

Mahmoud Abbas Visits Washington:

Key Quotes

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Brief Analysis

Palestinian Authority (PA) president Mahmoud Abbas conducted an unprecedented sequence of three public events during his visit to Washington last week, during which he articulated his positions on a range of issues. The events included an on-the-record dinner hosted by philanthropist Daniel Abraham, a television appearance with PBS host Charlie Rose, and a speech at the Brookings Institution.

Throughout, Abbas repeatedly conveyed his belief that both Israelis and Palestinians urgently need peace to avert further radicalization. He explicitly defined peace as "an end of claims" and "end of conflict," terms Israelis and others have long waited to hear him use.

At the same time, Abbas was equally explicit about the conditions for peace. He reaffirmed that the baseline for land swaps -- the idea of offsetting land within Israel in return for annexing settlement blocs -- must be the pre-1967 borders. Additionally, he made clear that he would agree to any long-term third-party security arrangements within Palestinian territory as long as they did not include Israelis. He claimed that the United States, Israel, and the PA reached agreement on this issue during the 2007-2008 tenure of former Middle East security envoy James Jones (currently President Obama's national security advisor). Washington and Israel do not share this view, however. On another key issue, Abbas stated that east Jerusalem should be the capital of Palestine, and west Jerusalem the capital of Israel. Regarding refugees, he indicated the need to reach an "agreed upon" solution with Israel.

An overarching theme of Abbas's visit was his repeated invocation of the incomplete negotiations he conducted with former Israeli prime minister Ehud Olmert as a baseline for comparable peace terms with the Netanyahu government. He also issued a rare acknowledgement of the historic Jewish presence in the region. Finally, regarding the Gaza flotilla raid, Abbas called for an international inquiry into the incident and a lifting of the blockade.

Below are noteworthy quotes from Abbas's Washington speaking engagements.

Gaza Flotilla and Blockade

"The investigation should not be left in the hands of Israel. Israel cannot investigate itself. The investigation should be international as proposed by the UN secretary-general.... Our main demand is how to end the blockade on Gaza,

and I believe that the whole world now, the entire world stands with us."

"More than thirty-two countries took part in this flotilla, and many world countries sympathized with what happened, particularly since Israel first of all attacked [a] convoy in international waters which is unlawful, unacceptable internationally."

Security Cooperation with the United States and Israel

"I can tell you there is absolute and total cooperation between our agencies and the Israeli ones on the security area as well as parties from the United States and the generals that have been helping us in this endeavor."

"As the Palestinian Authority, for more than three years, there was not one single incident against Israel in the West Bank. I am keen on having the security of Israel, and I say it frankly. I do not want the Israelis to worry because of insecurity in the same way I don't want my people to suffer from invasions and the violations that are taking place almost daily on the part of the Israelis."

Security Arrangements for a Palestinian State

Abbas said he would be willing to accept the deployment of a third party, such as NATO, to implement mutually acceptable security arrangements for as long as Israel desires. He said he does not mind if this is for "twenty" years: "[W]e would agree on the period for their presence, their location, where they would be deployed, as well as their missions, with the agreement that this would be under the leadership of the United States."

"I will not accept one Israeli to remain on Palestinian territory. If they agree to this, I'm ready. And it's fair. It is fair. Olmert had agreed to it."

Proximity and Direct Talks

"Now we are in the proximity talks. We are talking about any achievement, progress, from [the] Israeli government concerning the two core elements: security and borders. Any positive sign, we will go to...direct talks."

"We want this state, 22 percent out of the whole Palestine. We accept it. No more demands. No more. End of claims...end of conflict."

Calculating Border and Land Swaps

"Israelis have to accept the issue of the border. When we speak about the border, we are asking to have the international legitimacy be implemented and that says the border of 1967. We had agreed upon that with the government of Olmert, and that is the basis of the negotiations, which should be on the borders of 1967. And there is a possibility to do some swapping or some changes that would be respective on both sides....That also we discussed with the government of Olmert, and we are asking the government of Netanyahu to continue proceeding based on that."

Jerusalem

"We say that west Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. East Jerusalem is an occupied territory since 1967.... Our right is east Jerusalem. Prime Minister Olmert reiterated many times -- the Palestinian neighborhoods will be part of the Palestinian capital, and the Jewish neighborhoods will be the Israeli capital."

Palestinian Refugees

"We want [a] just and agreed-upon solution according to [UN Resolution] 194, which means that this issue will be put on the table [and] agreed upon. I cannot impose anything on Israel to accept or to reject, but we have to discuss. It is one of the items we stipulated in Oslo. It is one of the major issues. How can we find a solution for it? Nobody can ignore that there are five million refugees deported from their houses. We should find a solution for them. What is

the solution, agreed-upon solution?"

Palestinian or Arab League Mandate?

"There is no contradiction between [a] mandate [from] the Arab League and the Palestinian independent decision. Why? Because I go to the Arabs to ask them, to talk to them, and take their blessings, not only blessings but [a] mandate. Then I go to the...PLO and to the central committee of al-Fatah, to decide whether I am wrong or right, and to approve what I did with the Arab League. So, both sides are participating in the same...which is good for us because all the Arabs now are committed."

