Semitic terminology founded in myths. In an article in July 2014, Rabah discussed why Palestinians should not blame themselves for their problems and were not wrong for firing rockets:

It is all that we have. We have nothing else to speak with in talking to the killer Israelis, who commit crimes and who call their God “Yahweh,” the prince of soldiers who, according to the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, asks them to offer him sacrifices on Passover in the matzo bread with the blood of our children.⁷²

Rabah joined Abu Bakr in describing Israel as the “legal son of Nazism” that had “inherited all the terrorist means of the Nazis.”⁷³ He wrote that Netanyahu was from “Nazi sperm” and “worships Hitler’s path and imitates Hitler in all the holocausts that he has committed.”⁷⁴ Though

Rabah is no longer an official member of the PA leadership, his articles as a columnist for *al-Hayat al-Jadidah* continue to bear a tacit stamp of approval from the government. Invocation of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and blood libels and comparisons of Israel and Netanyahu to Nazi Germany and Hitler, respectively, are flagrant examples of hate speech. Although most PA officials have been more careful to avoid hate speech in public appearances, their official publications have not ceased promulgating it.

Moreover, some senior Fatah officials have lent their voices to this chorus. Jibril Rajoub has made several statements comparing Israelis to the Nazis and Hitler. In discussing the July 2014 war in Gaza, Rajoub stated, “This is the true face of Zionists. I believe that what is happening now, what the new Nazis, Israel, the Israeli Right is doing, is the other face of Hitler, Eichmann, and Goebbels.”⁷⁵ In another interview in early August, Rajoub said, “What happened in the Gaza Strip is unprecedented one-sided aggression and the other face of Nazism.”⁷⁶

In February 2015, Rajoub delivered a scathing interview in which he drew on extremely religiously charged ideas depicting both Jews and Israelis as historically vicious killers. He called Netanyahu “a distorted replica of the Nazism of the 1940s” and went on to say that Israelis “are the slayers of the prophets. These are the people who killed Arafat, killed Ahmad Yaseen, killed Abu Ali Mustafa, and arrested Marwan al-Barghouti. They did not leave any leader or citizen unharmed.”⁷⁷

More recently, however, Muwaffaq Matar, a member of the Fatah Revolutionary Council, objected publicly to some forms of hate speech. In an interview with the Fatah-run television channel Awdah TV, Matar responded to insults levied at him by Hamas:

[Hamas] said: “It seems that Muwaffaq Matar is a descendant of apes and pigs, physically and mentally.” This is racism...Naturally, they use this expression about the Jews. This is unfortunate. We also reject these expressions, because they are not part of our values, absolutely not.”⁷⁸

In addition, some sermons during the past two years by various preachers inside the al-Aqsa Mosque, and as recently as mid-October 2015, have indulged in the most vitriolic anti-Semitic diatribes,⁷⁹ despite repeated PA undertakings to prohibit such incitement. Although these speakers

are not normally the official imams, their presence and their inflammatory, even bloodthirsty, rhetoric are apparently tolerated and even disseminated by the relevant PA officials. Sometimes they are actually broadcast on PA-licensed media, while more often they find their way to the public via social media, especially YouTube. This dimension of PA “messaging by omission” is rarely discussed by Western officials, experts, or media, perhaps because of religious sensitivities. But that is all the more reason to take it quite seriously and to contrast it with PA protestations about its pursuit of peace.

2.

PA MESSAGING: CHRONOLOGY

In September and October 2014, two important developments transpired in the Palestinian political arena: in Cairo, Hamas and Fatah agreed to revive their reconciliation accord; and in New York, President Mahmoud Abbas outlined the Palestinian Authority’s platform at the UN General Assembly. Both developments shed light on the PA’s positions toward Israel.

REAFFIRMING UNITY WITH HAMAS: AUGUST 2014

On September 25, 2014, Hamas and Fatah delegations met in Cairo to resolve the disagreements that had prevented them from implementing the “Beach Agreement,” as their April 2014 unity deal was called. In addition to discussing a variety of issues relating to the rebuilding of Gaza, the delegations spoke about the future of the unity government and its position toward Israel. The specific positions in this new reconciliation agreement did not fully correspond with those outlined by many PA members in the months following the first iteration of the Fatah-Hamas accord.

Regarding the two-state solution and refugees, clause 5 of the new agreement called for

the liberation of the land, the removal of settlements and the evacuation of the settlers, the removal of the separation and annexation racist wall, the achievement of freedom, right of return, independence and self-determination, including the establishment of an independent state with full sovereignty on all Palestinian lands

occupied in 1967, with its capital in Jerusalem, guaranteeing the right of return of refugees to their homes and the liberation of all prisoners and detainees.⁸⁰

Although the agreement clearly supported the establishment of a Palestinian state along the 1967 lines, suggesting support for a two-state solution, it did not specifically mention Israel, peace, or even the term “two-state solution.” This vagueness makes it difficult to determine the unity government’s position on that crucial question. As for the refugee issue, the agreement flatly demanded the right of return without any reference to the Arab Peace Initiative or UNGA Resolution 194, which many PA officials had previously cited. This language obscured whether or not the new unity deal sought a full return of refugees or an “agreed upon” (and possibly compromise) resolution, as stated in the initiative.

A day later, on September 26, Abbas delivered his annual address to the UN General Assembly.⁸¹ He lambasted Israel for undermining the peace process and even claimed Israel had carried out genocide in the most recent war. He also presented, however, a new PLO peace initiative in which he called for a resumption of negotiations for a set, undetermined period to agree to the borders of the Palestinian state based on the two-state solution and a comprehensive settlement. While Abbas did not sound optimistic, he largely restated the positions he had advocated since the unity agreement regarding both the two-state solution and the refugee issue. His remarks about resistance sent an unclear message, though.

Abbas did clearly state that he still supported the two-state solution, explicitly mentioning it in the explanation of his initiative:

This endeavor aspires to correct the deficiency of the previous efforts to achieve peace by affirming the goal of ending the Israeli occupation and achieving the two-state solution, of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, over the entire territory occupied in 1967, alongside the State of Israel.⁸²

Regarding the refugee issue, Abbas again called for “a just and agreed upon solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees on the basis of resolution 194, with a specific timeframe for the implementation of these objectives as stipulated in the Arab Peace Initiative.”⁸³

But as for the issue of armed resistance, Abbas commented:

We will always maintain our respect and commitment to international law, international humanitarian law, and the international consensus, and we will maintain the traditions of our national struggle established by the Palestinian *fedayeen* and to which we committed ourselves since the onset of the Palestinian revolution in early 1965.⁸⁴

In reiterating his commitments to international agreements and obligations, Abbas intimated a commitment to nonviolence, but his endorsement of the Palestinian *fedayin*, who carried out terrorist attacks against Israel, seemed to contradict this. Moreover, in retrospect, this murky language appears to foreshadow the PA's, Fatah's, and even Abbas's own selective support for Palestinian terrorist "martyrs" during a wave of killings exactly one year later.

Abbas's UNGA speech elicited a number of responses from U.S. and Israeli officials, focusing on his characterizations of Israel. U.S. State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki, reacting to Abbas's genocide comment, said, "Such provocative statements are counterproductive and undermine efforts to create a positive atmosphere and restore trust between the parties."⁸⁵ Senior officials in Netanyahu's bureau also responded mainly to the genocide remark, saying the speech was "full of lies and incitement, and this is not the way a man who wants peace speaks."⁸⁶ Despite Abbas's presentation of a plan that seemed consistent with the two-state solution, U.S. and Israeli officials took issue with the other messaging embedded in his speech.

JERUSALEM TENSIONS: AUTUMN 2014

In the past two years, Jerusalem has continued to serve as a point of both verbal and even physical altercation between Israelis and Palestinians, officials and civilians alike. As a site considered holy by both peoples, and as the putative capital of both Israel and Palestine, Jerusalem has been the cause of some of the key tensions during Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. More recently, with no such talks in progress, the city has been the subject of especially strident PA messaging.

PA rhetoric on the issue of a Palestinian right to Jerusalem is a key part of peace negotiations. That “right” generally falls under two categories: the more moderate demand for “East Jerusalem” as the capital of an eventual Palestinian state, or the less moderate demand for “Jerusalem,” with no geographical qualification. The ambiguous terminology can make public discussion of the issue confusing, perhaps intentionally so. Linked to the emphasis on the historical and religious Palestinian claim on Jerusalem, a common piece of rhetoric in both PA and affiliated messages is the devaluing or outright denial of a historical or religious Jewish relationship to the city. Lately, in the absence of peace talks, the focus of active controversy has tended to narrow from Jerusalem as a whole, or just its eastern half, to the city’s Holy Places—in particular, the Temple Mount, or al-Haram al-Sharif in Arabic, at the heart of the Old City.

In the fall of 2014, a number of members of Israel’s Knesset visited that site and discussed the possibility of advancing legislation allowing Jews to pray there. This sparked protests and sit-ins in East Jerusalem and fueled Israeli-Palestinian strife. The tensions around the Temple Mount ultimately led to a number of terrorist attacks on Israelis in the city, described below—and the burning alive of an unarmed Palestinian teenager, Muhammad Abu Khdeir, by Israeli Jewish assailants. Throughout the fraught situation in Jerusalem, PA officials issued a number of statements considered by many to be supportive of the violence, prompting Israeli officials to call the PA’s commitment to non-violence into question.

President Abbas strongly criticized Israel; in particular, he denounced Jews visiting the Temple Mount and the proposed legislation to allow Jewish prayer there. At the Fatah Regional Jerusalem Conference, he said,

It is expected that we defend the al-Aqsa Mosque and it is not enough to say the settlers came, but rather it is necessary to prevent them from entering from all paths. This is our Haram, our Aqsa, our sanctuary, it is not right to allow them to enter and desecrate it.

He continued, “The world needs to see Jerusalem united, patient, and persistent in the face of those beasts.⁸⁷ Although not explicitly calling for violence, his incendiary language was polarizing.

A few days after this speech, Abdul Rahman Shloudi, a Palestinian

resident of Silwan, ran over a number of Israelis at the Shimon Ha-Tzadik light-rail station, killing a baby and wounding several others. Abbas failed to condemn the attack and instead blamed Netanyahu and the Israeli government for “fanning the flames” in Jerusalem. Approximately a week later, Moataz Hejazi, a resident of Silwan, shot Yehuda Glick, an activist who promoted Jewish access to the Temple Mount, near the Begin Center in Jerusalem. The Israeli police pursued and killed Hejazi later that day. Abbas once again did not denounce Hejazi’s violent act and instead sent a condolence letter to his family decrying the Israeli “crime.” He wrote:

Expressing anger and condemnations for the ugly crime of assassination undertaken by the gangs of killing and terrorism in the loathsome Israeli army at the expense of the son, Moataz Ibrahim Khalil Hejazi, he will rise high as a martyr defending the rights of our people and its sanctuaries and holy sites.⁸⁸

Yet Abbas also sent other messages, eschewing violence and denouncing the actions of some Palestinians in East Jerusalem. After the fatal knifing at a Har Nof synagogue of four Israeli Jews and one Israeli Druze policeman, Abbas condemned the attack unequivocally, saying, “The Palestinian presidency has always condemned the killing of civilians on both sides, and condemns today the killing of worshipers in a house of worship in West Jerusalem.”⁸⁹ Abbas struck a considerably different tone here, categorically admonishing the perpetrators of the terrorist attack.

Unfortunately, however, Abbas and his government continued to send mixed messages in this regard. Official PA and ruling Fatah Party broadcasts, newspapers, and social media continued to glorify terrorists and to spread dangerous blood libels about nonexistent Israeli threats to the al-Aqsa Mosque. And the PA still paid substantial stipends to terrorists convicted for murder, and to their families. The Hamas government of Gaza was, predictably, even worse, proudly displaying images of meat cleavers dripping blood as the way to “liberate al-Aqsa.” Yet that was the government Abbas still nominally insisted he wanted to unite behind.

