

## Hamas Attacks:

### Deja Vu All Over Again?

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On Tuesday night, Hamas shot dead four Israelis on the outskirts of Hebron, putting an end to nearly three years of quiet on the West Bank. They struck again the following day, this time critically wounding two. Abu Ubaida, spokesman for Hamas's armed wing, announced the Qassam Brigades' "full responsibility" for the attacks, adding that they are merely "a chain in a series of attacks: Some have been executed, and others will follow." That the attacks came on the eve of Mideast peace talks is a grim reminder that spoilers will try desperately to upend hopes for negotiations seeking to end the conflict.

Hamas' latest attack is reminiscent of the tactics they employed in the 1990s, when their aim was to plant a bomb on an Israeli bus immediately preceding a key moment of peace negotiations.

Yet, violence in the '90s did not succeed in forcing Israel to withdraw from the West Bank. Four bombs in the course of nine days preceding the 1996 election only angered Israelis and led to Benjamin Netanyahu's first victory as prime minister. Hamas attacks had another effect. They decreased the popularity of peace talks among the Israeli public, rendering withdrawal tantamount to vulnerability, not security.

#### Arafat's Role

Although Hamas's violence soured the mood for peace, it was because there was something even greater at work: The attitude of Yasser Arafat. The infamous Arafat was known in Israel to surreptitiously encourage terrorist killings while condemning violence on a pro forma basis, believing that it was actually a tool for negotiations. As Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Amnon Lipkin-Shahak told Israeli Radio in March 1997, "Organizations such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad have an understanding from the Palestinian Authority to carry out attacks." This comment was issued merely days after Arafat personally met with Hamas leaders in Gaza, giving them the "green light" to resume terrorist attacks.

As a result, when the beloved peacemaker Yitzhak Rabin said Israel will pursue peace as if there is no terror and terrorists as if there was no peace, it would ultimately ring hollow for Israelis. The Rabin formula could only work if Arafat had not been playing a double-game, privately encouraging terror while officially condemning it. Had the double-game dimension been absent, nobody would want rejectionists to have a veto on peacemaking.

In sum, the issue was not just terrorist violence, but the actions taken by the Palestinian Authority (PA) to encourage violence. While Israel could not expect 100% results, they did expect the PA to provide 100% effort.

Could we see a repeat of the 1990s -- an upsurge of terrorism on the eve of peace negotiations? Fortunately, current Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is not the same man that Arafat was. Whereas Arafat perpetually had a gun strapped to his belt, Abbas is viewed differently -- an in-house intellectual of the Palestine Liberation Organization. While Arafat had direct links to terror attacks and was known to favor jihad, Abbas is more associated with the non-violent path. He has always preferred links with Israel, even running for PA presidency in 2005 on the basis of achieving a two-state solution through peaceful means and criticism of the 2000-2004 violence powered partly by Hamas.

Abbas' enmity toward Hamas has grown and not diminished. In 2007, Hamas literally threw Fatah party members off the rooftops of Gaza and trashed his Gaza office. Hamas and Abbas are bitter rivals.

#### Israel and the PA

In short, unlike Arafat during the '90s, nobody thinks that Abbas is playing a double game. Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's condemnation of the attacks as "totally against our national interests and our commitments" is undoubtedly sincere. As Abbas said, the attacks were a deliberate intent to "disrupt the political process," which he nevertheless intends to continue.

So if malevolent will is not the issue, the question could be the PA's capability. Will Abbas be effective in halting Hamas attacks prior to and even after the creation of a Palestinian state? The good news is that security coordination between Israel and the PA is excellent. While 410 Israelis were killed in suicide bombings and other attacks emanating from the West Bank in 2002, only one such fatality has occurred in the last three years prior to Tuesday's attack. Cooperation between the security services of both sides is growing to the extent that the PA no longer hides its cooperation with Israel, even inviting Israeli security forces to witness Palestinian live-fire exercises. Such coordination is a top priority of Abbas and Fayyad, who personally oversee the efforts.

In a statement following recent attacks, Hamas made clear its intention to demonstrate that the security cooperation between Israel and the PA is not strong enough to stop their terrorist activities. The answer of Abbas, no less than Israel, must be the continuation of tight Israeli-PA security cooperation to thwart those who want to sabotage the chances of peace.

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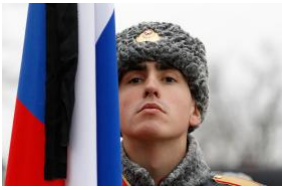
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