Peace Process and the U.S. National Interest

"This is the first time we hear from a U.S. administration that...the two-state solution is in the vital interest of the United States."

Favoring a U.S. Peace Plan

"I don't ask for it, but I wish it happened. I hope and wish that the time would come that it is at least part of the solution, [with Washington saying to Israelis and Palestinians] 'Here it is up to you to choose. Either this conflict would continue forever or you would solve it this way.'"

Two-State Solution and Prospects of Failure

"I'd like to express some concern that the situation is extremely difficult and that the hope is a two-state solution -- a state of Palestine, independent, contiguous, viable Palestine living side by side in peace and stability and security with the state of Israel. This context, this concept, I fear is beginning to erode. And the world is starting not to believe, to distrust that we're able to reach this solution."

"If we fail to achieve our goal, I don't know what the future will be. The people are becoming disappointed and desperate. Some of them don't believe in a two-state solution. If you go to Ramallah now, some of the NGOs made advertisements -- 'one-state solution.' We don't like it. We want a two-state solution, but when people lose hope to have an independent state, they will think about a one-state solution, occupation -- whatever it is, the results will be bad for everybody in the region."

Olmert Offer Rejection?

"[Olmert] said we negotiated everything. I offered them [a land] swap. They offered me [a] swap. I sent to them [a] map, and [they did] the same....They didn't accept, which means that we didn't reject any offer coming from them. In the meantime, we were discussing. He stepped down."

Palestinian Incitement

"There was a committee established during the era of Wye River, [a] trilateral committee to deal with the incitement. Anytime...they want to revive this committee, we are ready to sit around the table and to talk about the incitement from both sides. We are ready, if the Americans will say that this is incitement from the Palestinians, we are ready to eliminate any kind of incitement."

"For instance, I heard that some of the mosques on Friday, their sermons are against Israel. I identified all the sermons in the West Bank -- it is the first time, it is the first country around the Arab world, around the Islamic world, that these sermons are unified, only in the West Bank, because I don't want incitement against anybody."

Jews in Middle East History

"Nobody denies the Jewish history in the Middle East. A third of holy Quran talks about the Jews in the Middle East, in this area. Nobody from our side, at least, denies that the Jews were in Palestine, were in the Middle East."

Recognition of the Holocaust

"Maybe four or five months ago I sent my ambassador in Warsaw to participate in the Holocaust commemoration, and I sent my ambassador in Moscow to participate in the same occasion. Why? Because I want to tell everyone that these people suffered and we are suffering. Now we want peace between each other. And we do not deny, as some say we deny, the Holocaust."

Israel as a Nation-State of the Jewish People?

"Israel can name itself whatever it wants. It's up to the Israelis to call themselves what they want, and I said they can call themselves the empire of the Jewish and Zionist people around the world. It's up to them to name themselves. It's none of my business to accept or refuse."

Relationship with Fayad, Tension within Fatah

"Fayad is my prime minister. There are some people who are against, [both outside and within] Fatah. Now, if you mention his name with Hamas, they will become mad, furious. I believe Salam Fayad. I believe Salam Fayad is a capable man, is a good man for his post, and I trust him. He is my prime minister, whether some of Fatah likes or dislikes, doesn't matter."

Hamas and Elections

"They should come to the elections.... The election is a process. You win today, tomorrow you lose, as you have here, Democrats and Republicans. But it's not...wins forever. They believe that [they win] forever: 'We won, that's it.'"

Iran's View of Palestinian Reconciliation

"Iran would like to use Hamas for its own objectives. And for that reason it is tying them or pushing them not to sign [reconciliation]."

Khaled Mashal as Hamas Leader

"Khaled Mashal is the one who represents Hamas. He's the...head of the political bureau of Hamas, and therefore [if there is no reconciliation, it means he's stopping it]."

Budgetary Assistance to Gaza

"We as a Palestinian Authority, we pay 58 percent the general budget of the authority to Gaza, in Gaza. The salaries of the employees of electricity, water, fuel, education, health, we pay 58 percent of that.... We don't want to punish the Palestinian people for what Hamas did when it did its coup."

'Culture of Peace' in West Bank

"The Palestinian people now are living in a new culture in the West Bank.... Go now, go to the West Bank and tell people, 'Let us go and do another intifada.' You will not find one person. Why? Because the culture of peace spread among them. But the continuation of the occupation makes people step away from their rational thinking, which is right now what they're thinking, rationally.... We believe in peace. Our government believes in peace. We impose security everywhere. So people felt secure and with security, and then economic development started coming, taking place. And then we started convincing people in schools, in the mosques that peace was necessary. So the culture moved from a culture of violence to a culture of peace."

David Makovsky is the Ziegler distinguished fellow and director of the [Project on the Middle East Peace Process](http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateI02.php?SID=16) (<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateI02.php?SID=16>) at The Washington Institute. ❖

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