Jibril Rajoub also publicly responded to the ongoing situation in Jerusalem. In an interview with Israeli television after the shoot-

ing of Yehuda Glick, he stated emphatically, “I do not condemn or renounce...I do not want to see anyone be killed or attacked regardless of who they are, but what did Glick do?” On the same day, in another interview, Rajoub said, “God willing, any settler who approaches the al-Aqsa Mosque and our holy sites will be assassinated.”⁹⁰ Rajoub, in the first statement, was refusing to condemn the Glick shooting but claiming he did not support the killing of anyone. He then contradicted his position on violence by declaring that any “settler” who enters the Temple Mount should be killed. Moreover, after the synagogue attacks, Rajoub commented that “there is no Muslim or Christian conscious who agrees with killing people praying from any religion, but the Israeli right bears responsibility for leading the region into a religious war.”⁹¹ Again, as in his response to the Glick shooting, he contended he did not support violence while failing to directly denounce the attack. Instead, he concluded that Israel provoked the attack and ultimately bore responsibility for it.

Hanan Ashrawi, the previously mentioned PA member and official spokesperson of the Palestinian delegation to the peace talks, sharply criticized Israel for trying to change the demographic makeup of Jerusalem:

Looking closely at Israel’s attempts to annex occupied Jerusalem, destroy its heritage and historical character by passing racist and oppressive laws and undertaking illegal measures such as demolishing homes, expelling Palestinians from the homes of their forefathers, revoking citizenship, and building settlements and a racist separation wall is transforming Jerusalem into a purely Jewish city and making Muslim and Christian citizens temporary citizens.⁹²

While not openly calling for resistance or violence, Ashrawi was arguing that Israel planned to purge Jerusalem of its non-Jewish residents and had no intention of advancing the peace process. Furthermore, in response to the synagogue attack, Ashrawi claimed the incidents targeting them in Jerusalem had “provoked the Palestinians to the point where many of them are retaliating individually by resorting to violence.”⁹³ In other words, like many of the other PA officials, Ashrawi chose not to condemn the attack but, rather, to attempt to justify it.

Tawfiq al-Tirawi has also responded to the events in Jerusalem and made

a number of statements calling on Palestinians to protect al-Aqsa. He issued a pointed response to the synagogue attack, calling it

nothing but a reaction to the recent crimes of the occupation and the settlers in occupied Jerusalem and across the nation. The threats of the occupation against our people and the Palestinian leadership, represented by the president, will only increase our resolve in safeguarding our rights.⁹⁴

He added, “The responsibility for the Israelis killed today lies with Netanyahu, his government, and his settlers. The responsibility also lies with America, which helps Israel.”⁹⁵

Furthermore, PA media, including *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, published highly equivocal articles concerning the attack. Columnist Ghoul wrote:

The operation carried out by Ghassan and Udai Abu Jamal from Jabal al-Mukabbar is but a natural response to the crimes of the extremist right-wing Israeli government and to the acts of slaughter it has committed as part of a calculated plan to bury any spark of hope for a diplomatic settlement.⁹⁶

Adli Sadeq, a Fatah Revolutionary Council member, also published an article in *al-Hayat al-Jadidah*, writing,

As for the rabbis wearing the robes of Satan, who dispatch the extremists, murderers and terrorists...they regard us all as if we were superfluous creatures or names traced in chalk on the board of life, which are easy to erase and must be erased.⁹⁷

Sadeq was attempting to justify the attack by literally demonizing the rabbis. Contrast this with Hassan al-Batal, an *al-Ayyam* columnist, who responded by condemning the attack—not on ethical but on pragmatic grounds:

The murder [in the synagogue] is a dangerous act whose repercussions could prove even more dangerous. Let the [Palestinian] factions say what they will. Even if they justify or praise [the action] or describe it as an act of heroism, or condemn the [Palestinian] Authority’s condemnation of it...[I still hold that] this action threatens to transform the struggle between the two peoples into a war, at a time when Palestine is struggling on the diplomatic plane to become a state, and the state of Israel is struggling against it.⁹⁸

As for official social media, the Fatah Facebook page published an announcement praising Moataz Hejazi as a “martyr” and declaring he had “risen to heaven” for killing Yehuda Glick—a blatant example of celebrating and glorifying violence (see figure 7, page vi).

In sum, although officially the PA has renounced the use of violence, a review of officials’ statements during these Jerusalem tensions reveals the hesitancy of some to condemn violence against Israelis and, in some cases, outright support of the attacks.

The statements by Fatah officials elicited a strong response from their Israeli counterparts. Netanyahu repeatedly accused Abbas of “fanning the flames” and inciting the Palestinian public.⁹⁹ He responded harshly to Abbas’s claim that Israel was attempting to change the status quo on the Temple Mount:

Abu Mazen [Abbas] is not a partner to the effort against the incitement. He has proven how irresponsible he is—instead of calming tensions, he stokes them,”

he said, and then added,

Instead of telling the truth, he is spreading lies as if we are attempting to change the status of holy sites. Instead of educating his people on peace, he is teaching them terror.¹⁰⁰

He also issued a strong condemnation of Abbas after the synagogue attack, saying, “This is the direct result of incitement being led by Hamas and Abbas, incitement which the international community is irresponsibly ignoring.”¹⁰¹ Netanyahu blamed both Hamas and Abbas for stoking the flames and inciting violence against Israeli citizens.

Similarly, Foreign Minister Liberman blamed Abbas for the increasing tensions in Jerusalem. In response to Abbas’s speech on the tenth anniversary of Yasser Arafat’s death, Liberman stated, “There is no difference between Arafat and Abu Mazen [Abbas]: both are Jew-haters who believe in terror and promote terror.”¹⁰² In an interview with Israel Radio, he further stated Abbas “is overseeing a state terror campaign, and his incitement is more dangerous and inflammatory than that of Hamas.”¹⁰³

Public Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitch agreed that the synagogue attack “was an obvious result of the incitement we have been

witnessing from the PA, led by Abbas.”¹⁰⁴ President Reuven Rivlin also condemned the role of the PA in the uptick in violence, calling the most recent attack a “direct result of incessant incitement and a desire on behalf of the other side to cause harm.”¹⁰⁵ Even Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who had long supported negotiations with Abbas, upbraided him for his incendiary rhetoric in those weeks. Following the sending of Abbas’s letter of condolence to the family of Moataz Hejazi, Livni said, “You can’t on the one hand go round saying you condemn violence and on the other hand send letters encouraging it.”¹⁰⁶ Other Israeli Knesset members, such as Zev Elkin,¹⁰⁷ Yuli-Yoel Edelstein,¹⁰⁸ Yuval Steinitz,¹⁰⁹ and Uri Ariel,¹¹⁰ adopted nearly identical language in their discussion of the most recent events, and all accused Abbas of legitimizing the violence.

A rare public voice in Israel’s most senior security establishment, however, warned against placing the blame on Abbas. In a December 2014 meeting with the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Shin Bet security service chief Yoram Cohen rejected the notion that Abbas had been inciting violence and terrorism, saying, “Abu Mazen [Abbas] is not interested in terror and is not leading [his people] to terror. Nor is he doing so under the table.”¹¹¹ Cohen was careful, however, to note that other members of the PA had been less prudent: “Recent incitement by the PA leadership, led by Abbas, on issues related to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, contributes and influences the high level of violence on the ground, specifically in Jerusalem.”¹¹² This assessment is the most in line with the analysis offered here—that Abbas personally eschews violence but does not disavow other senior PA and Fatah figures who actively incite it.

As will be shown below, this pattern was repeated a year after the fall 2014 Jerusalem attacks, when a more sustained wave of individual violence erupted in Jerusalem and other scattered locations in the West Bank and Israel. And the pattern of Israeli responses to this equivocal PA messaging was again very similar, with the political echelon emphasizing PA incitement and the security professionals more focused on continued security cooperation.

From an analytical standpoint, however, it is essential to distinguish between the content of PA messages and the impact of those messages—

and between the whole subject of messaging and the other factors that might weigh in contemporary calculation by various parties. In this case, the content was, with little doubt, highly inflammatory; but the role it played in influencing Palestinian public opinion, or in motivating the behavior of individual Palestinians, is much more debatable. Conversely, some Israelis (and others) might reasonably judge that the benefits of PA security cooperation behind the scenes outweighed any damage from PA rhetoric. But that judgment should not distort an objective assessment of the nature of that rhetoric itself, for better or worse.

PALESTINIAN “UNILATERAL” DIPLOMACY AGAINST ISRAEL

During the 2014 Gaza war, the PA unveiled a new international strategy: it would, instead of negotiating with Israel, secure passage of a UN Security Council resolution to resolve all the outstanding issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. President Abbas presented the principles of the Palestinian UN draft resolution on November 29, 2014, at an Arab League meeting. He said, “We decided to make a number of decisions, including going to the Security Council to establish a Palestinian state on June 4, 1967, borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, in a specific time frame.”¹¹³ The UN resolution would conceivably have obligated Israel to accept the conditions as nonnegotiable. Moreover, Abbas defended this new approach later in the same speech by saying, “American mediation has failed.”

The full significance of this turning point toward unilateralism, in PA policy and public diplomacy alike, has often been overlooked. It is not just that Abbas and the PA turned their backs on any peace talks with Israel—a position they have hewed to ever since. It is also that they had decided thenceforth to seek independent statehood for themselves without paying any price at all to Israel—neither the end of claims and conflict, nor a compromise on refugees, nor formal agreement on any other issue. In other words, their objective was land without peace.

Hanan Ashrawi remarked about the Palestinian UN push during an interview with the Saudi newspaper *al-Youm*. She outlined the basic framework of the new, international strategy, saying, “We are going to

the UN. We have already consulted with Arab and unbiased states, in addition to France, the representative of Europe in the UNSC, to pass a resolution to end the occupation in 2016, considering Palestine is a state under occupation.”¹¹⁴ Ashrawi, like Abbas, intimated that the Palestinians did not plan to rely on U.S. mediation or direct talks with Israel but rather on a UNSC resolution to achieve statehood.

In a statement to the Palestinian news site al-Noqta, Tawfiq al-Tirawi declared his support for the UN initiative:

We have now made decisions, and these decisions were made in a specific arrangement. [First], we will go to the UNSC, and we know America will exercise its veto and exert its pressure so that we do not receive nine votes. Thereafter, we are going to the [International Criminal Court] and all other international institutions.¹¹⁵

Tirawi was indicating he did not believe the UN strategy would succeed and implied the Palestinian leadership had already forsaken the possibility of a peace process. As a result, he argued, the PA had decided to go to the ICC and other international institutions.

Jibril Rajoub also commented on the UN push during an interview with Al-Arabiya TV on December 30, 2014, only hours before the UNSC voted on the Palestinian resolution. Rajoub explained that the UN move marked a major change in the Palestinian strategy:

The time has come to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Americans wanted to continue direct negotiations, but there is an imbalance in power between the two sides and a lack of desire on the part of the Israelis to end the occupation... Either a Palestinian state will take form and [receive] its birth certificate, or we will call for Israel's birth certificate to be withdrawn.

That day, the UNSC voted not to adopt the proposed draft resolution, gathering only eight votes out of the required nine for adoption. In the wake of this failed UN bid, President Abbas and the PA continued to pursue a strategy of seeking international recognition for a Palestinian state. The following day, Abbas signed twenty international agreements, including the Rome Statute of the ICC. Explaining his decision to accede to the Rome Statute, Abbas said, “[The Israelis] attack us and our land every day, to whom are we to complain? The Security Council let us down—where are we to go?”¹¹⁶

This move prompted harsh criticism from U.S. officials, including a January 29, 2015, letter from seventy-five senators calling for an immediate halt to any economic assistance to the PA.¹¹⁷ The Israeli government responded by withholding approximately \$127 million in monthly Palestinian tax revenues, further contributing to the tensions.

Both the PA's attempt to achieve Palestinian statehood at the UNSC and its decision to join the ICC continue to raise questions about its intentions vis-à-vis the peace process and a return to negotiations. A survey of statements by PA officials suggests messaging on these matters following the failed UN bid was mixed: while some signaled their conditional willingness to return to the negotiation table, other officials and outlets were not as clear.

