

# In Mahmoud Abbas's Own Words

Jan 7, 2005



## Brief Analysis

Interim Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas is widely expected to win the presidential elections scheduled for January 9. The media has focused on statements he has made on the campaign trail; below is a survey of his statements on a variety of policy issues over the past several years.

### Overall Political Goals

"Our struggle will continue to realize our constant national rights as approved by our councils and institutions, to end the occupation of all the Palestinian territories that were seized in 1967 and establish the independent state of Palestine on this territory, with holy Jerusalem as its capital, and realize a just solution to the problem of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with Resolution 194 and based on the 2002 Beirut Arab summit resolutions." — Presidential election platform, January 2, 2005

"The political objective of the Palestinian Authority is to end the occupation that started in 1967, establish an independent Palestinian state, and find a just and agreed upon solution to the issue of the refugees under Resolution No. 194." — Press conference with British prime minister Tony Blair, al-Jazeera Television, December 22, 2004

". . . [our] struggle to end the Israeli occupation of our territories, which were occupied in 1967, for the establishment of our independent Palestinian state with Holy Jerusalem as its capital and the resolution of the refugee problem, which is the core and substance of the Palestine question, fairly according to Resolution 194." — Speech eulogizing Yasser Arafat, as reported by Gaza Palestine Satellite Television, December 21, 2004

### On the Roadmap

"We want to return to the road map and fulfill our obligations outlined in this road map in order to pave the way for the full implementation of the peace process. If Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he would commit himself to the road map, then the Israeli side should meet its obligations on a reciprocal basis. Hence, we can take a shorter road to peace." — Press conference with British prime minister Tony Blair, al-Jazeera Television, December 22, 2004

### On Refugees and UN Resolution 194

"Everyone should first be granted the right of return, but then we have to sit down and discuss the details that have to be jointly agreed upon and mutually acceptable to both sides." — Maariv, May 25, 2001

"Those refugees who choose to return should be allowed to do so and those who choose not to return should be compensated." — al-Sharq al-Awsat (London), October 31, 2000

". . . the Right of Return means a return to Israel and not to the Palestinian State. . . When we talk about the Right of Return, we talk about the return of refugees to Israel, because Israel was the one who deported them and it is in Israel that their property is found." — Remarks as reported by the Middle East Media and Research Institute (MEMRI) on November 23, 2000

### On Settlements

"Settlement activity is the worst of all provocations for the Palestinians."—Maariv, May 25, 2001

"[Settlements were] one of the main reasons behind the Palestinian intifada."—al-Ayyam (Ramallah), April 5, 2001

"The first opinion is that after the killing of 1,000 Israelis in the Intifada, Israel would collapse, as would Sharon; the second opinion is that the armed Intifada would liberate the homeland; the third opinion is that the Intifada would bring the settlements to a halt. Sharon did not fall. On the contrary, he has become the most popular [leader] in the history of Israel, after having been subjected to condemnations in Israel. On the same note, all of the Palestinian lands are now occupied and vulnerable, and the settlements have nearly doubled. We damaged our relations with the Americans and with Israeli public opinion. The fourth opinion says: stop the 'militarization' of the Intifada. Let us fulfill our obligations as they appear in the Road Map . . . and let us convince the world that we have fulfilled our obligations and that Sharon must fulfill his. Yet today the entire world condemns us instead of condemning Sharon."—al-Ra'i (Amman), September 27, 2004, as reported by MEMRI

#### On Negotiations, Oslo, and Incrementalism

Abbas recognizes that resolving issues with Israel is a step-by-step process, requiring reciprocity in performance and stages of negotiations that are linked, if not interlocked. At a joint press conference with Tony Blair on December 22, 2004, he stated that he is prepared "to begin negotiations following the Palestinian elections."

"Oslo was a declaration of principles and not a peace treaty. But a set of agreements on how to implement these principles has accumulated. That is why we said it was modest and significant at the same time. Treated right, it would lead us to statehood. But treated wrong, we would further consolidate the occupation."—al-Ayyam (Ramallah), June 12, 1999

"Had we linked all [outstanding] issues [with Israel] to one solution, we would not have restored our land or part of it, some of our people would not have returned to the homeland, and part of this homeland would not have been liberated and placed under the Palestinian Authority's full control. We realized from the beginning that the process would not be very easy and that we should proceed by stages, the first one being the transitional agreement and the second being the final-status agreement."—al-Sharq al-Awsat (London), October 31, 2000

#### On Palestinian Relations with the Wider Arab World

"We will alone participate in the negotiations, because we are the only party that is concerned. It is our cause. However, Arab and Islamic support for us will be useful. In fact, the Egyptians and the Jordanians have accepted our rationale. These countries have interests we should fully take into consideration in the negotiations. Interests differ from roles."—al-Ayyam (Ramallah), January 25, 1999

". . . there must be Arab coordination . . . due to the existence of common issues, such as the subject of the refugees, for there are refugees in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. These states in particular are directly concerned with this final solution."—al-Sharq al-Awsat (London), June 19, 1999

#### On the U.S. Role

"We maintain that the current U.S. role is insufficient and unacceptable. . . . [W]e must . . . drag the United States to play a principal role in the peace process. . . ."—al-Ayyam (Ramallah), April 5, 2001

#### Relationship between the PLO and the Palestinian National Authority (PNA)

"The PNA is certainly part of the PLO and not vice versa. It is authorized by the PLO to perform its current duties. But the spotlights focused on the PNA, being the day-to-day authority. . . . Israel recognized the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. It is negotiating with the PLO on that basis. It is negotiating in the name of the Palestinian people wherever they are and not in the name of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. We have

to protect it until we reach a full comprehensive solution for the Palestinian question, including the refugees issue. There is mixing between the day-to-day responsibilities taking prevalence in the arena and the general responsibilities involving the various aspects of the Palestinian question."—al-Ayyam (Ramallah), June 12, 1999

### Changing Political Reality Requires Changing Philosophy and Ideology

". . . the mentality of the revolution is different to that of the state. The slogans, the banners and the tools we used during the revolution should be adjusted according to the new reality; the reality of the state. Hence, all individuals, organizations, and institutions must change their previous concepts and adopt new ones. It was not possible in the past to drop the armed struggle option. Armed struggle was the theme of our movement. The situation has changed. We have a peace course; the course of negotiations. To achieve what we want, we have to adjust to reality. Hence, the organizations have to reconsider their state. We have to preserve the PLO and the national unity in a new appearance, with renewed powers capable of coping with the different age."—al-Ayyam (Ramallah), June 12, 1999

Compiled by Kenneth Stein, professor of Middle Eastern history and politics at Emory University and author of *Heroic Diplomat: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (Routledge, 1999). ❖

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