A few days after signing the Rome Statute, President Abbas noted that he would continue to work through the UN to achieve statehood: "We will continue to go to the Security Council until it acknowledges our full rights...We are committed to a just and comprehensive peace that ends the occupation and establishes an independent Palestinian state on the borders of June 1967 with its capital Jerusalem."¹¹⁸ Still, in a speech at the Arab League in mid-January 2015, Abbas suggested he was still prepared to reenter negotiations with Israel:

If at any time Netanyahu says "I will stop building settlements and I am ready for negotiations," we do not have any problem. We hope for this, because we know if we want to get something we must get it by the way of negotiations and dialogue. However, negotiations without meaning or a known strategy is an untenable situation.¹¹⁹

Similarly, in a conversation with Egyptian president Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, Abbas clarified that signing the Rome Statute did not mean the PA would necessarily move to bring charges against Israel. He said, "Despite the request to join the ICC, Fatah will not seek to prosecute Israeli officials in the event that they return to the negotiating table in earnest in the coming weeks."¹²⁰ Abbas did not see joining the ICC as an end to the possibility of negotiations, but he did reserve that option.

Yet other Palestinian officials called these events a turning point in Israeli-Palestinian relations and condemned Israel's lack of commitment

to negotiations. Responding to the Israeli decision to withhold tax revenues, Saeb Erekat, chief negotiator for the PA, commented,

Matters have reached the point of no return in Israeli-Palestinian relations in the wake of the collective punishments that the Israeli government has exacted against the Palestinian people and the threats that they have directed toward the Palestinian leadership, the Palestinian people, and international organizations.¹²¹

He went on to declare that Israel “cannot be allowed to destroy the two-state solution and opportunities for peace; and the search for just peace demands international commitment to the two-state solution.”¹²² He added, “There is no difference between ISIS, which slaughters journalists, and Netanyahu, who allows for the killing of Muhammad Abu Khdeir and caused the death of the minister Ziad Abu Ain.”¹²³

Similarly, Hanan Ashrawi voiced her uncertainty regarding the importance of negotiations. In meetings with European Union and British officials in Ramallah in January 2015, Ashrawi said, “Achieving a lasting peace based on the two-state solution is not contingent on the outcome of negotiations.”¹²⁴ She further stressed that Israel is not a credible partner for negotiations, stating, “The Israelis will not honor any commitment or sound agreement, not just to us...But also they will manipulate any agreement so that they will pick and choose what serves their interest, and what weakens us and whatever is in our favor, they will not implement.”¹²⁵

ISRAELI ELECTIONS

On March 17, 2015, Israeli voters unexpectedly repositioned Netanyahu’s Likud Party at the head of the Knesset yet again. PA reactions to Israel’s most recent national election had begun long before March, with some senior PA officials weighing in on how the elections would advance or hinder relations.

In general, however, President Abbas steered clear of any direct effort to influence the outcome. This was a marked departure from the previous election campaign in 2011, during which Abbas held several interviews and meetings with Israelis to express relatively dovish views, presumably in an attempt to support Israel’s “peace camp.” The failure of that effort

to produce clear results almost certainly contributed to the standoffish tone of his messaging throughout most of the long 2015 Israeli electoral campaign and subsequent government formation process, which took the entire first half of that year.

On January 15, 2015, right after the Israeli government called for new elections, Abbas delivered a speech to the Arab League dismissing the likelihood that a change of government would affect movement toward a two-state solution. “The Israelis will not give us anything, not before or after the elections,” he said. “We will not rely on who will be in power in Israel again... Instead, the world should convince Israel that its policies are incorrect and must be changed.”¹²⁶ This comment fell in line with Abbas’s general strategy of calling for international mediation rather than bilateral negotiations with Israel.

As Election Day approached, however, Israeli polls erroneously began predicting a Labor Party (now officially called “Zionist Union”) victory and correctly predicting an unprecedented number of seats for the Arab Joint List.¹²⁷ In response, Abbas began to express greater optimism. On March 4, two weeks before the elections, he negated his previous assessment and instead stated, “We ask God for these elections to be successful. He who succeeds from the Israeli side will have gained the confidence of his people. Also, we say to the Joint List, God is with you.”¹²⁸

Some PA leaders, such as Saeb Erekat, also expressed a broader optimism about the Israeli elections, perhaps in response to the expected potential of a coalition government led by the Zionist Labor Party. Two days before them, Erekat expressed hope that “the Israeli elections will produce an Israeli government able to make peace by withdrawing to 1967 borders and establishing a Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital.”¹²⁹ On the opposite end, Faisal Abu Shahla, a member of the Fatah Leadership Council, bluntly stated, “There is no difference between [the Israeli parties] on the Palestinian issue.”¹³⁰

Pessimism returned to the PA, however, after the elections and Netanyahu’s unexpected victory, despite the Arab Joint List’s similarly unexpected placement as the party with the third-most seats in the Knesset. For Abbas, this result indicated “Israel is not serious regarding a political and two-state solution,” and Erekat concurred, explaining, “We have realized that Binyamin Netanyahu is not a two-stater.” Rajoub voiced

similar concerns, suggesting the elections demonstrated “the rightward-turning compass of Israeli society and its extremist inclination.” Thus, after March 17, PA leadership expressed little optimism about any positive change in Israeli policy.

TRANSITION TIME: MAY/JUNE 2015

Immediately after the formation of Israel’s new government, PA messaging largely focused on differences between the PA and Hamas regarding the unity government. Meetings of the Fatah Revolutionary Council and PLO Executive Committee and their discussion of a French UNSC proposal calling for the creation of a Palestinian state, however, revealed important aspects of PA messaging concerning Israel.

President Abbas discussed the French proposal at the Fatah Revolutionary Council meeting on June 16, 2015, saying, “If the French UNSC proposal takes shape and it has what we want, we will welcome and accept it. Though if it has what we do not desire, we will not accept it.” Later in the meeting, Abbas stated, “We want the French proposal to include an independent Palestinian state along 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital and a timeframe for negotiations and implementation. Additionally, we will not accept a Jewish state.”¹³³ In other words, Abbas was only interested in a French proposal that guaranteed his terms and did not include a reference to a Jewish state—a reference the French had not ruled out.

Other Palestinian officials also commented on the French proposal. Hanan Ashrawi said, “The Palestinian side will study the proposal when it is presented and will not support any proposal that does not accept international law and the establishment of a Palestinian state along 1967 lines with East Jerusalem as its capital.” Regarding negotiating the details of the French proposal with Israel, Ashrawi added, “Negotiations must recognize Palestinian rights...and we will not accept negotiations for the sake of negotiations.”¹³⁴ Ashrawi, like Abbas, was indicating that the Palestinian leadership would accept the French proposal as long as it abided by core Palestinian positions.

Riyad al-Maliki, the Palestinian foreign minister, also weighed in on the

question of the emerging French proposal. During a press conference, he said, “We welcome these ideas, and we are ready to work with them and to provide everything that is required as Palestinians to make the efforts undertaken by [French foreign minister Laurent] Fabius successful.”¹³⁵ Maliki made clear that he viewed the French proposal as beneficial and conspicuously did not name any specific conditions for Palestinian support.

Moreover, the PA leadership accepted the broader principle of a French UNSC proposal, but many insisted on certain conditions, especially the exclusion of a reference to Israel as a Jewish state and the inclusion of a timeframe for ending the occupation.

LATE 2015: WOULD THE PA ENDORSE A THIRD INTIFADA?

In the final quarter of 2015, as stabbings and violent demonstrations in and around Jerusalem continued, official Palestinian statements and media commentary sent a dual message. Generally speaking, messages from neither the PA nor Hamas called for more violence in their own territory—although Hamas did call for the murder of more Jews in Jerusalem. But neither Palestinian government repudiated the violence; both praised its Palestinian perpetrators; and both blamed Israel rather than their own people for it.

Leading up to this crisis, PA accusations against Israel had turned increasingly shrill, building upon the widespread but false Palestinian perception that Israel was trying to stake new claims to the al-Haram al-Sharif and its al-Aqsa Mosque, sacred to Muslims, on the Temple Mount, and that Jews had no history or rights in that area. Sadly, repeated Israeli disavowals by Prime Minister Netanyahu and others of provocations by an extremist Jewish fringe did not offset incitement by the fundamentalist Israeli Arab “Northern Branch” movement or other radical Islamist groups, or by the PA itself.

During the Jewish holiday season in mid-September 2015, in the wake of demonstrations and Israeli police action at the al-Aqsa Mosque, President Abbas personally and publicly denounced the “filthy feet” of Jews trampling there, while praising “every drop of blood shed...for the sake

of Allah.”¹³⁶ This outburst elicited a highly unusual private admonition against such incitement, according to Israeli press accounts, from UN secretary general Ban Ki-Moon.

Nevertheless, Abbas did not recant, and he went on to repeat such inflammatory and misleading accusations regarding Israeli policy toward the Temple Mount in his address to the UN General Assembly a week later. Shortly thereafter, on several occasions when Israelis were shot or stabbed to death by terrorists in the West Bank and Jerusalem, Abbas did not repudiate those actions as he sometimes had in the past. His silence was especially noteworthy because a Fatah faction had publicly taken responsibility for two of the most recent killings. Instead, the PA officially called for the UN and the international community to “protect” Palestinians against Israeli “escalation.”¹³⁷

Although early statements by Palestinian officials blamed Israel for escalating the crisis, privately they were reportedly trying to rein in the potential for uncontrolled disorder. And some Palestinians privately pointed out that most of the violence was taking place not in the West Bank but inside Israel and Jerusalem or on the border with Gaza, where PA officials and security agents had no access or control. Behind the scenes, according to Israeli officials and experts, PA security continued to coordinate with Israel against Hamas terrorism—going so far, according to Hamas, as to deliver the five-member underground Hamas cell in the Nablus/Jenin area responsible for shooting two Israeli settlers to death.

By the second week of October 2015, a familiar pattern of mixed messaging had reemerged. Abbas reiterated, to his own domestic audience in Arabic, that he opposed violence and wanted only “peaceful, popular resistance.” To Israelis, he said, “We want peace, and our hands will continue to be extended in peace, despite all our suffering at your hands.” In the same breath, however, he urged Palestinians to “defend” themselves and “protect” al-Aqsa, telling Israel to “stay away from our Islamic and Christian holy places.”¹³⁸

Moreover, even Hamas statements seemed designed to preempt drastic escalation and Israeli retaliation in Gaza. Early on, Mousa Abu Marzouk, a senior member of Hamas, announced that the group would refrain from firing rockets into Israel, so as not to “distract” from the struggle in Jerusalem and the West Bank.¹³⁹ And in late 2015, Hamas declared that its side

of the border with Israel would thenceforth be a closed military zone—presumably so it could better control incursions or other incidents.

At lower levels, on many days during October 2015, the PA official newspaper still labeled Palestinian terrorists killed in action as “martyrs”; termed stabbings and other Palestinian attacks as “operations”; and reported in detail about social media approval for the murder of settlers.¹⁴⁰ Fatah media and, sometimes, official PA television, featured statements by senior party officials (including Mahmoud al-Aloul and Sultan Abu al-Einein) and others explicitly praising violence against Israeli civilians—for instance, by calling settlers “legitimate targets.” On October 8, the PA cabinet issued a statement that did not mention Palestinian violence but accused Israel of acting “to kill and assassinate defenseless children and civilians...[through] summary executions and cold-blooded murder.”¹⁴¹ Since this statement, senior PA officials, including Saeb Erekat and Nabil Abu Rudeineh, have repeated and elaborated on these charges.

A perfect instance of mixed messaging came from an unexpected source. On October 11, in an open letter written from jail and published in the UK’s *Guardian* newspaper, Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti endorsed the right of “unarmed” Palestinians to “resist this occupation” and denounced “Israeli attacks against the Palestinian people in the city and in Muslim and Christian holy sites.”¹⁴² Elsewhere in the piece, he also wrote, albeit without explicitly affirming a lasting two-state solution, that this was still “a solvable political conflict” and that “the last day of occupation will be the first day of peace.” But that message could be found only in English, not in any major Arabic publication.

The differences in these messages have been amplified in the pan-Arab newspapers and satellite television channels—which, surveys have shown, Palestinians watch and read at least as much as they do their own local media. For example, Saudi-owned Al-Arabiya TV and newspapers *al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *al-Hayat* have been playing down the latest Israeli-Palestinian violence, producing at most one such lead story each day. In sharp contrast, Qatar-owned Al Jazeera TV or *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper play up the new “intifada,” featuring three or four lead stories on it each day, plus inflammatory “analysis” about PA, and even Hamas, “cowardice” or “treason” in not expanding the violence. So far,

as indicated by a Cairo statement on October 13, the Arab League has been toeing the PA line about “Israeli provocations against al-Aqsa” and “international protection for the Palestinians,” rather than the Hamas line calling for greater “armed resistance” activities in Jerusalem and the West Bank.¹⁴³

Back in Ramallah on October 11, 2015, according to one Israeli press report, Abbas met with militant Fatah leaders from the Tanzim faction and asked them to cease incitement. By this time, however, some analysts were speculating about just how much—or how little—difference Abbas could make in this volatile climate, given his declining popularity and internal political authority. Indeed, as Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki pointed out, two-thirds of the Palestinian public in the West Bank and Gaza now wanted Abbas to resign.¹⁴⁴

Throughout that October and on into November, official PA and Fatah messaging below the Abbas level—in print, online, and in broadcast and social media—maintained a steady barrage of text, photos, cartoons, and sound bites promoting or rationalizing violent protests. In contrast to Hamas propaganda, PA and Fatah messages emphasized rock throwing rather than arson or stabbing. But these sources also continued to eulogize stabbers as “martyrs”; and, occasionally, the Fatah Facebook page and Twitter account explicitly encouraged stabbing as well.¹⁴⁵ On October 14, 2015, the PA Ministry of Education held a public ceremony to honor “martyred” murderers,¹⁴⁶ while other statements, notably a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed by freshly installed PLO secretary-general Saeb Erekat, blamed the violence on Israeli “apartheid” rather than on Palestinian perpetrators.¹⁴⁷

Abbas himself remained mostly silent on the subject. On October 22, however, he personally presented the “Palestine Order of Merit for Culture, Sciences, and the Arts” to cartoonist Baha al-Bukhari—who, in the pages of the official PA daily, had been regularly hailing Palestinian rock throwers, while depicting Israel as an evil octopus, fungus, or bat, and its leaders as bathing in blood.¹⁴⁸ In a speech to Arab foreign ministers on November 9, Abbas avoided much talk either of violence or of peace, concentrating instead on next steps in obtaining “international protection for the Palestinian people.”¹⁴⁹

Without a clear successor, and with Hamas and other radicals seeking to supplant Abbas, the prospects are very dim for PA messages of peace or rec-

conciliation, either in the current or a post-Abbas scenario. And the prevalence of inflammatory social media messages has mitigated any impact of Abbas's December 2015 unimpressive, if self-described, "important speech to the nation" against violence. In the current fraught climate, any official call for nonviolence will require real action if it is to be effective.

3.

PA MESSAGING AND PALESTINIAN PUBLIC OPINION 2014–15

One possible manifestation of the effects of Palestinian Authority messaging is the nature of Palestinian attitudes on the range of issues discussed above. Determining the causal direction, however—that is, to what extent PA messaging shapes, or simply reflects, prevailing public opinion in the PA’s jurisdiction—is very difficult. The often quite negative Palestinian views of the PA and its leaders, including President Abbas, lately give little reason to expect their words to be decisive concerning attitudes toward Israel.

Moreover, West Bank and Gaza Palestinians often pay about as much or more attention to outside Arabic media as to local ones. In June 2014, for example, according to credible surveys, more Palestinians watched foreign Arabic-language media (38.3%) than local Palestinian media (33.6%). Subsequent surveys showed only modest changes by September 2014 (33.1% foreign, 44.3% domestic) or December 2014 (36.6% foreign, 40.3% domestic).¹⁵⁰ So even if attitudinal trends do derive from media messages, those messages and that influence may well be received from outside the PA altogether. For these reasons, a comprehensive causal analysis of trends in Palestinian opinion polls is beyond the scope of this study.

Nevertheless, a substantial exploration of this topic is useful, to demonstrate both the similarities and differences between the PA “party line” and public attitudes among its people. During the period covered here, various polling agencies, including the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR), Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD), the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion (PCPO), and The Washington Institute have tracked the opinions of Palestinians on many relevant ques-

tions. The results are summarized below under four chronological phases within the overall period under consideration: March to June 2014, covering unity with Hamas and collapse of the peace talks; June to December 2014, the Gaza war and its aftermath; January to June 2015, focusing on “lawfare” and Israel’s election; and June 2015 to date, renewed but low-level violence and religious tension. By design, these phases broadly correspond to the predominant messaging phases analyzed above.

Overall, the findings indicate a close convergence between PA messages and local public opinion on many points related to Israel—but also some intriguing divergences on certain issues or at certain times. On some key issues, such as acceptance of a “two-state solution” but insistence on “the refugee right of return,” popular attitudes seem roughly in sync with the Ramallah government’s line. But on certain tactical issues, such as a return to negotiations or local economic interactions with Israel, the public is actually more moderate than the PA party line. And, on certain longer-term or strategic issues—such as unity with Hamas, the eventual claim to all of Israel, or “armed struggle” against it—the reverse is often the case: the public tends to be more militant than the official messages it receives. Given this pattern, it is reasonable to conclude PA messaging probably influences but clearly does not control Palestinian public opinion.

MARCH TO JUNE 2014

A close look at Palestinian views on prisoner releases, the Jewish state question, economic needs, and other issues suggests that, in the spring of 2014, on the eve of the PA-Hamas unity deal and the collapse of peace talks with Israel, diplomatic openings were far from exhausted. The Palestinian public in the West Bank and Gaza was more prepared to accept various diplomatic compromises than official positions or elite attitudes suggest.

A number of polls by different Palestinian pollsters, and in-depth discussions with Palestinian scholars and others in late March 2014, indicate that President Abbas had greater latitude to make a deal than is often supposed. The polls cited here are from PSR and AWRAD, both based in Ramallah, and PCPO, based in Beit Sahour. Each had approximately 1,000 to 1,200 participants.

In private meetings among Palestinian politicians and experts in Ramallah in late March, discussion of unpublished but credible new polls established that the West Bank and Gaza general public is often somewhat more inclined to compromise than its leading political, media, professional, and academic figures. For example, a comparison of an unpublished February AWRAD poll tracking elite opinion and a separate March AWRAD poll tracking overall public opinion shows 49 percent of the public, but just 39 percent of the elite, supporting “the ongoing negotiations between the PA and Israel.” Similarly, 44 percent of the public, but only 31 percent of the elite, said they might accept a temporary Israeli military presence in the Jordan Valley.¹⁵¹

On a few issues, the discrepancy pointed in the opposite direction; a demilitarized Palestinian state, for instance, got a “maybe” from half the elite, but a mere one-fifth of the Palestinian street. Nevertheless, asked about an overall package of these and other compromises, 48 percent of the street accepted it, as compared to just 41 percent of the Palestinian elite.¹⁵² A separate PSR poll taken March 20–22 supported this analysis of a more flexible general public. Among college graduates, 72 percent were opposed to extending the peace talks, but among those who were illiterate, that proportion was significantly lower, at 54 percent.¹⁵³

The disparity between elite and general public attitudes was particularly pronounced on the question of recognizing Israel as a Jewish state. In one pair of 2014 polls, only 15 percent of the elite said they “might” accept this suggestion—but 40 percent of the overall West Bank and Gaza population voiced that view.¹⁵⁴ A separate survey found that while two-thirds of college graduates would reject a deal including recognition of the Jewish state, only 43 percent of illiterates held that view.¹⁵⁵ In 2006, as much as two-thirds of the West Bank and Gaza public accepted recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, but the figure has since fallen to around 40 percent.¹⁵⁶

This decline was probably caused by several factors: the Israeli government’s insistence on this condition; the Palestinian government’s recent adamant rejection of it; and the overall downturn in popular confidence in the peace process. Despite all these negative new signals, it is noteworthy that such a large minority of the Palestinian public continued to accept the controversial concept of recognizing Israel as a Jewish state.

Moreover, surprisingly, the strongest opposition appeared concentrated not in the masses, but in the upper classes.

Among the most striking findings buried in these survey reports is that none of the previously noted issues topped local priorities. Rather, Palestinians, like most people in most places, were more interested in domestic than in foreign affairs. Asked to pick “the most serious problem confronting Palestinian society today,” around two-thirds selected internal matters, including poverty and unemployment (27%); lack of national unity (21%); or “corruption in some public institutions” (10%). Just one-fourth picked “the continuation of occupation and settlement activities” as their most serious problem, while 10 percent cited “the siege and closure of the Gaza border crossings.”¹⁵⁷

Interestingly, the PSR poll also suggests the prisoner issue was more salient, and perhaps more relevant to efforts to revive the peace talks, than Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Views on extending those talks shifted from 55 percent negative in general to 51 percent positive if Israel agreed to a partial settlement freeze; but support for continuing negotiations jumped to 65 percent if Israel freed more prisoners. And even more (68%) agreed with delaying accession to additional international bodies in exchange for new prisoner releases.¹⁵⁸

Along the same lines, a March 2014 PCPO poll found three-quarters of Palestinians saying prisoner release was pivotal to keeping the peace talks alive. In response to an open-ended question, freeing prisoners slightly outranked a settlement freeze (35% versus 33%) as a condition for continued negotiations.¹⁵⁹ In May 2014, half the Palestinian public still backed the resumption of peace talks, with very little difference between West Bank and Gaza opinion. That proportion rose to a surprisingly high two-thirds if Israel accepted two Palestinian conditions: a fourth round of prisoner releases and a three-month settlement freeze. A mere 15 percent of West Bankers, and 24 percent of Gazans, favored “the approach advocated by Hamas” to achieving Palestinian independence.¹⁶⁰

One survey from this period found overwhelming popular backing (86%) for a unilateral PA move to join international organizations.¹⁶¹ But others indicated this support would drop dramatically, to around 60 percent, if U.S. economic sanctions resulted from this decision.¹⁶²

An alternative or longer-term possibility—working toward one state combining Palestinians and Israelis with equal rights—attracted support from approximately one-quarter of the public, including nearly 30 percent of West Bankers.¹⁶³ While this remained a minority view, it represented a substantial increase over past years. The reasons were most likely a combination of growing popular disillusionment about the prospects for a two-state solution, revived perceptions of an eventual Palestinian demographic challenge to Israel, and a gradually increasing awareness of a movement to delegitimize Israel as an “apartheid state.”

Asked if they would personally support armed resistance to Israel, around one-third of Palestinians (somewhat higher in Gaza) answered in the affirmative. But probably more telling, because less politically charged, is another statistic. Asked what they believe would most likely happen if the current round of negotiations were to fail, a mere 25 percent responded, “A new intifada.” An equal proportion said that “President Abbas will return to the UN,” and 11 percent predicted the PA would simply collapse. The most common response about what would happen, however (34%), was “nothing.”¹⁶⁴

Among the most interesting results from these polls were responses on various forms of pragmatic cooperation with Israelis. Despite the semi-official Fatah campaign against “normalization,” West Bankers were, in fact, quite closely divided on many kinds of contact with Israelis. Between 43 and 49 percent said it was acceptable to welcome visiting Israelis, have political discussions with them, talk to Israeli journalists, improve trade relations with Israel, and cooperate on scientific, environmental, or health projects. Only when it came to sports or cultural events did a large majority (66%) reject such contacts. Popular opposition to all these options was somewhat higher in Gaza, but security restrictions made such contacts almost impossible there, anyway.¹⁶⁵

The main conclusion from this analysis is that, contrary to common misconceptions, Palestinian public opinion offers openings for U.S. officials as they seek to shape policy on key issues. A focus on prisoner releases, more than on settlement freezes, would actually be a better response both to Palestinian popular demands and Israeli government preferences. Furthermore, preparing U.S. sanctions against additional unilateral PA moves is likely to decrease Palestinian popular support for such

steps; and prodding the PA to compromise on the Jewish state issue, as part of a peace package, would probably face surprisingly little grassroots resistance. In the meantime, U.S. support for Palestinian economic development—and even for mutually beneficial Israeli-Palestinian interaction, as a more popular alternative than violent confrontation—would find unexpectedly wide resonance in Palestinian society.

Despite the new unity agreement, West Bank and Gaza residents alike were still apparently more receptive to Fatah than Hamas viewpoints. Findings from three public opinion polls in the West Bank and Gaza showed overwhelming support for a new “unity” government backed by both Hamas and Fatah—even as a narrower majority still supported peace talks and peaceful coexistence with Israel. The idea of a Palestinian unity government enjoyed very broad backing among West Bank and Gaza Palestinians, according to a reliable poll by AWRAD conducted May 24–26, 2014. Three-quarters in both territories supported integrating Fatah and Hamas security services and including Hamas in the PLO. An even larger majority supported reconciliation even if it resulted in U.S. economic sanctions or Israeli political pressure. In a related finding, overall optimism had surged 15 points since March, with an especially large jump in Gaza, from 46 to 71 percent.¹⁶⁶

At the same time, a bare majority of West Bank and Gaza Palestinians supported the statement by President Abbas that the new government “would recognize Israel, renounce violence, and honor all previous international agreements.” But the margin of support was somewhat higher in the West Bank (where 54% were in favor versus 40% opposed) than in Gaza, where the public was almost evenly split on this question.¹⁶⁷

A narrow majority of Palestinians also still accepted “the principle of a two-state solution with a Palestinian state living side-by-side in peace with Israel.” Here again, the margin of support was significantly higher in the West Bank (58% versus 39%) than in Gaza (52% versus 47%). An intriguing, counterintuitive finding is the perceived “most significant impediment” to reaching this solution: it was the issue of Jerusalem, rather than of refugees, with the margin even higher (46% versus 33%) among the largely refugee-origin Gazans.¹⁶⁸

The continuing interest in peace talks helps explain why, in a separate Zogby poll also conducted in early 2014, two-thirds said that it was impor-

tant for their country to maintain good relations with the United States, even though a mere 27 percent had a favorable opinion of it. Sixty percent said the United States was at least “trying” to develop good ties with their country.¹⁶⁸ Those figures were confirmed by the AWRAD survey, which showed 55 percent terming the United States “important to the conduct of negotiations and the eventual resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.”¹⁷⁰ Remarkably, however, when asked by Zogby about the most important priorities for U.S.-Arab relations, under half (47%) of Palestinians picked the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Nearly as many (39%) chose ending the Syrian conflict or helping Syrian refugees.¹⁷¹

But the most urgent task in Palestinian eyes, especially in Gaza, was a new national election; this was the priority for 69 percent of Gazans and 45 percent of West Bankers. By contrast, only around 10 percent overall selected any of the other options offered: resuming peace talks, joining more United Nations and international bodies, nonviolent resistance, or violent resistance. If an election were held, Abbas and Fatah would be favored over Hamas candidates by margins of around 41 percent to 13 percent—although nearly 40 percent of Palestinians said they were either undecided or unlikely to vote.¹⁷²

These data demonstrate that a U.S. policy of holding the new Palestinian government to previous commitments regarding nonviolence and negotiations with Israel would have enjoyed majority acceptance at the Palestinian popular level in the spring of 2014. Moreover, the West Bank and Gaza publics both appeared more receptive to the Fatah than to the Hamas side of their new national unity arrangement. This seemed to offer U.S. policymakers some prospect of working to preserve the option of a two-state solution, despite Hamas’s continuing rejection of that ideal.

JUNE TO DECEMBER 2014

By mid-June 2014, however, this pragmatic popular view of long-term issues was eroding—perhaps in delayed response to the official PA shift toward “unity” with Hamas. Survey results showed violence was not a popular option among Palestinians, and Hamas was not benefiting from it. But a reliable West Bank/Gaza public opinion survey conducted on June 15–17, 2014, also showed Palestinian popular attitudes had

hardened considerably on long-term issues of peace with Israel. Commissioned by The Washington Institute and conducted by a leading Palestinian pollster, the poll comprised face-to-face interviews with a standard random geographical probability sample of 1,200 adult Palestinians, yielding results with a 3 percent statistical margin of error. The responses indicated that fewer than 30 percent of Palestinians now supported a “two-state solution”: a West Bank/Gaza Palestinian state in lasting peace with Israel (see figure 8). At the same time, some surprising signs of short-term pragmatism emerged—especially, and even more surprisingly, in Gaza.

Regarding this fundamental issue of a two-state solution, Palestinian public opinion was clearly taking a maximalist turn. Other polls conducted during this period showed a majority or plurality still favoring the goal of an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, even after the collapse of the latest peace talks, alongside Israel (though the numbers were gradually declining).¹⁷⁴ But now, as illustrated by figure 8, a clear majority (60% overall, including 55% in the West Bank and 68% in Gaza), when offered a choice of other options, said the five-year goal “should be to work toward reclaiming all of historic Palestine, from the river to the sea.” On this key question, just 31 percent of West Bankers and 22 percent of Gazans opted instead “to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza to achieve a two-state solution.” And even fewer picked a “one-state solution,” in which “Arabs and Jews will have equal rights in one country, from the river to the sea.” That was the preferred option of a mere 11 percent in the West Bank and 8 percent in Gaza.¹⁷⁵

This pattern was confirmed by other questions in the survey. For example, just one-third said a two-state solution “should be the end of the conflict.” Nearly two-thirds said “resistance should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated” and only a third that “it might be necessary to give up some of our claims so that our people and our children can have a better life.” Similarly, only a third thought a two-state solution would be their leadership’s final goal. Instead, almost two-thirds said it would be “part of a ‘program of stages,’ to liberate all of historic Palestine later.” This remarkable finding helps explain how a plurality or more of Palestinians could support President Abbas and reject a two-state solution at the same time.¹⁷⁶

What is the main Palestinian national goal for the next five years?

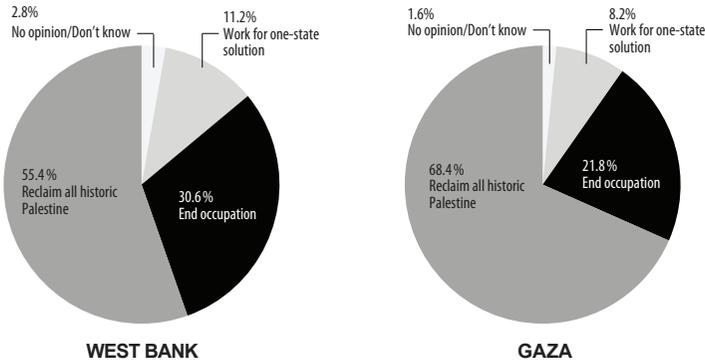


FIGURE 8

Meanwhile, despite continuing tensions over the June 12, 2014, kidnapping of three Israeli teenagers in the West Bank and Israel's resulting intensive searches and arrests, the Palestinian public was not turning toward large-scale violence. Rather, on tactical questions of relations with Israel, respondents broadly supported a nonviolent approach. Asked whether Hamas "should maintain a ceasefire with Israel in both Gaza and the West Bank," a majority (56%) of West Bank respondents and a remarkable 70 percent of Gazans said yes. Similarly, when asked if Hamas should accept Abbas's position that the new unity government renounce violence against Israel, West Bankers were evenly divided, but a majority (57%) of Gazans answered in the affirmative.¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, "popular resistance against the occupation"—such as demonstrations, strikes, marches, mass refusals to cooperate with Israel, and the like—was seen as having a positive impact by most respondents in both territories: 62 percent in the West Bank and 73 percent in Gaza. Asked what Israel could do "to convince Palestinians that it really wants peace," a large plurality picked "release more Palestinian prisoners." That option far outranked the others, each in the 15 to 20 percent range: "share Jerusalem as a joint capital," "stop building in settlements beyond the security barrier," or "grant Palestinians greater freedom of movement and crack down on settler attacks."¹⁷⁸

Most striking, and contrary to common misperception, Hamas did not benefit politically from the kidnapping. Asked who should be the presi-

dent of Palestine in the next two years, a solid plurality in both the West Bank and Gaza named Abbas (30%) or other Fatah-affiliated leaders: Marwan Barghouti (12%), Mohammad Dahlan (10%), Rami Hamdallah (6%), Mustafa Barghouti (4%), Salam Fayyad (2%), or Mahmoud al-Aloul (1%). In stark contrast, Hamas leaders Ismail Haniyeh and Khaled Mashal rated a combined total of just 9 percent support in the West Bank and 15 percent in Gaza. Another intriguing finding was that Dahlan had significant popular support among Gazans, at 20 percent. Also notable was that not one of the other old-guard Fatah figures, such as Ahmed Qurei (aka Abu Ala), Nabil Shaath, or Jibril Rajoub, attracted even 1 percent support in either the West Bank or Gaza.¹⁷⁹

Some additional and unexpected signs of short-term pragmatism showed up concerning bread-and-butter issues. Over 80 percent said they would “definitely” or “probably” want Israel to allow more Palestinians to work there. Around half said they would personally take “a good, high-paying job” inside Israel. Moreover, despite narrow majority support for boycotting Israel, a larger majority said they would also like Israeli firms to offer more jobs inside the West Bank and Gaza, and nearly half said they would take such a position if available. This kind of pragmatism was particularly pronounced among the younger generation of adult Palestinians, those in the eighteen- to thirty-five-year-old cohort. In a similar vein, among West Bankers in that group, more than three-quarters said they would like a new north–south highway bypassing Israeli checkpoints around Jerusalem. Among older West Bankers, that figure was somewhat lower, at around two-thirds.¹⁸⁰

In the West Bank, three-quarters saw a “significant problem” with “threats and intimidation from Israeli soldiers and border guards” and with “delays and restrictions at checkpoints.” Somewhat fewer West Bankers, but still a majority (63%), viewed “threats and intimidation from Jewish settlers” as a significant problem. These figures were all a bit lower in Gaza, where Israel’s presence is much less intrusive.¹⁸¹

Looking in more depth just at Gaza, the survey showed most Gazans opposed Hamas policies and leaders alike and favored a ceasefire with Israel. At the time, Hamas had rejected Egypt’s offer of a ceasefire with Israel and instead continued to fire rockets indiscriminately at Israeli towns and cities. Less known is a crucial fact: the people of Gaza were

solidly against these Hamas policies. Indeed, by a very large majority, they opposed Hamas rule altogether.¹⁸²

As tensions mounted and Hamas and other Gazan factions began to step up rocketfire in June 2014, the people of that territory were heavily in favor of a ceasefire—70 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “Hamas should maintain a ceasefire with Israel in both Gaza and the West Bank.” This attitude, as seen in figure 9, was corroborated by the 73 percent of Gazans who said Palestinians should adopt “proposals for (nonviolent) popular resistance against the occupation.” Similarly, when asked if Hamas should accept PA president Abbas’s position that the new unity government renounce violence against Israel, a clear majority (57%) answered in the affirmative. The responses to all three questions clearly indicated the rejection by most Gazans of military escalation.¹⁸³

The poll also demonstrated Gazans were unhappy with Hamas governance, on multiple levels. A large majority (71%) considered crime a “significant” problem. Two-thirds said another significant problem was official corruption. Moreover, a large majority (78%) found the “presence of Palestinian militias that are not organized under the formal security structure” to be at least a “moderate” problem. In light of this dissatisfaction with Hamas security forces and administration, most respondents favored the prospect of the PA’s taking over Gaza. A remarkable 88 percent agreed with the statement “The PA should send officials

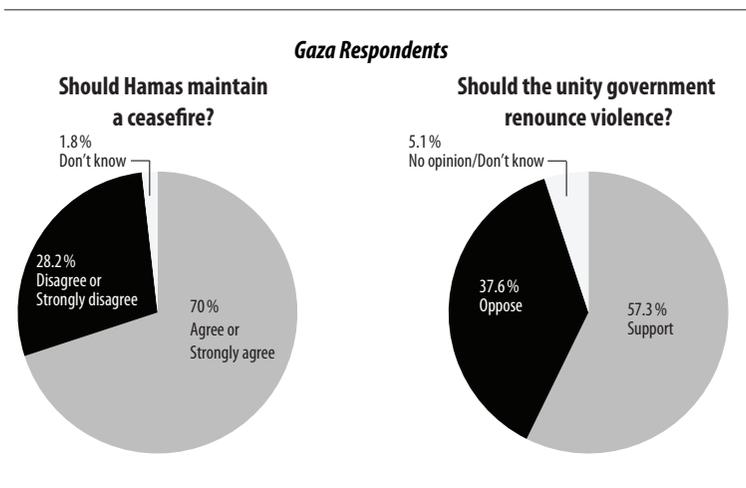


FIGURE 9

and security officers to Gaza to take over administration there,” including two-thirds who strongly agreed.

In sum, the survey demonstrated the sharp contrast between what most Gazans wanted and what their Hamas government both practiced and preached. The group’s popularity was at a low point as the crisis began, and no evidence suggests it rebounded. The poll results showed the people of that hard-pressed territory wanted a ceasefire and even economic opportunity in Israel—and that they overwhelmingly rejected Hamas policies and leaders alike.

JANUARY TO JUNE 2015

In the first half of 2015, Palestinian attitudes in both the West Bank and Gaza had hardened. Concerning a two-state solution, a poll released in January 2015 by AWRAD indicated only 33 percent of Palestinians believed they were closer to achieving an independent Palestinian state than they were at the time of the Oslo Accords, while 58 percent believed they were farther from this goal.¹⁸⁴ In answer to the same question in AWRAD’s April 2015 poll, only 28.7 percent of respondents said they believed Palestinians were closer to achieving a Palestinian state, while 64.4 percent believed they were farther away.¹⁸⁵ In a poll conducted by PCPSR in March 2015, however, 59.4 percent of respondents believed the two-state solution was no longer viable, while 37.8 percent believed it still was.¹⁸⁶ Belief in the viability of a two-state solution seems to have dropped over the previous three months—in a PCPSR poll from December 2014, 48 percent of respondents indicated support for the two-state solution. That said, rejection of the one-state solution remained relatively constant, with 71 percent opposing it in December and 68 percent in March.¹⁸⁷

On the topic of violence, the PCPSR poll conducted in December 2014 found 79 percent supported methods used by Hamas in confronting Israeli occupation, and 80 percent supported attempts by individuals to stab or run over Israelis. More broadly, 62.1 percent supported resorting to popular nonviolent and unarmed resistance, and 60.1 percent supported returning to armed intifada and confrontations.¹⁸⁸ A poll conducted several months earlier in September 2014, before the UN bid and the accession to the ICC, provided interesting results on a question

concerning the most effective means of ending occupation and building a Palestinian state: 44 percent responded armed confrontation was the most effective means; 29 percent believed negotiation was the best means; and 23 percent believed popular nonviolent resistance the most effective route to statehood.¹⁸⁹ Interestingly, PCPSR's poll from March 2015 revealed similar attitudes toward negotiations (29.4% in favor), but a relative increase in support for popular nonviolent resistance (29.7%) and a decrease in support for armed confrontation (26.7%).¹⁹⁰

Similarly, as of mid-2015, polls also showed the majority of Palestinians opposed a third intifada. An AWRAD poll conducted in April demonstrated that only 25.7 percent of Palestinians supported the outbreak of an intifada, while 66.8 percent opposed it.¹⁹¹

The drop in support for a two-state solution and the increased support for forms of violent resistance are a troubling trend in Palestinian public opinion. Although it is difficult to establish causation or correlation between PA messaging on these issues and the results of these polls, there are striking parallels, nonetheless.

These polls also demonstrated a high degree of support for the PA's decision to join international organizations such as the ICC. In PCPSR's March 2015 poll, 82.3 percent of respondents supported joining international organizations, and 85.7 percent wanted the PA to submit a complaint to the ICC against Israel for building settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. Even when asked about the PA's decision to join the ICC in light of Israel's freezing the transfer of tax revenues, 69.4 percent of respondents answered they believed it was the correct decision.¹⁹² As mentioned previously, it is difficult to establish causation from these polls, but at the very least, the PA's moves in late 2014 and early 2015 had garnered broad support.

As for the issue of refugees, the right of return continued to be a prominent concern for Palestinians. PCPSR polls in December 2014 and March 2015 asked about the most important and second most important national goals for Palestinians, and the issue of refugees' right of return to their 1948 towns was considered the most important by 30.9 percent of respondents in December and 35.9 percent in March. It was considered the second most important national goal by 42.7 percent of respondents in December and 36.5 percent in March.¹⁹³

On normalization, polling during this period indicated Palestinians were generally supportive of policies opposing it, even if they continued to want Israelis to provide them with employment. For example, boycott movements had overwhelming support in the Palestinian territories. The March 2015 PCPSR poll showed 85 percent of Palestinians “certainly support[ed]” or “support[ed]” local and international campaigns to boycott Israel and impose sanctions against it, while only 13 percent opposed them.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, on the question of the efficacy of boycotting Israeli products as a tool to help end occupation, the poll found 65 percent of Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza believed it effective and 34 percent did not. The same PCPSR poll showed Palestinians also supported ending security coordination with Israel, which is often seen as an example of normalization practices by the PA, with 60 percent of those polled in favor of ending it and 35 percent not in favor.¹⁹⁵

Although little has been asked on the question of the Jewish nature of Israel, PCPSR’s March 2015 poll asked about Palestinian support for an independent Palestinian state on the condition of “a mutual recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people and Palestine as the state of the Palestinian people.” Among the respondents, 38.6 percent agreed to such a proposal, while 59.2 percent opposed it.¹⁹⁶ Although it is difficult to assess whether the issue of a “Jewish state” was the sticking point for the opposition, it enjoyed more support in other formulations of the question that did not include direct reference to it. For example, in a question that conditioned the establishment of a Palestinian state in accordance with the Saudi Arab Peace Initiative plan on Arab states’ “recogniz[ing] Israel and its right to secure borders, [signing] peace treaties with her and establish[ing] normal diplomatic relations,” 50.4 percent opposed such a plan and 46 percent supported it.¹⁹⁷

TRENDS IN LATE 2015

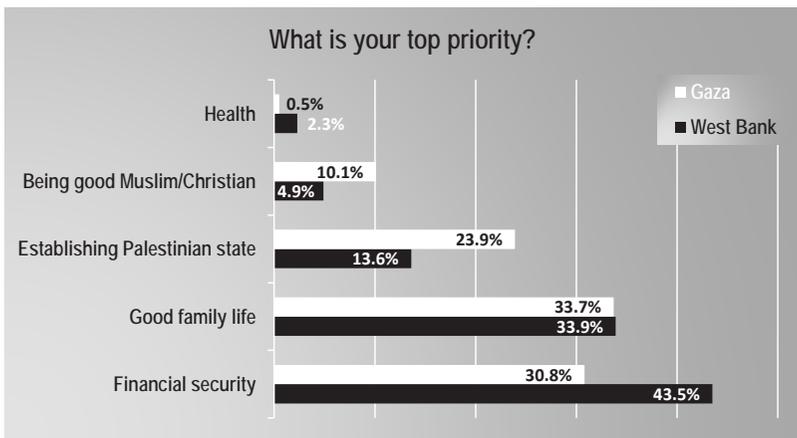
As of June 2015, majorities in both the West Bank and Gaza still wanted to “liberate all of historic Palestine” someday, and meanwhile voiced support for “armed struggle and car attacks against the occupation.” Yet majorities also desired economic cooperation and a Hamas ceasefire with Israel—and around half even accepted the principle of “a state for the Jewish people” to which Palestinian refugees would have no “right of return.”¹⁹⁸

One reason for these surprises is simply that this poll asked some questions other pollsters typically do not. That is why The Washington Institute sponsored another public opinion survey by a leading Palestinian pollster, the Palestinian Center for Public Opinion, based in Beit Sahour in the West Bank. It was conducted June 7–19, 2015, by personal interviews among representative samples of 513 Palestinians in the West Bank and 408 in Gaza, yielding results with a margin of error in each case of approximately 4.9 percent.

To help ensure the survey’s technical quality, the author traveled to the West Bank to consult at length with the polling firm’s director and his entire staff, including all of the dozen West Bank field supervisors (plus the Gaza supervisory team, who phoned in). Together, in Arabic, we reviewed the sampling frames, initial respondent feedback on the questionnaire, quality control mechanisms, and all other relevant survey parameters. The outcome was a data set with very high validity.

Since most Mideast polls ask mostly about politics or religion, the first surprise, which figure 10 demonstrates, was that neither politics nor religion was a top priority for most West Bankers or Gazans. In the West Bank, most people said their top priority was either “making enough money to live comfortably” (44%) or “having a good family life” (34%). In Gaza, the results were similar, though skewed a bit in the other direction: 31 percent picked money, and 34 percent picked family.

FIGURE 10



trast, just 14 percent of West Bankers, and 24 percent of Gazans, selected “working to establish a Palestinian state” as their top priority. And a mere 12 percent of West Bankers said “being a good Muslim (or Christian)” was either their first or even their second priority. In Gaza, that figure was somewhat higher but still unexpectedly low, at 19 percent.¹⁹⁹

A second surprise, linked to the first one, was that despite widespread theoretical support for boycotts against Israel, most Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza actually wanted economic cooperation with Israel. Two-thirds of West Bankers and three-quarters of Gazans said they “would like to see Israel allow more Palestinians to work inside Israel.” Moreover, a majority (55%) in the West Bank, and nearly as many in Gaza (48%), said they would “like to see Israeli companies offer more jobs inside” those areas. And when asked about such practical possibilities even “after the Israeli election and the formation of their new government,” over one-third of Palestinians in each territory still saw at least some chance of progress.²⁰⁰

A key related question—though showing sharp divergence between West Bank and Gazan opinion—concerns “responsibility for the slow pace of reconstruction in Gaza.” In the West Bank, a large plurality (40%) put the heaviest blame on Israel. A mere 7 percent singled out Hamas for blame. But in Gaza itself, this order was dramatically reversed: a plurality (40%) blamed Hamas the most, with Israel coming in second, at 29 percent. By comparison, only small minorities—10 percent of West Bankers and 20 percent of Gazans—placed the primary onus for Gaza’s plight on the PA. That helps explain why Gazans overwhelmingly (88%) said “the PA should send officials and security officers to Gaza to take over the administration there.” On the West Bank, this proportion was nearly as high, at 81 percent.²⁰¹

On broader questions of relations with Israel and the peace process, West Bank and Gaza Palestinians had very mixed views (see figure 11). On the one hand, both demonstrated majority support for the long-term goal of reclaiming all of Palestine and for armed struggle as a means toward that end. Fifty-eight percent of West Bankers and 65 percent of Gazans said that even if a “two-state solution” were negotiated, “the struggle is not over, and resistance should continue until all of historic Palestine is liberated.” In the West Bank, 56 percent supported “armed struggle and car attacks against the occupation”—though just 23 percent felt strongly

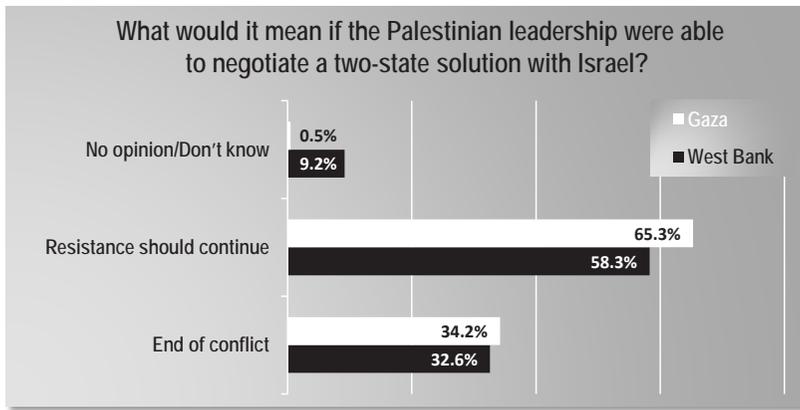


FIGURE 11

that way. And in Gaza, an astonishing 84 percent backed such violent tactics, including 53 percent who voiced strong support.²⁰²

On the other hand, support for certain key compromises with Israel was also surprisingly widespread, as figure 12 demonstrates. At the tactical level, perhaps the most stunning statistic in this whole survey is this: 74 percent of West Bankers, and fully 83 percent of Gazans, said that “ Hamas should maintain a ceasefire with Israel ” in both areas. Furthermore, at the strategic level, half or more of West Bankers would “ probably ” accept compromises on two major issues. On the definition of statehood, 56 percent would agree to “ the principle of two states for two peoples, the Palestinian people and the Jewish people, ” if that “ might help to end the occupation. ” Similarly, 51 percent would “ accept that the right of return will apply to the West Bank and Gaza but not to Israel. ” Among Gazans, those figures were lower but still substantial: 43 to 44 percent would “ probably ” accept both a “ two states for two peoples ” formula and right of return only outside of Israel, if either concession were required for the sake of Palestinian independence.²⁰³

Altogether, the evidence is clear: as of June 2015, at least, most Palestinians in both the West Bank and Gaza wanted a ceasefire and economic cooperation with Israel—and many would also have compromised on certain tough core issues for the sake of ending the occupation. In this case, as in so many others, it has been outside advocates and some politi-

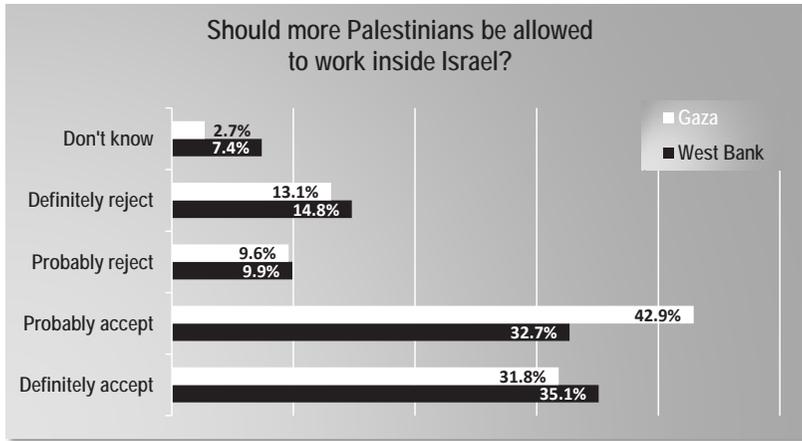


FIGURE 12

cal figures hewing to a harder line. They would do better to follow the relatively pragmatic lead of the Palestinian people themselves.

One other important sign of short-term pragmatism is a willingness among around half the Palestinian public, both in the West Bank and in Gaza, to share sovereignty over Jerusalem with Israel. Another sign of tactical flexibility is the large majority of West Bankers (79%) saying that, “in the current situation,” they would like a highway through that territory which bypasses Jerusalem altogether.²⁰⁴

For the longer term, however, many Palestinians had a much more maximalist orientation. Unlike others, this survey asked about three different timeframes: the next five years, the coming thirty to forty years, and the distant future, a hundred years from now. The results are instructive, suggesting a widespread expectation of “two stages” rather than “two states” in the long term.²⁰⁵

Even for the next five years, a plurality picked “reclaiming all of historic Palestine from the river to the sea” rather than “a two-state solution” as the “main Palestinian national goal.” In the West Bank, the margin was 41 percent versus 29 percent; in Gaza, surprisingly, it was much closer, with 50 percent opting for all of Palestine, compared with 44 percent in favor of a two-state solution. But the difference was largely accounted for by a third option: a “one-state solution in all of the land in which Pal-

estinians and Jews have equal rights.” Among West Bankers, 18 percent selected that option; among Gazans, just 5 percent did.²⁰⁶

From a normative perspective, too, Palestinian attitudes were clearly maximalist. In the West Bank, 81 percent said all of historic Palestine “is Palestinian land and Jews have no rights to the land.” In Gaza, that proportion was even higher, at 88 percent.²⁰⁷

Yet many Palestinians, especially in the West Bank, did not believe the PA actually planned to take over Israel any time soon. The survey included this very unusual question, offering a rare insight into the issue of incitement: “The PA publishes official maps, statements, songs, and poems that talk about all of historic Palestine as belonging to the Palestinians, including cities like Haifa, Jaffa, and Tiberias. Do you think this shows that its real intention is to work toward liberating all of Palestine someday?” In Gaza, around half (54%) said yes. But in the West Bank, just one-fourth (27%) thought so.²⁰⁸

Nevertheless, looking ahead to the next generation, only one-fourth of Palestinians in either the West Bank or Gaza expected Israel to “continue to exist as a Jewish state” in thirty to forty years. Another fourth thought Israel would become “a binational state of Jews and Palestinians.” And 38 percent of West Bankers, along with 53 percent of Gazans, thought Israel would no longer exist at all, even as a binational state. That group was about evenly split between those who predicted Israel “will collapse from internal contradictions” and those who predicted that “Arab or Muslim resistance will destroy it.”²⁰⁹

As for the really long-term view, a century away, a mere 12 percent of West Bankers and 15 percent of Gazans said Israel would still exist then as a Jewish state. In the West Bank, a plurality (44%) thought Israel would either collapse or be destroyed, although 20 percent quite reasonably said they didn’t know what would happen in a hundred years. In Gaza, an absolute majority (63%) anticipated the destruction or collapse of Israel within that distant horizon.²¹⁰

For policymakers on all sides, these bifurcated attitudes present both an opportunity and a severe challenge. The opportunity is to take advantage of current tactical flexibility to take steps toward peaceful coexistence, and perhaps ultimately toward conflict resolution. The evidence previously reported from East Jerusalem respondents in this same poll

indicates that practical, mutually beneficial working relations with Israelis tend to produce more moderate attitudes. On questions of Israel's longevity, Jewish rights to the land, and others, those 300,000 Palestinians are much more conciliatory than their 4 million or so compatriots in the West Bank and Gaza.

The severe challenge, however, is that, given these attitudes about the long-term future, there is good reason to wonder if any "final status" agreement will ever truly be final. Of course, attitudes may well change significantly over such a long period, either for better or for worse. But that is why, in applying the widely accepted principle of "land for peace," responsible policymakers should pay at least as much attention to practical ways of keeping the peace—even after a compromise agreement over this disputed land.

To understand Palestinians' attitudes fully, it is useful to look at the way they perceive Iranian policies and Iran's key Arab allies. Hezbollah, for example, garnered a remarkable 69 percent approval rating among West Bankers in the survey. Among Gazans, that figure was somewhat lower, yet still an impressive 57 percent. Hezbollah's popularity was much higher among Palestinians than among any other Arab public recently polled. The most plausible explanation is that many Palestinians still focus on and admire Hezbollah's record of uncompromising, violent opposition to Israel, while many other Arabs have come to resent its subservience to Iran and support for another Iranian client, Bashar al-Assad's brutal dictatorship in Syria.²¹¹

One other group with high approval is another Iranian extremist client, with a record of smaller attacks against Israel: the tiny but very vocal terrorist organization, based mostly in Gaza and frequently on tour in Tehran, known as Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ). That group got a 71 percent favorable rating in the West Bank—and a stunning 84 percent in Gaza. PIJ's popularity there far eclipsed that of Gaza's own Hamas ruling faction and, indeed, may in part reflect a kind of "protest vote" against Hamas failure, repression, and misrule.²¹²

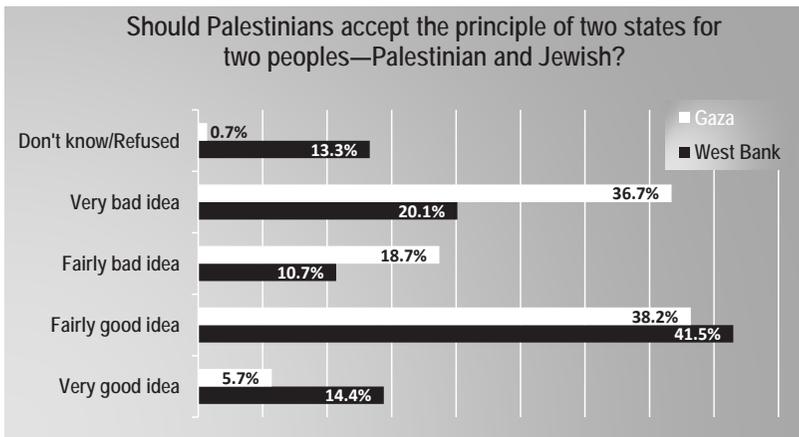
More broadly, Palestinian attitudes toward Israel showed some affinity with (or at least ambivalence toward) Iran's rejectionist position. Unlike Iran's official position, about half of West Bankers and Gazans did say they accepted the principle of a "two-state solution" to the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict and would agree to certain tactical compromises with Israel (see figure 13). About half would even agree to recognize Israel as “the state of the Jewish people”—poles apart from the official position of Iran, or even of the PA. Nevertheless, when asked about their long-term vision, a clear majority in both the West Bank and Gaza said two states should not be the end of the conflict—and that the struggle (including armed struggle) to “liberate all of Palestine” should persevere until it prevails someday.²¹³

And yet, to put this picture in perspective, one must compare Iran’s popularity on the Palestinian street with that of other regional powers, including the two neighboring states that have formally made their peace with Israel—namely, Egypt and Jordan. Egypt’s recent policies rated about the same approval as Iran’s: 57 percent among West Bankers and 54 percent among Gazans. And Palestinians were much less likely to blame Egypt than to blame Israel, or even Hamas or the PA, for the snail’s pace of Gaza’s postwar reconstruction over the previous year. Moreover, Jordan scored even better than Egypt, with a 62 percent favorable rating in Gaza and an impressive 74 percent in the West Bank.²¹⁴

Given this evidence, the following conclusions may reasonably be drawn. First, although Palestinians are overwhelmingly Sunni, over the long run Iran cannot be counted out as a popular champion for the Pal-

FIGURE 13



estinian cause. And, second, relatedly, the Palestinian street is up for grabs concerning regional partners, both Arab and non-Arab, and even concerning Israel. Palestinians responded in the survey to whichever party they saw as reflecting their priorities or meeting their needs, and they had both moderate and radical impulses. Whether Iran can exploit the latter is probably a function of what alternatives the Palestinians think they have.

4.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

From mid-2014 through early 2016, the PA's dominant discourse clearly changed for the worse. Policy, public diplomacy, and public opinion alike have, respectively, largely turned against "normalization," abandoned peace talks, and hardened further on many of the issues once at stake in them. Most recently, too, from President Abbas, to his cabinet, to their official media and social media, to the Palestinian street, terrorists have often been treated as heroes. At the official level, this is clearly a case of mixed messaging, which has professed peace and tolerance even as it promotes violence and, sometimes, outright anti-Semitism.

Sadly, much of the reaction to this change has been guided by false assumptions. In June 2014, for example, most public (and apparently also private governmental) discussion blithely assumed, without a shred of evidence, that Abbas had been seriously "weakened" by his very commendable public condemnation of the kidnapping of three Israeli students in the West Bank. In fact, however, a highly credible Palestinian survey taken that week demonstrated Abbas and Fatah were maintaining their usual (lukewarm) degree of public support.

According to all the polls and other evidence, Abbas is, indeed, weaker than ever in 2016. Perhaps more pressure on him to convey less negative or more positive messages to Israel would risk further undermining his position. Yet that kind of pressure might also be more effective against such a weakened target; and Abbas probably now fears uncontrolled escalation at least as much as any other risks he confronts. If pressure to curb incitement produced favorable results, it might elicit reciprocal gestures from Israel, which also wants to avoid all-out confrontation.

And that would likely defuse the immediate crisis somewhat, allowing at least the possibility of better outcomes down the road.

In November 2014, after another round of PA incitement and a particularly vicious terrorist attack, the author penned an op-ed entitled “U.S. Should Cut Aid to Palestine for Supporting Terrorists.”²¹⁵ Because the argument remains relevant, the gist of that article is reproduced below.

Although PA president Abbas condemned a synagogue massacre in Jerusalem that month, he allowed his advisors and official media to praise the perpetrators as heroes, while his government kept paying stipends to convicted terrorists and their families. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu blamed incitement by Abbas for the massacre. But one of Israel’s top security officials said Abbas was not directly involved in terrorism, and that Palestinian security forces were actually cooperating with Israel against terrorists.

In reality, both statements were true—because Abbas was trying to have it both ways. He personally condemned this terrorist attack, and he directed his forces to keep a close watch on Hamas and other extremists in the West Bank. Yet, at the same time, he allowed his advisors, his ruling Fatah political party, and his official media to praise and glorify these terrorists as heroes, martyrs, and more. And Abbas himself wrote a formal letter of condolence to the family of the Palestinian terrorist who shot and almost killed Rabbi Yehuda Glick.

This means the United States should, in line with existing U.S. law, move immediately to cut some of our very substantial aid to the PA, unless Abbas publicly repudiates and unequivocally ends this practice of hypocrisy and deception about incitement to murder. And the United States should press all of our allies, European, Arab, and other, to do the same. But if we must do this unilaterally, so be it.

Palestinian-Israeli incitement can and should still be curbed. Calls for violence by Palestinians (and Israelis) should be penalized rather than explained away or dismissed. The omnibus spending bills passed by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives in late 2014 included one obscure yet potentially significant provision on the issue of incitement in the Israeli-Palestinian arena: a reiteration of the requirement that the PA act to end its official incitement against Israel as a condition for con-

tinued U.S. funding. This provision should be enforced, not evaded, as has been the case.

Funding need not be cut completely, which might jeopardize both Palestinian and Israeli lives if security coordination suffers as a result. But a meaningful, concrete penalty for official incitement, by either side, should be imposed. In addition, the United States should raise the problem of incitement in that discussion and work to incorporate clear and binding language against it in any eventual Security Council resolution. These are among the few U.S. tools available to demonstrate real determination to fight this evil and deter its all too frequent recurrence.

Ignoring incitement is contrary to previous official commitments by both the Palestinian and Israeli governments, sound U.S. policy, and even U.S. law. The very first Oslo agreement, for example, committed both parties to cease “hostile propaganda” against each other. Although even the most odious hate speech by private citizens—unless it directly instigates violence—is protected by the First Amendment under U.S. law, existing U.S. policy and precedent endorse measures against *official* hate speech. For example, a formal U.S. proposal to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2010 urged all governments to “speak out against intolerance, including advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitutes incitement,” and to censure government officials who practice it. In line with this policy, U.S. secretary of state John Kerry made this statement after five Israelis were murdered in a synagogue by Palestinians in 2014: “The Palestinian leadership must condemn this, and they must begin to take serious steps to restrain any kind of incitement that comes from their language, [or] from other people’s language.”²¹⁶

Moreover, major precedents exist in international law for prosecuting the most egregious form of incitement: incitement to genocide. Since the Nuremberg Trials after World War II, and on through the Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and other more recent tribunals, senior government officials have been tried, convicted, sentenced to long prison terms, and even executed for this crime, even if they never directly committed or ordered any act of violence themselves. In one incident widely circulated on the Internet, a Palestinian sheikh at the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem openly urged the assembled to “slaughter all the Jews without mercy, every last

one.” This kind of hate speech deserves formal international condemnation and punishment. That is all the more relevant as the PA has now obtained enhanced legal standing in the International Criminal Court.

Some who minimize the importance of incitement, such as University of Maryland professor Shibley Telhami (in a December 5, 2014, *Washington Post* op-ed),²¹⁷ claim it is “the wrong explanation” for violence, because it merely reflects a “deeper problem.” Yet, almost in the same breath, Telhami concedes that “incitement can make matters worse.” Indeed; so why not also address the problem of incitement directly? Similarly, he argues that incitement “is rarely a primary cause of violence.” Even if that were true, should we not work to mitigate a secondary cause of violence? One wonders if Telhami would make the same case for overlooking the vicious video propaganda of the Islamic State, for example.

Telhami and like-minded advocates argue further that leaders’ words have limited impact on popular attitudes or actions, particularly in this age of social media. Again, even if that were true, limited positive impact from leaders would be better than none at all. At a minimum, even if they cannot bring themselves to offer positive messages of reconciliation, or restrain others from incendiary words, they should refrain from hate speech and incitement themselves. Moreover, in the specific case of the PA, leaders do have the legal and practical ability, not just the moral duty, to stop the incitement regularly promulgated by their own senior colleagues and in their own government-controlled media.

Other observers correctly note that, in the Israeli-Palestinian context, both violence and incitement tend to rise as hope for peace declines. Yet the causal connection works both ways, creating a vicious circle: hopelessness about peace is deepened by incitement, which in turn causes more incitement, and so on. Research over the past several years, including extensive surveys and interviews on both sides, reveals that inflammatory rhetoric plays a direct role in convincing each side—on both the official and the popular levels—that the other is not a reliable partner for real peace. The evidence is arrayed in a monograph titled *Beyond Words: Causes, Consequences, and Cures for Palestinian Authority Hate Speech*.²¹⁸ Curbing such official rhetoric would help reverse this unfortunate trend, making it at least somewhat more feasible to address the underlying issues.

This assessment applies as well to Israelis. While incitement by Israeli officials is the exception, and is usually repudiated by the government, hate speech and hate crimes by extremist settlers and others are all too common. More serious Israeli measures against that, Palestinian polls demonstrate, might help persuade the Palestinian public (and perhaps the PA) to support a return to peace talks instead of pursuing outside pressure against Israel. But neither side's transgressions can be excused or covered up simply by saying, "Well, the other side does it too." That is an argument more worthy of kindergarten than of serious policy analysis and prescription.

Any instances of official Israeli incitement should, therefore, also be censured and penalized.

Curbing incitement is not a lost cause, even as the conflict continues. In 2005, to cite but one instance, U.S., EU, and even UN pressure and funding incentives greatly contributed to a significant reform of Palestinian textbooks. The result, documented in a major Yale University study led by experts from both sides, was that the worst forms of anti-Semitic demonization were removed from those textbooks, although their content remained 84 percent negative about Israel, Israelis, and Jews. Even if incitement cannot be totally ended, and even in the absence of agreement on other issues, ample room and ample reason exist for progress in curbing destructive and inflammatory rhetoric, especially from official sources. It is a tough task, but avoiding it risks making things even worse.²¹⁹

The persistence of incendiary language by the PA has become increasingly controversial in light of new legislation passed in the United States in December 2015, expressly stating that

the Secretary of State must certify and report to the Committees on Appropriations prior to the obligation of funds that the Palestinian Authority...is acting to counter incitement of violence against Israelis and is supporting activities aimed at promoting peace, coexistence, and security cooperation with Israel.²²⁰

In October 2015, responding more urgently to PA and Fatah messages glorifying a wave of Palestinian stabbing attacks as "martyrdom for al-Aqsa," the U.S. Congress moved to implement one recommendation outlined above: to cut back funding for the PA. The amount at stake was \$80 million, out of the roughly \$400 million annual U.S. aid pack-

age (above and beyond a similar amount for UNRWA²²¹). This time, the State Department informally warned the PA that a presidential waiver restoring the aid that was cut back, as last occurred in late 2013, might not be forthcoming.

An initial PLO/Fatah public message responded with derision: PLO Executive Committee member Dr. Ahmed Majdalani declared that “this traditional means of pressure...will not cause the Palestinian leadership to concede its national position,” and has “already failed.”²²² But it will take time to fully assess the impact, if any, of this incremental policy departure. For now, it can properly be viewed as an experiment to test whether such calibrated penalties will or will not effect positive change. Contrary to the PLO’s quick dismissal, it has worked before, as the textbook case noted above and other instances clearly demonstrate.

To be sure, even if flagrant incitement to violence declines, this is no guarantee that the PA will follow up by changing either its other messaging or its actual policies on core issues. That would ideally mean a radically different style and substance, promoting not just a “two-state solution” but also permanent peace, immediate peace talks, and a willingness to compromise on all the hard problems: Jerusalem, refugees, borders, security, and recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. In the absence of a serious new offer from Israel, it is very hard to see how or why the PA would move very much at all in this direction. Moreover, even if it did, it is far from certain that Palestinian public opinion would follow its lead. But that is all the more reason to push for whatever smaller constructive steps might still be possible, for both sides. And, on the PA side, moderating the message would be an excellent place to start.

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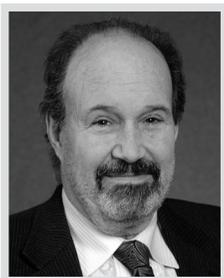
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THE AUTHOR



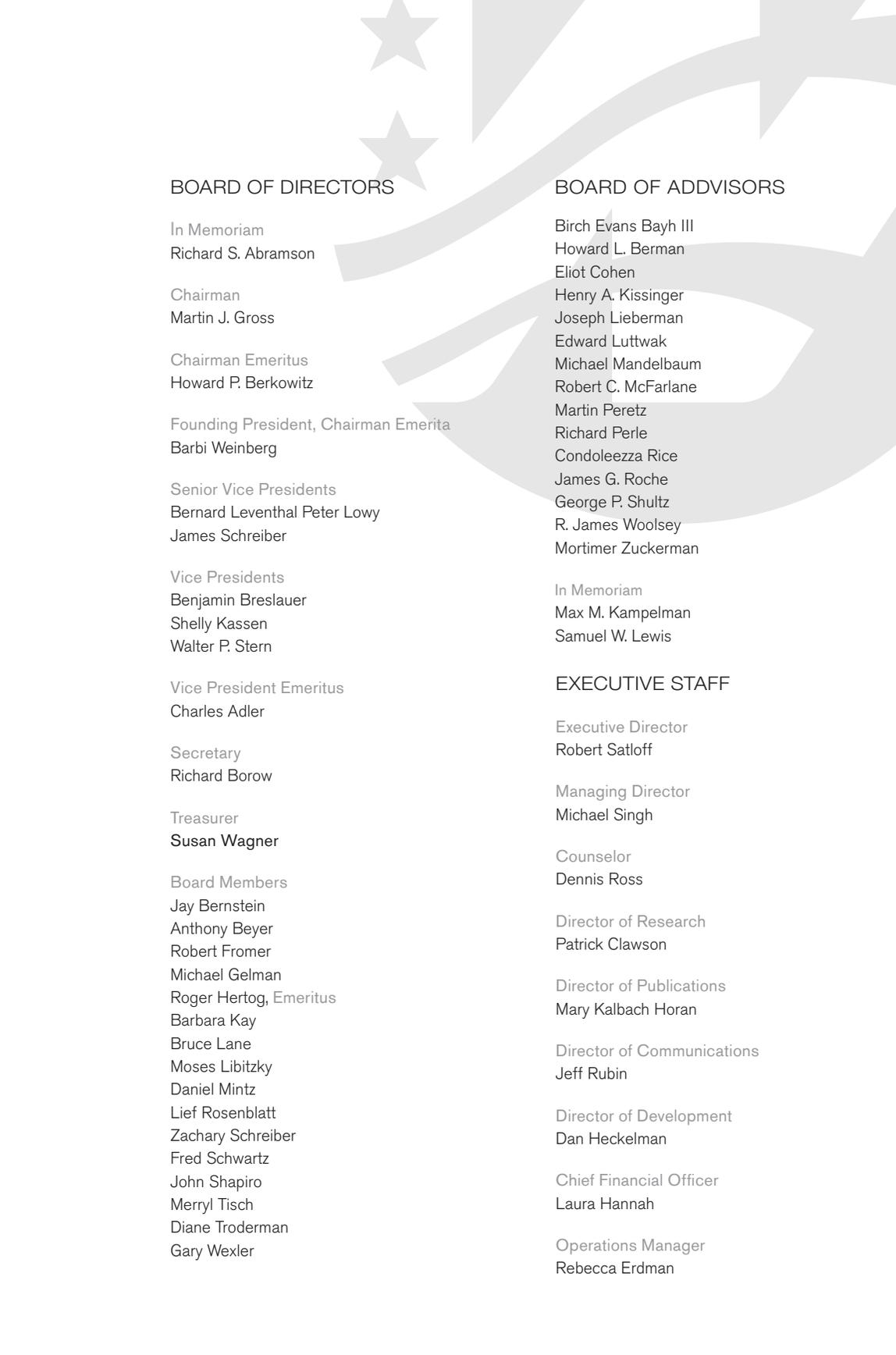
DAVID POLLOCK, the Kaufman Fellow and director of Project Fikra at The Washington Institute, focuses on the political dynamics of Middle East countries. He served previously as senior advisor for the Broader Middle East at the State Department, providing advice on issues of democracy and reform in the region, with a focus on women's rights. He also helped launch the department's Iraqi Women's Democracy Initiative and the U.S.-Afghan

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Within the PA, official talk of negotiations, peace, reconciliation, or even the “two-state solution” has become conspicuous by its absence. Quoting extensively from remarks in Arabic by President Mahmoud Abbas and other key PA figures, as well as drawing heavily on polls of the Palestinian populace, *MIXED MESSAGES* analyzes this significant transition in PA messaging concerning the key issues at stake: the two-state solution, normalization and reconciliation with Israel, refugees, negotiations vs. unilateral “lawfare,” Jerusalem and its holy places, armed resistance, and hate speech or incitement to violence.

